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An Augustan Representation of Cicero

To talk today about Cicero in the Augustan Age, particularly with special reference to Conyers Middleton, the author of *The History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1741), needs, if not straightforward apologies, some justification. In the first place, there are few, be they select or not, who now take Cicero seriously; secondly, of these perhaps precious few there are probably yet fewer who would recognise Conyers Middleton in connection with Cicero; and thirdly, should they recognise him as such, almost none would take trouble to read his bulky production. The reasons are not far to seek. The overall decline of interest in classical learning has gone hand-in-hand with the fall of the Ciceronian ideal of *humanitas*, whose goal is supposed to be “eloquence joined with moral and political wisdom.” The advancement since then of “scientific” scholarship on the history of Rome in general and Cicero in particular has made it nearly out-of-date in simple matters of fact. In short, in the universal intellectual tendency where “the ancients” have been critically and increasingly superseded by “the moderns,” Conyers Middleton, as a historian of Cicero’s life, has long since been condemned to oblivion.¹

Yet there is more to it than that. On rare occasions when his name is now invoked at all it is difficult to leave unquestioned the alleged accusation. *The History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, one would be

1. For the decline of interest in the classics in general and Cicero in particular, viewed with special reference to the modernization of Japan, see my “On the Failure to Establish Cicero Studies in modern Japan,” an Appendix to my translation of P. Grimal’s *Cicéron*, published as *Kikero* (Tokyo, 1994).

reminded, was once accused of plagiarism.² The irony is, however, that since almost no one would care to read it today, it does not matter whether the work is authentic or not.

What is then this unnecessary fuss about Conyers Middleton's virtually, and in a sense justifiably, forgotten work? One could perhaps make a circumstantially acceptable claim that every biography of Cicero should be duly commemorated in this two thousand one hundredth anniversary of Cicero's birth.³ But even this jubilant note will not allow us to be blind to the fact that the billennium celebration, which took place a century ago in 1895, and which one might expect to be as jubilant as could be, apparently left nothing commemorative of Middleton. Zielinski's monumental work on the history of Cicero-reception, which actually was conceived on the occasion of the billennium anniversary, took no cognizance of Middleton's work.⁴ To be sure, it was not the business of Zielinski's work to deal with the "lives" of Cicero, and still less was he concerned with Ciceronian reception specific to eighteenth-century England. Emphasis was rather placed on the overall transmission and transformation of Ciceronian ideas in Europe. It is safe to say, however, that by the *fin de siècle* Middleton's work had largely lost its significance.

Be that as it may, from a historical point of view the fact remains that Middleton's work enjoyed an authoritative status in the cultural scene from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. By 1767 eight editions had appeared in England, with many more to follow. "During that period," as William Forsyth was to observe in 1866, Middleton's work "exclusively occupied the field in this country as the Biography of Cicero."⁵ This observation finds corroboration in Colley Cibber's *The Character and Conduct of Cicero, from the history of his life, by the Reverend Dr. Middleton* (1747). Cibber, politically a champion of Caesar, showed himself largely critical of Middleton's defensive stance toward Cicero, but at the same time he did not hesitate to reveal his indebtedness to Middleton's work as an indispensable source on which to form his own critical opinion. Middleton's influential presence as a cultural authority was not

2. As we shall soon see in the section entitled "Digression."

3. The year 1995, when I read this paper, fell on that year, though to the best of my knowledge there does not seem to have been any special commemoration.

4. Th. Zielinski, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig, 1912).

5. William Forsyth, *Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (London, 1866).

restricted to the British Isles alone. His monumental work was translated into French, Spanish and Italian.⁶ In America, too, where it could find its way without translation, it made an enormous impact on the cultural formation particularly during the revolutionary and nationalist period.⁷ John Adams, a celebrated admirer of Cicero, confessed that it was through Middleton's work that he became familiar with him. In a letter to a friend in 1805, he said of Middleton's *Life of Cicero*, "I seem to read the history of all ages and nations in every page, and especially the history of our country for forty years past. Change the names and every anecdote will be applicable to us."⁸ Similarly, Thomas Paine, "a man of reason," who also learned a lot from Middleton's biography, saw in Cicero an exemplar of "the sublimity of right reasoning," free from Christian intervention. In 1804 he claimed, "In Cicero we see that vast superiority of the mind, that sublimity of right reasoning and justness of ideas, which man acquires, not by studying bibles and testaments, and the theology of schools built thereon, but by studying the creator in the immensity and unchangeable order of his creation, and the immutability of his law."⁹ In this way Cicero's life as presented by Middleton served as an example of the reasonable way of life, as an exemplary course of history, and as a standard source of information on which to form one's critical opinion. There is thus a sense in which Middleton's *Life of Cicero* had an important role to play in forming what can be termed English and American Ciceronian culture for at least a hundred years after its publication.

6. Cf. Howard D. Weinbrot, "Middleton's popular life of Cicero went into a fifth edition by 1755, was translated into French—by the Abbe Prevost—in 1763, and Spanish in 1790..." The subscribers to Middleton's work included Ralph Allen Burlington, Colley Cibber, Samuel Johnson, Esq., Lyttelton, Uvedale Price, Pope, Sir Robert Walpole (five large paper books), William Warburton, and Daniel Wray. The Royal Family subscribed the large paper edition, and John Lord Hervey subscribed twenty-five large paper sets, *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England: the Decline of a Classical Norm* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 74–75.

7. Carl Richard, *Founders and the Classics* (Mass.: Cambridge, 1994).

8. Richard, p. 84.

9. Richard, p. 219.

Digression: the Problem of Plagiarism

Before going into a discussion of Conyers Middleton's monumental work, let me follow the eighteenth-century custom of "digression" and touch briefly on the unavoidable issue of alleged "plagiarism." In the *Preface* to his work, Middleton makes an acknowledgement of his debts to various authors.¹⁰ Beside such familiar *auctores* as Plutarch and Dio Cassius, mention is also made of some writings which have already become obscure and unfamiliar: *Quaestura* by a certain Sebastiano Corrado (d. 1556), *The Exile of Cicero* by a certain French author, who is repeatedly referred to as "excellent" but is never explicitly identified, and lastly *The Annals of Pighius*. The unnamed French author is Jacques Morabin and his work was translated into English as *The History of Cicero's Banishment* (London, 1725),¹¹ and the exact title of *The Annals of Pighius* is the *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX* of Pighius Stephanus Vinandus (1520–1604). But the work, as can be expected from its title, must be one of a family of works related to the more famous Valerius Maximus's similarly entitled work. Thus going through the *Preface*, the modern reader cannot but be struck by its unusual opacity and curious obscurantism. It may be that such obscurity is merely a measure and result of our modern ignorance, which indeed seems highly likely with *The Exile of Cicero*. Jacques Morabin was in fact one of the most noted and popular historians of the times.¹² But why specifically *Pighius* and Sebastiano Corrado?

To use another eighteenth-century custom of the sententious style à la Gibbon, obscurantism and boasting are often different faces of the same coin called vanity. Middleton claims that he read all the works of Cicero closely and put them in chronological order so that he could make use of them in the course of his narrative. One is tempted to read this self-confident assertion as something insidiously and perhaps ironically related to the above-mentioned obscurantism. This suspicion is partly

10. I quote from the three-volume edition, which was regarded as a standard after 1741 (London, 1810).

11. I owe this and other information to Joseph M. Levine's fascinating and informative article, "Et Tu Brute?": History and Forgery in 18th-Century England," in *Fakes and Frauds: Varieties of Deception in Print & Manuscript*, eds. R. Meyers & M. Harris (Detroit, 1989), pp. 71–97.

12. Levine, p. 91.

confirmed when one learns that Middleton's work actually was accused of plagiarism.

It has been alleged that there was an unacknowledged source, namely the *De Tribus Luminibus Romanorum* (1634) by William Bellenden. According to its description in *The Dictionary of National Biography* (under the entry "Bellenden"), the work is "a history of Rome from the earliest periods, and consists, like its author's previous works, of quotations from Cicero so woven together as to make a continuous whole." And while the same author in *DNB* is generous enough to suggest that "it was from Bellenden's *De Tribus Luminibus* that Middleton conceived the idea of writing Cicero's history in his own words," Leslie Stephen in another entry ("Conyers Middleton") indicates that there is good scholarly evidence for Middleton's plagiarism. Stephen writes,

It [*De Tribus Luminibus*] was a compilation, giving Cicero's history in his own words, and most of the impression having been lost at sea, had become very scarce. Middleton, whose book followed a similar plan, had thus all his materials arranged for him, and instead of acknowledging the debt, boasted in his preface of his great labours. Parr, in his famous "Preface to Bellenden," states that after a careful investigation he has been compelled to regard Middleton as guilty of plagiarism.

On the issue of Middleton's plagiarism opinion was divided: on the one hand, there was a lenient and benign view that Bellenden's work merely served as a catalyst to trigger Middleton's imagination, while on the other, a hard and severe one held him strictly guilty. It now seems the accepted scholarly view, however, that the accusation was unfairly made.¹³ Still the fact remains that he took advantage of Bellenden's handy compilation, and hence there is no justification whatsoever for his failure to acknowledge his debt to Bellenden while claiming to the Herculean labour of having assiduously subjected Cicero's entire *œuvre* to critical examination.

His scholarly morals are therefore suspect, but reading through *The History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, there seems little doubt that it is a work with a distinctive personal imprint, a work informed by a con-

13. Levine, p. 92, note 36.

sistent outlook as well as the typical vocabulary of the age, which includes “deism” and “republicanism.” It comes as no surprise therefore that Howard Erskine-Hill, one of the few scholars who have something to say about Middleton’s *Life of Cicero* today, refers to it as an instance of contemporary work commending “a republican view,” (which was on the ascendancy in the mid-century,) while showing no concern with the issue of plagiarism.¹⁴ To the best of my knowledge, the question of plagiarism does not seem to have received sufficient scholarly treatment.¹⁵ And yet, so long as one takes a historical point of view in which Middleton’s authoritative presence remains an indisputable fact, the question can be regarded, with due reservation, as a separate matter.¹⁶

The English Lineage of Ciceronian Lives

This state of affairs seems to me instructive of the way in which the significance of Middleton’s work is to be sought and interpreted. The “Preface,” with its obscure references, looks tempting enough to put us on the unnecessary track of source-hunting, while the real material, if not the original source, which he actually took advantage of, is securely concealed from our eyes. Such an immoral gesture and unabashed pretence on the author’s part may well defy our well-intended interest in the work. But, I think, there is a different way in which Middleton’s work can be placed in a meaningful context; we may set it historically in what can be called the lineage of an English tradition rather than in the *Quellenforschungen* of those obscure works of Latin and French descent.

By the lineage of an English tradition I mean the one which began in the Renaissance with Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Life of Cicero* (1579). In the literary form of biography proper, the thread of this

14. Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Augustan Ideas in English Literature* (London, 1983), p. 250.

15. The only one exceptional and almost definitive study that can be consulted is M. L. Clarke, “Conyers Middleton’s Alleged Plagiarism,” *Notes and Queries* (Feb. 1983): 44–46.

16. In fact, Middleton’s work occasioned another controversy in his own day. It concerned the authenticity of “the letters of Cicero to Brutus,” on which he drew in writing his *Life of Cicero*. Middleton thought they were genuine but two Cambridge colleagues close to Richard Bentley took up a critical position. The battle lasted for a decade in England and went on for more than a century in Europe. Today, scholars seem to accept that they are genuine.

lineage was only later to be picked up by George Lyttelton’s *Observations on the Life of Cicero* (1733), but the English Ciceronian tradition in between produced interesting literary anomalies. North’s translation served as a stimulus for Robert Greene’s *Ciceronis Amor, or Tullies Love* (1589), a prose work with the ambition to portray the unwritten period of Cicero’s life, viz., his meeting with and courtship of Terentia.¹⁷ The literary form Greene adopted was appropriately an interesting hybrid of the Renaissance courtesy book and pastoral romance. When Ben Jonson next took up the Ciceronian theme in his *Catiline* (1611), the first half of Cicero’s life culminating in his triumph over *Catiline* was represented in dramatic form and with Jonsonian historical precision. *Catiline* was followed in the middle of the century by an anonymous play entitled *Cicero* (1650),¹⁸ which as a self-conscious sequel to Jonson’s work deals with the latter half of Cicero’s tragic life. It was in the turbulent year of 1650 that the work appeared, its literary significance closely and subtly bound up with the contemporary killing of the king, and after this event, at least to the English reader, the life of Cicero ceased to be a mere biography of the Roman. The Roman tyrannicide, in the commitment of which Cicero played no small part and in the aftermath of which he was at the mercy of political fortune, came to provide English history with a mirror where the latter’s killing of the king and its consequences could find their authoritative frame. Naturally, the mirror did not give a simple and straightforward vision. But starting with the corresponding instances of tyranny/kingship in Caesar and Charles I, one would be tempted to make interesting, if controversial, analogies such as between Brutus/Cicero and Cromwell, between Anthony and Charles II, and between Octavius and Williams III. To see English political history in a Roman mirror was a custom that had begun in the reign of James I, but shadowing the political upheavals in the mid-century, the custom of Roman analogy came to acquire a wider and deeper dimension. When the dawn of the new age was breaking, in which people did not hesitate to draw

17. There is a critical edition by Charles H. Larson, *Ciceronis Amor: Tullies Love* (Salzburg, 1974). Cf. also the same author’s article, “Robert Greene’s *Ciceronis Amor*: Fictional Biography in the Romance Genre,” *Studies in the Novel* 6 (1974: Fall): 256–67.

18. *Marcus Tullius Cicero* (The British Library, Wing B4902). Cf. also, Dale B. Randall, “The Head and the Hands on the Rostra: *Marcus Tullius Cicero* as a Sign of its Time,” *Connotations* I, i (1991): 34–54.

on the Roman exemplar in calling it “Augustan,” its peaceful association was not yet entirely free from nightmarish memories that experiences of the recent past had left. If the English Augustan age was considered an epoch established and developed on the basis of the Glorious Revolution, then it was hardly possible to deal with it independent of the topsy-turvydom which had preceded it. A whole series of religious and political antagonisms was played out, where the end of regicide turned out to be another tyranny, where the republican principles went hand-in-hand with puritan sentiments in demolishing the absolute royal power but practically resulting in the establishment of another absolute power. The regicide and the Protectorship were to remain as traumas in the collective memory of the people, and it was therefore not surprising that whenever the turbulent history of the late Roman republic was dealt with in the Augustan age, reference was almost always made to recent domestic history, especially those traumatic events of the mid-seventeenth century.

The political history of the late Roman republic and that of mid-seventeenth-century England were thus intricately interrelated, and in this dynamic complexity of historical configuration the life of Cicero, too, was deeply involved. Although no one perhaps doubts the centrality of the Ciceronian ideal of *humanitas* in the formation of a modern intellectual tradition and that with it went a certain knowledge of Cicero’s life as cultural currency, yet to make a critical assessment of his life the troublesome relationships endemic to political historiography between now and then would certainly have stood in the way. This is perhaps one of the reasons why England had to wait until the beginning of the eighteenth century to have its own biography of Cicero.

After North’s translation of Plutarch’s *Life of Cicero*, which as biography had held the primary position since the Renaissance, the first biographical attempt to appear in England was George Lyttelton’s *Observations on the Life of Cicero* (1733). It was characteristic of this little biographical treatise to see Cicero lacking in “a Steadiness and Uniformity in his Conduct which alone could entitle him to the Reputation he was so desirous of obtaining, and that has been given him rather by the Partiality of

19. Lyttelton, p. 4.

learned Men, than from the Suffrage of historical Justice.”¹⁹ To demonstrate his thesis Lyttelton draws our attention to the specific junctures of Cicero’s career, in which the nature of his actions will reveal the character of the actor. Of these junctures, he contends, two are of paramount importance: one is the occasion on which Cicero acted in defense of “the Manilian Law” and the other the period which comes between his triumph over Catiline and his exile. In the latter case Cicero is shown to have double dealings with both Pompey and Caesar, and in the former he is critically treated as an inconsistent opportunist who defended, in spite of his proclaimed anti-absolutist position, the Law which was proposed to invest Pompey with Absolute Power. It is interesting to note for our present purposes that Lyttelton emphasised Plutarch’s failure to problematise Cicero’s inconsistency in the controversial proposal of “the Manilian Law.” And this consciousness of tradition or lineage was to continue from then onward.

It is no exaggeration to say that Lyttelton provided Middleton with an important occasion to conceive his work, and Middleton in turn was to be in the mind of Forsyth and Trollope as an unignorable heritage. As a matter of fact, in a hundred years’ time Middleton’s work came to provide Forsyth with a point of departure for his Ciceronian project. At the very outset of his work he states,

More than a century has elapsed since Middleton first published his *History of the Life of Marcus Tuilius Cicero*, which has during that period exclusively occupied the field in this country as the Biography of Cicero. It occurred to me that the time had come when another Life might be acceptable to the public.

The reasons he gave for the need of a new biography are two: first, “the advanced state of scholarship” on the history and literature of Rome, (which he acknowledged was largely an accomplishment of German scholars) and, secondly, “the faults” discernible in Middleton’s work. The latter, he does not hesitate to say, are “not inconsiderable,” including “a blind and indiscriminating tone of panegyric” and the insufficient treatment of “the details of his private and domestic life.” The last comment may sound rather surprising in view of the lengths Middleton went to for his ambitious project. The point of Forsyth’s criticism lies, however, in

the comparatively scanty treatment of the private side of Cicero's life, which stands in sharp contrast to the exuberant account of the background socio-political history of the time. It is interesting to observe with hindsight that when it finally came under critical investigation, having enjoyed almost unchallenged authority for nearly a century after its publication, Middleton's work was taken to task for being not only adulatory and uncritical but also not specifically biographical enough. Forsyth's objective was therefore to present Cicero "as he was in private life, surrounded by his family and friends—speaking and acting like other men in the ordinary affairs of home."

It would be certainly interesting to put Forsyth's criticism of Middleton beside Middleton's own criticism of Lyttelton. The comparison will show a curious irony of history. It was the fate of Middleton to be later criticised as excessive in his delineation of background history while insufficient in the description of personal history. But it was precisely such contextualization of the private life in a larger sociopolitical framework that formed the essential part of his intention in writing *The History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero*. Seen in the perspective of English Ciceronian tradition, Forsyth's criticism is clearly wide of the mark. But what is important is not so much Forsyth's irrelevant remark, as the ironical chain-reaction that occurred among these writers of Cicero's life. If Middleton was to be criticised by Forsyth for an excess of historical generality, that same excess originated in Middleton's critical observations on Lyttelton's work, which in his view was lacking precisely in such historical generality. Middleton thought that unjustifiably Lyttelton put undue emphasis on some of Cicero's foibles and weaknesses while neglecting the need to provide a historical backdrop, against which the private characteristics should have been assessed.

To form our notions of a great man from some slight passages of his writings or separate points of conduct, without regarding their connection with the whole, or the figure that they make in his general character, is like examining things in a microscope which were made to be surveyed in the gross; every mole rises into a mountain, and the least spot into a deformity: which vanish again into nothing when we contemplate them through their proper medium and in their natural light. I persuade myself therefore that a person of this writer's good sense and

principles, when he has considered Cicero's whole history, will conceive a more candid opinion of the man, who, after a life spent in a perpetual struggle against vice, faction, and tyranny, fell a martyr at last to the liberty of his country.²⁰

Based upon his critique of Lyttelton, whom he thinks narrow-sighted and unduly severe, Middleton set out to give a full description of Cicero's history both in particulars and in general, examining its various stages and phases "through their proper medium and in their natural light."

Lyttelton and Middleton

As has been briefly noted, the purpose of Lyttelton's short treatise is to demonstrate that Cicero did not live up to what he said himself, not only was he vain as had long been held, but also conspicuous in lacking "a Steadiness and Uniformity in his Conduct." Lyttelton's method in demonstrating this thesis was analytic in that he picked up such specific junctures in Cicero's career as are significant both to the future of the commonwealth and in the assessment of his character. Of these crucial junctures, as has been noted, two in particular are given special treatment. One is the defense case for "the Manilian Law" (*pro lege Manilia*), which was omitted, much to Lyttelton's delight, by Plutarch, and in which Cicero argued for the proposal submitted by Manilius that Pompey be invested with absolute power. Arguing for the absolute power of a single individual, needless to say, goes against Cicero's professed political principle of the republican order. According to Lyttelton, Cicero at this juncture "entirely forsook his former Character of a Lover of his Country, and became a principal Instrument of Illegal and Arbitrary Power."²¹

The other juncture Lyttelton selected for his critical demonstration is the period that comes between Cicero's triumph over Catiline and his exile. During this period Cicero was allegedly ambidextrous in his dealings with Pompey, Caesar and other political magnates. Lyttelton is

20. *Preface*, xv.

21. Lyttelton, p. 8.

remarkably eloquent when he describes these double-dealings: “sometimes devoted to Pompey; sometimes at variance with him; sometimes imploring his Protection; sometimes despising his Power; now resolved to stand or fall with the Commonwealth, now making his Terms with its Tyrants; almost always Reasoning differently, and yet frequently Reasoning better than he could prevail upon himself to act.”²² Insincerity and inconsistency are at stake, and such inconsistency and insincerity in his relationships with power-mongers like Caesar and Pompey would inevitably lend itself to the denial of Cicero as the champion of “liberty.”

Thus an exemplary case for the negative image of Cicero was born. He is vain and ambitious through and through. Eloquent and learned as he is, he fails almost always to live up to what he propounds with self-confidence. It is true that Lyttelton also admits that Cicero, generally speaking, has an amiable, witty and gentle personality, and in some sense can be even called a man of reason. But as a whole, the negative overrides the positive image.

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Middleton’s was the first full-fledged modern biography of Cicero, whose scope and perspective far exceed those of Lyttelton’s. But it is also true that it was counted as one of the aims of Middleton’s work to refute the latter’s negative presentation and provide a favorable picture of his own construction. Middleton’s strategy in defense of Cicero was to offer a full description of historical circumstances so as to correct the errors that myopic and anachronistic authors like Lyttelton had committed. To see how his strategy is worked out, let us take a look at those sections of his *History*, in which the two controversial junctures that Lyttelton problematised are confronted.

(A) the Manilian Law

Cicero at that time was at crucial point in his career: he had become praetor and consulship was only one step away. Since Pompey was universally regarded as the powers that be, Cicero’s speech for the Manilian

22. Lyttelton, pp. 16–17.

law may well have been suspected of being an interested action to facilitate his own advancement. While Lyttelton, quite naively, proceeds from this suspicion to his own conviction that Cicero acted, yet again inconsistently, against his own principle, Middleton by contrast tries to dissipate the suspicion by bringing our attention to some of the circumstantial conditions. First, Lucullus’s troops sent on the Mithridatic campaign were suffering from mutinies and had better be replaced by Pompey’s army; secondly, Pompey had demonstrated his military prowess by his success against the pirates; thirdly, Pompey had a singular character of modesty and abstinence. These, Middleton cautiously proposes, “might probably convince him [Cicero], that it was not only safe, but necessary at this time, to commit war, which nobody else could finish, to such a general; and a power, which nobody else ought to be entrusted with, to such a man.”²³ Rome had to cope with both external enemies and internal subversive elements. If order was to be established and maintained at all, it was necessary to have a good leader experienced in the art of war as well as in politics. Middleton suggests that Cicero’s conduct at this juncture be interpreted not on the principle of his personal political conviction alone but as a result of careful deliberations on the general situation in which he stood. Some would certainly call this attitude “opportunist”; Middleton, however, considers it a misnomer because the opportunist is a person who acts in his own interests whereas Cicero always put the public benefit before his own personal profit.

(B) the period between Catiline’s death and Cicero’s exile

This is indeed an interesting and significant period in Cicero’s whole career, because it is here that the first successful phase of his life, which had ended in triumphant comedy (cf. Ben Jonson’s *Catiline*), is to be replaced by the second tragic phase. Although this tragedy of banishment, after all, is not final but to be followed yet again by another comedy of triumphant return, there is a sense in which this tragic interlude prefigures the final tragedy of his whole life (cf. the anonymous *Cicero* [1650]). What took place in this period was a drastic change from consular triumph to ex-consular banishment, from fame to disgrace. One

23. Middleton, Section II.

could hardly resist the temptation to ask what essentially was the cause that brought this to pass. And at the same time, it would be equally difficult to imagine that such a drastic change could be caused either by a set of personal misjudgments or simply by the arbitrary dictates of frolicsome fortune, which are beyond personal discretion and endeavour? Lyttelton, as has been noted above, drew attention, rather exclusively, to the different attitudes he took toward the political magnates, only to prove his thesis that Cicero was wanting in steadiness and consistency. Not surprisingly, he does not seem to have recognised the importance of the drastic change that must have taken place in this period of Cicero's life. And it is to precisely this that Middleton directed his criticism of Lyttelton's approach:

To form our notions of a great man from some slight passages of his writings or separate points of conduct, without regarding their connexion with the whole, or the figure that they make in his general character.

Middleton therefore offers an ample picture of the socio-political background of the period, to which a good part of Section IV—the entire volume, by the way, consists of XII sections—is devoted. The descriptive narrative includes, among other things, the movement of those who harboured repressed resentments toward Cicero's consular triumph as well as the situation and actions of Pompey, Caesar and Clodius. In fact, "the whole," to which Middleton insists individual incidents must be connected, turns out to be comprehensive enough to contain, for instance, an interesting reference to the Jews in Rome. Now, I think it fair to say that this is one of the enjoyments of his work, allowing us access to such unexpected information and stimulation of our curiosity. To name only a few, the inundation of the Tiber and the existence of a lady-friend called Caerellia are among the details of this kind. And yet, after all is said and done, the question remains as to what aspects of Cicero's personality and conduct these oblique, if not totally irrelevant, minutiae help to illuminate. Throughout, the author repeatedly reminds us of the existence, in some form or other, of Cicero's moral-political principle, which is exemplified by such statements as "where our duty and our safety interfere we should adhere always to what is right, whatever danger we incur by it."²⁴ Again, in another instance, "if we

reflect on Cicero's conduct from the time of Caesar's death to his own, we shall find it in all respects uniform, great, and glorious; never deviating from the grand point which he had in view, the liberty of his country."²⁵ But, we cannot help gaining the impression that too ample a circumstantial description is of as little help as a too meagre.

Some Characteristics of Middleton's History

Middleton believed and professed himself a rational Christian opposed to and critical of superstition, which he thought saturated Christian orthodoxy. Such an "enlightened" rational view was perfectly in accord with his admiration of Cicero. There is an unforgettable passage at the beginning of Section 1, in which he recalls the visit (made sometime during his stay in Italy in 1724–25) to Cicero's family seat at Arpinum.

But there cannot be a better proof of the delightfulness of the place, than that it is now possessed by a convent of monks, and called the Villa of St. Dominic. Strange revolution! to see Cicero's porticoes converted to monkish cloisters! the seat of the most refined reason, wit, and learning, to a nursery of superstition, bigotry, and enthusiasm!

The image of "the most refined reason," expressed with unswerving conviction and deep sympathy, leaves us with an optimistic impression of radical humanism. Writing the first full-fledged modern biography of Cicero meant to Middleton an active participation and contribution to the enlightenment, which had been initiated in the Renaissance humanist revolution.

The optimistic note on which the volume opens, however, is soon to be re-adjusted. We are told that this man endowed with "the most refined reason" is not without weaknesses and that he can be at the mercy of irrational forces and become a victim of circumstances. If reason serves as a proof against superstition, it is by no means an effective help for a person thrown in true affliction and total dejection, as Cicero was in his ban-

24. Middleton, Section VII.

25. Middleton, Section XI.

ishment. During that period he had no hesitation in concealing his emotions, and perhaps nothing is more remote from reasonable behaviour than his at that time. But Middleton tells us that such criticism does not apply in this case. Reason, he seems to imply, is not supernatural but humane: to be sure, it possesses a certain normative power, but it has equally a certain limitation beyond which it cannot and even, in some instances, must not go.

He was now indeed attacked in his weakest part; the only place in which he was vulnerable: to have been as great in affliction as he was in prosperity, would have been a perfection not given to man: yet this very weakness flowed from a source which rendered him the more amiable in all the other parts of life; and the same tenderness of disposition which made him love his friends, his children, his country, more passionately than other men, made him feel the loss of them more sensibly.²⁶

It is not that Middleton made a virtue of the weaknesses but rather that in his view mundane conditions require that even “the most refined reason,” “a perfection given to man,” be not only invulnerable to “weaknesses” but also by its nature fragile enough to sympathise with others’ weaknesses.

Now, it is no exaggeration to say that there has been no one who writes about Cicero who has not left a critical comment on his “grand foible,” i.e., vanity. As might be expected, Middleton again took a defensive position:

since this [the love of glory and thirst for praise] is generally considered as the grand foible of his life, and has been handed down implicitly from age to age, without ever being fairly examined, or rightly understood, it will be proper to lay open the source from which the passion itself flowed, and explain the nature of that glory, of which he professes himself so fond.²⁷

He argues to the effect that “the source” and “nature” of the glory Cicero

26. Middleton, Section V.

27. Middleton, Section VII.

was so concerned about even to the point of obsession is traceable to the ancient socio-political institution in which he had to situate himself. The love of glory and thirst for fame may look an unforgivable weakness, or even a sin in Christian ethics; but, properly put in the ancient Roman system of “the course of honours,” it will be understood as a positive virtue. No doubt, we are tempted to read in this explanation a historicism which would propose that man is a product of historical conditions. But Middleton was, we must also remember, of the opinion that “human nature has ever been the same in all ages and nations.”²⁸ Middleton’s position, I think, can be described as follows: the thirst for fame has ever been part of human nature and in itself it is neither good or bad; rather, depending on the varying historical circumstances, it can be channeled in the direction of positive use.

It is a measure of Middleton’s rationalism consciously to remain in the mundane and secular. Keen as he was on a positive appraisal of Cicero, which sometimes verged on panegyric, he never gave his narrative an aura of hero-worship. Cicero was presented, sometimes, as a man of “reason, wit and learning,” sometimes, the last hope and bulwark of liberty; but there was nothing saint-like about his representation. It is remarkable, as well as to his credit, that the final scene of Cicero’s death was narrated in an appropriately restrained manner. Its brevity and solemnity correspond to the extent of human dignity with which Cicero was endowed, together with various weaknesses.

Cicero commanded them to set him down, and to make no resistance: then looking upon his executioners with a presence and firmness which almost daunted them, and thrusting his neck as forwardly as he could out of the litter, he bade them do their work, and take what they wanted.²⁹

Compared to North-Plutarch’s famous representation of the same scene, which has every intention of suggesting a Christian martyrdom,³⁰ Middleton’s restraint is paradoxically as eloquent as can be.

28. Middleton, Dedication.

29. Middleton, Section XII.

30. Cf. North-Plutarch: [Caesar Augustus] “went one day to see one of his nephews, who had a book in his hand of Cicero’s: and he fearing lest his uncle would be angry to find that

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It is obvious that Middleton found in Cicero's life a representative figure for the republican ideal. For him Cicero was the source of "the light of liberty" as well as reason, and as such he fought his way to the last moment: "Cicero had now done everything that human prudence could do, towards the recovery of the republic; for all that vigour with which it was making this last effort for itself was entirely owing to his counsels and authority."³¹ As a side effect of this adoration of Cicero as champion of republicanism, Caesar and Octavius (later Augustus) were to undergo some damage. Thus in the Middletonian version of Roman history Caesar is destined to play the role of a tyrant from the very outset:

by the experience of these times [the first civil war: Sylla vs. Marius], young Caesar was instructed both how to form and to execute that scheme, which was the grand purpose of his whole life, of oppressing the liberty of his country.³²

The matter is not confined to the sphere of politics alone: tyrannical power is regarded as the origins of cultural well as moral decline:

book in his hands, thought to hide it under gown. Caesar saw it, and took it from him, and read the most part of it standing, and then delivered it to the young boy, and said unto him: he was a wise man indeed, my child, and loved his country well."

"After he has slain Antonius, being Consul, he made Cicero's son his colleague and fellow Consul with him, in whose time the Senate ordained that the images of Antonius should be thrown down, and deprived his memory of all other honours: adding further unto his decree, that from thenceforth none of the house and family of the Anthony should ever after bear the christen name of Marcus. So, justice made the extreme revenge and punishment of Antonius to fall into the house of Cicero": *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes*, [...] translated out of Greeke into French by Jakmes Amyot [...] and out of French into English, by Thomas North, [...] 1579 (rept. London, 1929/30).

The reason why I use the designation of "North-Plutarch" instead of simply "Plutarch" is based on a critical awareness, to which recent scholarship on translation has duly drawn our attention, that North's is a translation done with a certain mode of orientation and predilection. For this, see John Denton's erudite article, "Plutarch in English from Sir Thomas North to the Penguin Classics (1579–1965)," in *Aspects of English and Italian Lexicology and Lexicography*, ed. David Hart (Rome: Bagatto Libri, 1993), pp. 265–78.

31. Middleton, Section X.

32. Middleton, Section I.

the fatal effects of arbitrary power upon the studies and compositions of men of genius, and on the restraint that it necessarily lays on the free course of good sense and truth among men... and it was the same power which, from this beginning, gradually debased the purity both of the Roman wit and language, from the perfection of elegance to which Cicero had advanced them, to that state of rudeness and barbarism which we find in the productions of the lower empire.³³

The conspiracy against and assassination of Caesar is, of course, justified and Cicero's influence on that event is duly acknowledged.

Under these circumstances, Octavius/Augustus could hardly hope to escape a similar eclipse. Being political in the bad sense of the word and deceptive, Octavius is presented as a person who puts trust more in might than in right.

Octavius's conduct was not less politic or vigorous: he had great parts, and an admirable genius, with a dissimulation sufficient to persuade that he had good inclinations too... from the same policy with which he joined himself with the republic to destroy Antony, he now joined with Antony to oppress the republic as the best means of securing and advancing his own power.³⁴

He is thus thought to be involved in the destruction of Cicero, and this obnoxious image of the destroyer of the light of liberty, we are told, is to survive in the newly established reign of Augustus. The odium of that nightmarish memory, Middleton notes,

fell chiefly on Antony; yet it left a stain of perfidy and ingratitude also on Augustus: which explains the reason of that silence which is observed about him by the writers of that age; and why his name is not so much as mentioned either by Horace or Virgil.³⁵

33. Middleton, Section VIII.

34. Middleton, Section XI.

35. Middleton, Section XII.

Such an antagonistic relationship between Augustus and Cicero does not fail to raise the interesting but complicated question, particularly in eighteenth-century England, of the “Augustan” image of Cicero. On the one hand, Cicero enjoyed an insuperable authority in the cultural formation of the century, while on the other, the image of Augustus as the bringer of “*pax romana*” had an equally influential role to play in its politico-historical formation. As has been noted, Middleton’s *Life of Cicero* saw an immediate success, which is an indication of the interest many of his contemporaries had in Cicero. His rhetorical treatises were regularly used in the schools as models of prose style, and his orations were learnt by heart; but it was not until Middleton undertook and accomplished his task that people were able to come by a full biography. It must therefore have had a significant impact on the politico-cultural transactions of the age that Middleton took a clear-cut position against Caesarism and Augustan monarchism. And I have to admit that it is beyond the scope of the present study to look into the various effects and repercussions to which Middleton’s work gave birth.³⁶ All I can do and must content myself with for our present purposes is to conclude by briefly discussing the interesting case of one such repercussion.

In 1747, six years after Middleton had published his *History*, Colley Cibber—“Mr Cibber of Drury Lane,” as one writer styles him³⁷—apparently having difficulty in repressing his own likings of “cesarismo” and hence his uneasiness about Middleton’s anti-Augustanism, wrote *The Character and Conduct of Cicero, from the history of his life, by the Reverend Dr. Middleton*. The situation in which he seems to have written this not insubstantial work was extraordinary: Cibber now sixty-eight, but like a much younger man, “went to balls and assemblies, frequented

36. There is a vexed question about the relationships between politics and historiography. In Middleton’s case things seem to have been rather straightforward: his political stance as a “Whig” and his predilection as a historian of Cicero the republican apparently go together well. But it is difficult to generalise about these politico-historical relations, as Howard D. Weinbrot (96) says, “disapproval of Augustus Caesar was a bipartisan venture common to Whig court ‘favorites’ like Thomas Gordon and Conyers Middleton, ‘Tories’ like Bolingbroke and Pope (who were only part of the opposition), ordinary citizens who did not meddle with political office or ambition, and students of art, poetry, history, and biography, among others”; or, “If anti-Augustanism were peculiar to the ‘Tory opposition,’ we should expect a court historian to favor Augustus; yet Conyers Middleton does not.”

37. Richard H. Barker, *Mr. Cibber of Drury Lane* (Cambridge, 1939).

Tom’s and White’s, paid his addresses to actresses and court beauties,” while he wrote *The Character and Conduct of Cicero* and other works.³⁸ Of course, it is by no means a scholarly piece; now and then the author makes his presence felt as an amateur reader as well as a humble comedian. But this amateur reader understood well, if in his own way, the role and position Caesar had to play and hold in history.

All I have said for *Caesar* then amounts but to this: That of all the Evils which the Licentiousness of the *Roman* Government had then reduced them to a choice of, the absolute Power of so great a Genius as *Caesar* was the *least*, and therefore the most eligible that could befall them.³⁹

Furthermore, he had self-confidence in his expressive and analytical power, eloquence and reasoning. Particularly the latter, “Reason,” was the principal weapon he employed in bringing to light contradictions that were discernible in both the description of historical characters and the narrative itself.

I depend upon plain natural Reason as it nakedly appears to me, and if that deceives me, perhaps I shall be less ridiculous in being an illiterate Blockhead, than a learned one.⁴⁰

The result, obviously, is a down-grading of the Middletonian image of Cicero, but to the extent to which Cibber depends for his self-assertion entirely on Middleton’s work, without which he could not have used his “reasoning” and eloquence in the first place, the impact, we must say, is not strong. It may be worth observing that, placed in our “lineage of English Lives of Cicero,” where the critique of the predecessor often turns out to repeat the position of the predecessor’s predecessor, Cibber to a large extent covered the ground over which Lyttelton had trodden his way.

38. Barker, p. 233.

39. *The Character and Conduct of Cicero, Considered, From the History of his Life, by the Reverend Dr. Middleton. With Occasional Essays, and Observations upon the most memorable Facts and Persons during that Period*, By Colley Cibber, Esq; Servant to His Majesty (London, 1747), 108. I used the copy in Cornell University Library.

40. *The Character and Conduct of Cicero*, the Introduction (unpaginated).