

Leonardo Bruni's *Cicero Novus*¹

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The importance of Leonardo Bruni in the history of early Renaissance has long been recognized but his *Cicero Novus*, unfortunately, has rarely become a subject of extensive argument.² An exceptional case, now a classic essay on it, is E. B. Fryde's article, "The Beginnings of Italian Humanist Historiography: The *New Cicero* of Leonardo Bruni."³ In this informative study Fryde discusses the significance of the *Cicero Novus* as an instance of the attempt at historiography, placing it in the intellectual development of Bruni as a historian. He also provides us with the relevant and useful information about the sources employed by Bruni, particularly Plutarch's *Life of Cicero*.

To follow precisely the intellectual development of Bruni, or for that matter, of any Renaissance humanist, is an extremely difficult task because of the complexity involved in dating the manuscripts. In Bruni's case, however, the foundation has been prepared by Hans Baron's pioneering works, according to which it is fairly certain that his attitude to the past shows the development, in broad outline, from that of panegyric to that of history. If the latter is more objective and philologically oriented, the 'panegyric' "in order to impress its readers effectively," as Bruni in his maturity (1440) says, "must at times go 'beyond the truth'."⁴ One of the key factors that made Bruni so tendentious as to be labeled a 'panegyric' writer can be sought, as Hans Baron repeatedly emphasizes, in the political situation in which Florence was placed in the early 1400s. With the ascendancy of the monarchies and tyrannies in northern Italy, there arose with renewed vigor the revival of the medieval idea of Universal Monarchy. Under these circumstances, those humanists who had been convinced of the twin ideals of liberty and learning were compelled to seek patronage in unexpected quarters, either changing their mind or making a compromise. Especially decisive is the year 1402 when, with the death of Giangaleazzo Visconti, the powerful monarch of Milan, "the political fate of the peninsula and the future of republican freedom in Italy seemed to depend on the Florentine citizens who decided to keep up their lonely resistance."⁵ It was there and then that the republican ideal was reconfirmed in contradistinction to the tradition of monarchy and the attempt was made to reconstruct the republican ideal, both seeking its origin in and comparing it with the ancient republic of Rome. The 'panegyric' tendencies are then to be seen mainly in the direction of republicanism. In this politico-cultural picture of the

early 1400s, *Cicero Novus* comes almost as a perfect fit, which is arguably written in a few years after 1401 and, in its tenor, shows a blatant strain of the ‘panegyric’.

The purpose of the present essay, reflecting the above-mentioned background, is simple and straightforward, i.e., an interpretive re-examination of the text of Bruni’s *Cicero Novus*, not in the context of politico-cultural history and a personal development but rather in the generic framework of biography as such. For I believe such an elementary undertaking has not been sufficiently done and is still in order. And fortunately, with the recent publication of the new critical edition by Paolo Viti we are in a better position to do so.⁶

I

The occasion that brought about Leonardo Bruni’s decision to make a new Latin translation of Plutarch’s *Life of Cicero* is memorably described by himself in the brief introduction to the text. One day as it so happened that the Latin translation of Plutarch’s *Life of Cicero*, which we know was done by Iacopo Angeli da Scarperia between 1400 and 1401, came into his hand.⁷ Before this event, Bruni proudly told us, he had gone through the experience of avidly and closely reading it in the original Greek. Now browsing over this Latin version, he found the translation inaccurate and in his assessment he could not but denounce the translator as not erudite enough (*non satis eruditum*) (p. 416). By this “not sufficiently erudite,” Bruni meant that the translator was not only ignorant of ancient Greek (the language from which to translate) — *ignorante grecarum litterarum* — but also poorly gifted and learned in his command of Latin (the language into which to translate) — *ariditate quadam ingenii*. In short, Iacopo Angeli’s translation is doubly in need of improvement, in terms of both Greek interpretation/reading and Latin expression/writing. He therefore took upon himself the task of correcting and improving this poor state of the deformed Latin (*deformati latine lingue*) (p. 416). One will naturally expect that the result of his task was what we have as it stands; as it turned out, however, contrary to our expectation and much to our surprise, that was not the case.

What must have initially been conceived of as a project of correction of and improvement on the unlearned and unrefined version eventually came out as no true translation whatsoever. For it came to pass, as he went on with his translation, that even Plutarch’s original version did not seem to him to do justice enough to Cicero. He thought that it did not live up to his own image of this great man: *considero, ne ipse quidem Plutarchus desiderium mei animi penitus adimplevit* (p. 416). (I think that even Plutarch himself did not fulfill my wishes and aspirations sufficiently.) Bruni’s adoring picture of Cicero is too grand to be satisfactorily met by what is originally given by Plutarch:

Quippe multis pretermisissis, que ad illustrationem summi viri vel maxime pertinebant, cetera sic narrat, ut magis ad comparationem suam, in qua

Demosthenem preferre nititur, quam ad sincerum narrandi iudicium accommodari videantur (p. 416; 418). (In fact, leaving aside many things that would best contribute to the illustration of this great man, Plutarch narrates other things, in such a way as more to endorse the comparison where Demosthenes is put in a preferable light than to conform to the narrative decorum.)

What is at stake here is neither grammatical precision nor stylistic refinement in the business of translation. At first Bruni found fault with Iacopo Angeli's translation both in its interpretation of the original and in its Latin presentation. But now he was bold enough to take exception to the original Plutarchan text itself, overstepping what we now suppose is the translator's duty and business. It is perhaps crucial to understand that Bruni here exemplifies the contemporary attitudes of Renaissance humanism toward ancient texts, which is analyzable as: (a) [in reception] the correct interpretation of the ancient texts, (b) [in expression] the rhetorical refinement, and (c) [in representation] the illustration of the ancient exemplary model. If his original intention had consisted merely in the textual transaction of correct and good translation alone Bruni's business would not have included the third element, a sort of trans-textual move. In my understanding, the truth is that precisely because his real concern was how to represent, as the best political, ethical and artistic model, the ancient illustrious personality, and since he had a special interest in and admiration for Cicero — *desiderium animi* — he could not choose but to take the Plutarchan text to task for, as it were, its *accurate insincerity*. In its essentials his "*desiderium animi*," which made him commit a purposeful misreading (trans-translation) of the text, must be regarded as one of the important faces of the Renaissance humanism.

Of the use and function of the humanist disciplines, he seems to have been more than convinced. It must not be sought, he must have thought, neither in the technical accomplishment of truthful translation nor in the blindfold belief in what the ancient authorities set forth. In fine, the business of translation as such, however accurate and elegant it may be accomplished, is always short of the mark. What is in order, instead, is a *critical and ideal* reconstruction of history. This humanist venture of reconstruction calls for, according to Bruni's ideas, four elements: (a) the collection and collation of relevant sources, (b) the setting up of a certain principle of its own, (c) the use of critical reflection, and (d) the mobilization of its own ideal and judgment.

Nos igitur et Plutarcho et eius interpretatione omissis, ex iis que vel apud nostros vel apud Grecos de Cicerone scripta legeramus, ab alio exorsi principio vitam et mores et res gestas eius maturiore digestionem et pleniore notitia, non ut interpretes sed pro nostro arbitrio voluntateque, descripsimus (p. 418). (Therefore, putting aside Plutarch and the translation of his work, using instead what we can collect from both our own and ancient Greek sources on the matter of Cicero, and basing ourselves on a distinct principle of our own, we described his life, his habits and his actions with more mature reflection and ampler information, not acting as translator but as being dictated by our judgment and ideal.)

Boldly and explicitly Bruni abandons his function as a translator (“interpretes”), making known his intention to write a piece of history in accordance with his own aspirations. But this does not mean — he hastens to add — an arbitrary indulgence in encomiastic prejudice, spelling out his wishful thinking. He claims as much explicitly that reason and proof will and must underline his exposition of the ancient ideal:

Est autem nihil a nobis temere in historia positum, sed ita ut de singulis rationem reddere et certa probatione asserere valeamus (p. 418). (However, nothing in our story is written without rhyme or reason, but rather in such a way as every single item is given its ground and is affirmed with certain and sure proof.)

Then what kind of reason and proof does Bruni bring to bear on the changes, alterations and rearrangements he has to make in Plutarch’s account? To answer this question it is probably useful to make an attempt at a kind of typology of Cicero criticism.

II

It is no exaggeration to say that since its inception in classical antiquity the account of Cicero, be it biographical or otherwise, has always been controversial. The detractors as well as admirers have long since made their presence felt. The extremely negative assessment, originating in Dio Cassius toward the end of the third century A.D., came a long way to find its modern representative in Theodor Mommsen (1817–1903) in the nineteenth-century Germany. Likewise, the positive view, starting with Quintillian and strengthened by the Renaissance admirers, found its modern supporter, for example, in Anthony Trollope in Victorian England.⁸ In a way it is amazing to see why opinions are divided so far apart over a single individual. One reason for this discrepancy in evaluation can be sought in the fact that he is a man of no single trade, being at once orator, politician, philosopher, and even military commander. Depending on which aspect of his multifaceted personality we find ourselves particularly attached to, the whole picture will naturally change for better or worse.

True, at least on one point there can be a general consensus among positive and negative views: no one would either detract or praise Cicero in the capacity of military commander. (Should there be one inclined to celebrate him as *imperator* it would be none other than Cicero himself in his mood of self-praise.) But, when it comes to Cicero the philosopher, opinions are divided in the extreme. Some like Petrarch revere him as a Stoic philosopher,⁹ some like Theodor Mommsen denounce¹⁰ him as a poor interpreter of Greek philosophy, while the Renaissance period in general saw in him an exemplary philosopher of skepticism.¹¹ As for the other trades of orator and politician, it must be said that there is made a contrastive valorisation between them. While Cicero the orator has never failed to be praised in the long history of Western

Europe Cicero the politician has had a hard time steering clear of the severe criticism for his misjudgments. The consensus is apparently reached that he is the master of eloquence but a political failure. As for the latter point, however, we must hasten to add that his being a political failure does not necessarily mean that his political ideals are equally without value and significance. With a person, action is one thing and thought another. He could indeed be powerless in *Realpolitik*, particularly in front of such powerful presences as Caesar and Pompey (or even Octavian) but his political ideal of republicanism is as enduring as his oratorical teaching.

Another reason for the discrepancy found in his evaluation can be sought in what I see as a structural contrast in his career. With his attainment of consulship at the age of forty-three, at the youngest possible age for that post in the Roman regulation, Cicero's *vita* is divided into two halves. And these can be most appropriately grasped in light of literary genres, the first half being a comedy and the second a tragedy. (In fact, attempts at such dramatization were actually made in the seventeenth-century England; Ben Jonson's *Catiline* (1611) deals with the first half while an anonymous tragedy called *Cicero: A Tragedy* (1650) the latter half.¹²) The first half, an exemplary instance of successful story culminating in his consular defense and victory over the Catiline conspiracy, is studded with a series of praiseworthy achievements both in political and forensic activities. The second half, beginning as it does with despair and joy (the banishment and return), is afterward steadily characterized by a general down-hill movement: the ineffable disgrace under all-powerful dictatorial Caesar in public on the one hand, and the divorce from Terrentia and the death of his beloved daughter Tullia in private on the other. Although this steady decline momentarily shows some sign of recovery and reinvigoration when he is given an occasion to attack Antony, yet it is only a swan's song before he has to face his murderer's final blow. Depending therefore on which side of his *vita* one chooses to emphasise, be it his successful climbing of social ladder or his dejection period of banishment and powerlessness, the framework of one's evaluation is to a large extent determined and demarcated. It is a case in which one's choice of an object is a function of her subjective estimate.

In broad outline it is then possible to draw up a kind of typology in the critical discourses about Cicero's life. Eulogies and censures, respectively, have their own distinct *loci* with respect to the different phases of Cicero's career and in conjunction with the various aspects of his personality. Thus, for example, the typical negative view will tend to focus on the latter half of his career, especially in its political side of his behaviour, and ignore his triumphant political activities in the first half. The typical case of eulogies, in contrast, will turn to the first half of his career and examine what a splendid public figure he cuts as an orator-statesman. Of course, the matter, in the nature of things, is not as simple as that. In the notorious instances of vanity and self-praise, for which he is almost always destined to be criticized, are detectable all through his career, and perhaps more visible in the first successful half of ascendancy than in the latter. His philosophical period, the phase of *vita contemplativa*, in which

he produced many influential works, and for which he was later to be held much in esteem as a Stoic or Skeptic philosopher, is mainly set in the latter half. But by and large, the above typology seems valid.

III

Theoretically speaking, what must be taken as a strategy in renovating the image of Cicero then is twofold: to lessen in the first place as much as possible the censure he is liable to incur and secondly, to augment in turn as many as possible the praises he has the chance of gaining. And this in fact is precisely what Bruni put into practice, as we have seen him state in his preface, “using what we can collect from both our own and ancient Greek sources on the matter of Cicero, and basing ourselves on a different principle [ab alio exorsi principio], we described his life, his habits and his actions with more mature reflection and ampler information, not acting as translator but as being dictated by our judgment and ideal [non ut interpretes sed pro nostro arbitrio voluntateque].” Let us see then on what kind of different principle he conducts his argument.

(1) The strategy for the amelioration of the negative views

The typical instance of the negative view, as we have noted, tends to focus on the latter half of his career, especially centering around what is claimed as his ambidextrous dealings with Pompey and Caesar before the battle of Pharsalia. Cicero is often criticised for his double-dealings with these two political giants, for his blatant inconsistency and useless hesitation. Bruni’s defensive argument against such criticism lies in stressing rather Cicero’s consistency in his political conduct and behaviour. Far from an opportunist double-dealer, Bruni contends, Cicero acts on the firm political principle and ideal whose aim it is to achieve a balance of power between Pompey, Caesar and the Senate. Thus during the period between his return from the banishment and his appointment as governor of Cilicia, the period in which he fortunately and finally saw the death of Clodius, his inveterate enemy, Cicero was flourishing for many years, by seeking to maintain in the republic the middle way that would show him friendly toward both Pompey and Caesar and at the same time respectful toward the Senate (*multosque per annos Cicero floruit eam mediocritatem in re publica sequutus ut et Pompeio et Cesari amicissimus esset, nec tamen a gravitate senatoria usquam discederet*; p. 456). In fine, this is a realist policy based on the idea of balance of power and has nothing to do with a disgraceful opportunist manoeuvring. And all this for the maintenance of peace, which in turn requires the equilibrium of power in the republic. This political conviction never left him, aware though he was of the fact that he owed Pompey his triumphant return from his miserable banishment. He must have felt his obligation so much to Pompey that he would have been happy to go to war with him and would have preferred a defeat with him to a victory with Caesar, and yet he did not do it at this stage. (Later on, Cicero was precisely to do this on the occasion of the battle of Pharsalia.) Instead, Cicero

never ceased to be an author of peace by being a middle man who showed more friendship to neither — *tamen ut medius quidam nec alterutri affectior, pacis auctor esse non destitit*. The civil war was the last thing he would accept and hence he believed that peace must be maintained at any price. For the sake of peace no compromise seemed to Cicero too dear.

Sententia eius semper una fuit, omnem pacem, quamvis iniquam, civili bello sibi videri preferendam (p. 460). (His moral conviction is always one and consistent, i.e., he thinks that peace of any kind, be it ever inadequate, is preferable to a civil war.)

Elsewhere, Bruni even goes so far as to call this politico-moral conviction of Cicero's as the principle of honesty (*honestatis rationem*) — *ea cunctantem et ambiguum diutius [Pompeius et Caesar] tenerunt, sic tamen ut honestatis rationem semper utilitati securitatisque preferret* (p. 460) (thus Pompey and Caesar for long considered him [Cicero] hesitant and ambiguous, but it was because Cicero preferred the principle of honesty to his personal advantage and security). Furthermore, Bruni maintains his emphasis on Cicero's integrity in the latter's dealings with Caesar and Antony as well — "*Cui [Cesari] Cicero nihil summisce, nihil nisi cum dignitate et magno animo respondit* (p. 460)" (To Caesar, Cicero never yielded, unless Caesar answered with dignity and generosity). So much for Bruni's defense of Cicero's political conduct.

One of the most difficult tasks for any defender of Cicero is, as might be expected, to save him from the censure of self-praise or vainglory. He prides himself on what he has achieved and can hardly refrain from proclaiming it in public. Vainglory was a sin in the Middle Ages and (I believe) still is a blameworthy practice in the modern age. The method that is often used to save him from this negative strain of criticism, particularly in the modern era, is to be sought in the strategic alteration of historicism, from whose point of vantage the ancient Roman social custom and habits are safely put in a distance and seen different and distinct from those of the present. According to this historicist view, in ancient Rome to pride oneself in public on what one has achieved for one's country was neither a sin nor a vice but rather an important and indispensable social function. Desire for fame was a positive value publicly accepted as beneficial for the society.

But Bruni did not adopt this way of excuse. His own way, to the best of my knowledge, was unique in that he tried to justify Cicero's self-glorification by pitting it against Cicero's glorification of others. It is true, Bruni says, that Cicero does indulge in self-praise but, by the same token, he makes it a practice to praise others as much as or no less than himself. When the act of praising is equally devoted to both oneself and others one half (self-praise) cannot deserve the reproach of vainglory.

Una tantum in re audientibus gravem fuisse dicunt, quod de se ac de illo

consulatu suo plurimum loquebatur. Sed hec certe necessariū erat contra invidentes carpentesque repetere, et habebant medicinam quod nemo in laudibus ceterorum hominum magis profusissimus umquam fuit, nemo aliorum commendationibus detraxit minus (p. 478). (To those who listened to him there was one thing which they said was a problem, i.e., he made too much of himself and his consulship. But it was certainly necessary to repeat these things against those who were envious and invective, and it had some compensation because there was none so profuse in praising others and there was none so modest in criticising others' reputations.)

This is palpably a forced argument, but we must (and I am sure we feel obliged to) take such an attempt by Bruni in good parts. For it was unlikely that Bruni was in a position to enjoy the modern historicist standpoint, which could have allowed him to put Cicero in a totally different interpretive framework. Under the circumstances where the relativist historical perspective was still immature, Bruni can be said to have gone all the length possible to justify Cicero's self-praise.

(2) The strategy for the enhancement of the positive aspects

The incident of the Catiline conspiracy is on any account one of the most significant events in Cicero's whole career. Not only is it dramatic, as is exhaustibly made use of by Ben Jonson for his dramatization, it also marks the zenith of Cicero's *curriculum vitae* while the banishment that immediately follows in contrast bespeaks its nadir. As might be expected, Bruni, all alert in defending Cicero, never failed to take advantage of this outstanding incident. But ingeniously enough, he did not forget to employ the strategy of understatement in the first place.

Qua de re quia vulgaris historia est et ab optimis auctoribus diligentissime scripta, non erit mihi cure nisi pauca, et ea ipsa que singulari aliqua notatione digna videbuntur, repetere (p. 432). (Because on this matter there is a vernacular version and is extensively dealt with by excellent writers, it won't be necessary for me to go all over again. All I can say is but a little, i.e., only those parts which seem to be worthy of special attention.)

Elsewhere, Bruni can be as succinct as ever and is as often as not bold enough to curtail significant passages in their entirety. Thus he cuts out, for example, the whole episode of the Verres impeachment, whose absence in Bruni's *Cicero Novus* is in a way surprising because its inclusion would certainly contribute to the creation of his positive image. But coming to the Catiline conspiracy, Bruni cannot be brief. Throughout no opportunity seems to be lost in emphasizing Cicero's characteristic "prudencia et eloquentia," with which Cicero saved Rome's liberty. At the same time Bruni sees no infelicity at all in repeating the golden passage where Cicero is called «pater patrie». It is veritably the case that Bruni's account of the Catiline conspiracy begins and ends alike with the same triumphant reference to «pater patrie».

Hic est ille gloriosissimus consulatus, per quem Cicero pater patrie primus omnium Romanorum appellatus est, quam appellationem romani imperatores postea usurparunt. Sed Ciceroni libera adhuc civitate, et non ab hoc vel illo adulatore sed ex sententia M. Catonis, hic tantus honor accessit. (Here is that most glorious consulship, through which Cicero is called the father of the country, first among all the Romans. This designation is later to be taken up by the Roman emperors, but this great honour is accorded to Cicero when civil liberty is still alive, and that by the opinion of not some adulator but M. Cato.) [. . .]

Denique tanti existimate sunt he res ab eo geste, ut M. Cato, vir severus et summe gravitatis, earum gratia patrem patrie putaverit appellandum: quod, ut supra diximus, primo omnium Ciceroni contigit, et quidem in libera civitate, ut inquit poeta quidam imperatores deridens qui ab adulatoribus hoc nomen sumebant: «Roma patrem patrie Ciceronem libera dixit (Iuv.8.244)» (p. 444). (Finally, his achievements are held in such high esteem that M. Cato, man of austerity and gravity, thinks that because of these he [Cicero] deserves to be called the father of the country: and, as we said above, it was accorded to Cicero for the first time and in the time of liberty, so that a certain poet, poking fun at the emperors who received this designation from adulators, said «Rome at the time of liberty called Cicero the father of the country»).

Thus the advantage the Catiline conspiracy offers for the amplification of Cicero's positive image is fully taken by Bruni, who thereby commemorates, along with Cicero's political feats, his ideal of civic liberty.

For Bruni, a representative of the early Renaissance humanism, the accomplishments in *vita activa* as exemplified by Cicero's at the crisis of the Catiline conspiracy were of great importance. But as one of the linkage personalities in the grand Renaissance movement between Petrarch and Machiavelli, both of whom made much of *vita contemplativa* as well as *vita activa*, he was bound to find equally important Cicero's achievements pertaining to the *vita contemplativa*, i.e., works in *litterae humaniores*. It is thus that when the narrative comes to the post-Pharsalian period, where he was forced to abandon actual politics and retire to his private life, Bruni takes the opportunity to cut the thread of his narrative and set out to discuss Cicero's writings. The latter half of his life, as our typology suggests, can hardly be characterized in a positive light; only exceptions are (a) his philosophical (contemplative) activities and (b) the last spurt of anti-Antony diatribes. Bruni does not fail to take full advantage of the former exception. Bruni notes that Cicero is to be remembered not only as "the father of the country" but also as "the father of eloquence and our literature" (parentem eloquii et litterarum nostrarum).

Homo vere natus ad prodesendum hominibus vel in re publica vel in doctrina: siquidem in re publica patriam consul, et innumerabiles orator servavit. In

doctrina vero et litteris non civibus suis tantum sed plane omnibus qui latina utuntur lingua lumen eruditionis sapientieque aperuit. [. . .] Hic ad potestatem romani imperii dominam rerum humanarum eloquentiam adiunxit. Itaque non magis patrem patrie appellare ipsum convenit, quam parentem eloquii et litterarum nostrarum (p. 468). (He was the man born to make contribution to the people in both politics and learning because as consul he saved the country in politics and as orator saved many. In learning as well as literature he gave the light of erudition not only to his fellow citizens but also to all those who use the Latin language. He added to the Roman imperial power the humanist dominance of eloquence. Thus he should be rightfully called the father of his country no less than the father of Latin eloquence and literature.)

“The father of the country” is to the Roman Empire what “the father of eloquence and literature” to the humanities, or what we call the republic of letters. And then he goes on to give us an analytical description of Cicero’s writings, classifying them under four categories: political, forensic, familial, and doctrinal. (The familial comprises his letters addressed to his relatives.)

Genera autem scriptorum eius quadripartita fuerunt. [. . .] Alia publica sunt, alia forensia, quedam familiaria, quedam studiorum atque doctrine (p. 470). (His writings were of four different types . . . Some are political, some forensic, some familial and some theoretical or doctrinal.)

When he enumerates Cicero’s works according to his fourfold classification Bruni is veritably at his best. Plutrach’s original life is second to none in ingeniously incorporating in his narrative as many references as possible to Cicero’s writings, of which, however, there is no separate treatment. It is one of the originalities of *Cicero Novus* to abandon the narrative and give a systematic exposition of Cicero’s works, about which there has been, to the best of my knowledge, no such thorough treatment. The section concludes in the vein where again the co-presence of both the “active” and the “contemplative” ideals is emphasized:

Illud dixisse sat erit: ex tanta multitudine studiosorum hominum, qui vel in eius etate fuerunt vel postea secuti sunt, neque dicendo adhuc quispiam Ciceronem equavit neque scribendo prioximus accessit (p. 478). (Suffice it to say this: there have been a multitude of learned men, be they his contemporaries or his followers in later ages, but there has been none who proved himself equal to him in speaking or has come near to the equal in writing.)

By stressing Cicero’s eminence in both speaking (*dicendo*) and writing (*scribendo*), Bruni ingeniously succeeds in producing the comprehensive image of Cicero, through which it looks as if the negative aspects of his later “active” life were replaced by the

grandeur of his intellectual works produced in *otium*.

IV

In this way Bruni carried out his defense of Cicero as much by alleviating the negative aspects, for which Cicero is usually criticized, as by augmenting the positive sides more than ever. But this does not mean he is thorough in his purgation of negative details to such an extent as to strike out every possible infelicity. There remain in fact some passages which, read straightforwardly, show Cicero in a disadvantageous light.

For example, in the course of the narrative dealing with the Catiline conspiracy, the people are said to have been terrified at the sight of the conspirators being taken one after another to execution. The people were not simply horrified; they were terror-stricken because they witnessed that the country was entirely put in the power of the consuls and the senate, leaving no room for any opposition from the people (*quod in potestate consulis et senatus positam rem publicam sine ulla contradictione intuebatur* (p. 442): because [the people] saw the republic placed in the power of the consuls and the senate without any objection permitted). This passage, where the consular and senatorial power is suggested to verge on the tyrannous cruelty, is indeed no Bruni's creation but originates from Plutarch, but it certainly comes as a surprise to find Bruni the would-be champion of Cicero — and of republican ideal if we are to accept Hans Baron's theory of "Civic Humanism" — keep it intact. Non-emphatic and brief as it is, the reference to the dismal power the republican authority gave the impression of exerting seems of much importance.

Similarly, in reference to the murder of Clodius (Cicero's lifelong enemy) by Milo, Bruni did not conceal the suspicion (as Plutarch transmits him) that Cicero was responsible for the whole transaction of the assassination (*nec abfuit suspicio Ciceronem eius cedis auctorem suasoremque fuisse* (p. 456): there was not without suspicion that Cicero was the author and instigator of his [Clodius's] murder). It is true that Clodius, as every reader of *Life of Cicero* (of any version) knows, is a villain who may deserve death by murder. But this is not the place where that kind of poetic justice should be employed. Together with the almost tyrannical exertion of power at the time of the Catiline crisis, this suspicion of wire-pulling for Clodius's murder helps to contribute to the negative image of Cicero. It certainly is not conducive to the straight encomium — provided that Bruni's intention here was solely directed to the panegyric — of Cicero the politician.

Another instance that does not work to Cicero's credit is found in the passage that describes his behaviour during the period of his banishment. Of the dishonorable actions and behaviours that can be picked up in the typical version of Plutarch's *Life of Cicero*, this instance may come as the second or third, the first being the inveterate habit of self-praise.

Tulit autem hoc exilium non forti animo, nec ut homini philosopho convenire

videbatur, sepe damnans se ipsum quod ferro non dimicasset, damnans consilia amicorum et perfidiam culpans, semper ad Italiam conversus, semper dolore et merore anxius (p. 452). (However, he did not endure this exile with firm mind and his behaviour did not seem to be proper to a philosopher, often regretting that he had not entrusted himself to the sword, censuring his friends' advice and blaming them treacherous, always turning his face to Italy, always distressed by sorrow and misery.)

The passage reminds us of Petrarch's disillusionment in the previous century (1345) when he happened to find the manuscripts thitherto unknown of Cicero's *Epistolae ad Familiares* (*Letters to his Friends*), which ironically revealed the "infirmity of mind" and the "behaviours improper and unsuitable to a philosopher of his caliber." Petrarch was not in a position to know Plutarch: the Greek original version does not seem to have reached him, or if reached, he had no Greek with him to read it anyway. Bruni, on the other hand, was learned enough to read Greek and had access to a copy of the original Plutarch. Perhaps with his knowledge of both original Plutarch and the *Epistolae*, which had long since been a common currency among the humanists, Bruni had no way but to corroborate Petrarch's shocking discovery, i.e., the inconsistency between his actions and what Cicero propounds as philosopher.

Now, it may well be puzzling to find these damage-making passages retained in the biographical enterprise by someone who, considering that "even Plutarch himself did not fulfill [Bruni's] wishes and aspirations sufficiently," — to quote again from his preface — "therefore, putting aside Plutarch and the translation of his work, using instead what [he] can collect from both [his] own and ancient Greek sources on the matter of Cicero, and basing [himself] on a distinct principle of [his] own, [he] described his life, his habits and his actions with more mature reflection and ampler information, not acting as translator but as being dictated by [his] judgment and ideal." Read in light of this statement, the above-mentioned defects and weak points detectable in Cicero will probably belong to the description made "on a distinct principle of [his] own" and "with more mature reflection and ampler information." That what one wishes and hopes for (*desiderium animi*) in the illustrious description of a man comes to subsume certain references to his defects may look contradictory, and indeed it would be so if the negative references far outweighed the positive effects the "*desiderium animi*" aims to produce. Being as they are, however, the negative references in this instance are better to be understood as a kind of foil against which the positive side may enhance its forces. It seems to me that the references to Cicero's infelicitous conducts either in political action (at the Catiline crisis and the Clodian murder) or in personal behaviour (during the banishment) bring about, if implicitly, the felicitous effects for both Bruni and Cicero, giving the sense of 'honesty and sincerity' to the whole picture Bruni describes on the one hand, and 'the breadth and depth' to Cicero's human nature that is being described. Is it too much to say that by the presence of these non-conformist elements, the entire field gains

strength accordingly?

V

All in all, then, Bruni's *Cicero Novus* is new in its method and effects. The critical and corrective gesture it first shows toward its predecessor's unsatisfactory translation soon reveals itself as aspirations to an ideal illustration of the man he never ceases to adore. Bruni's aspirations (*desiderium animi*), as we have noted, must be characterized as 'trans-translational.' We may say, in a way, that Bruni took the word 'translatio' in its proper sense, i.e. 'transference/transferring.' His method then can be described as 'transference aiming at the fulfillment of his aspirations' — *translatio ad desiderium animi*.

What comes out of such a method is accordingly a new life of Cicero, which one may call ambitious but can equally criticize as all-too tendentious. Efforts are visibly made to stress the consistency of Cicero's political platform and the grandeur of his cultural achievements. The ambidextrous dealings with the political magnates, for which he is usually taken to task, are ingeniously smoothed out, as we have seen, under the pretext of common good and on the principle of personal "honesty and integrity" into harmless necessary evils. As for his cultural achievements, works done essentially in *vita contemplativa*, Bruni gives a uniquely systematic treatment, which turns out to be extensive enough to include his works done in *vita activa* as well. ("There has been none who proved himself equal to him in speaking [*dicendo*] or has come near to the equal in writing [*scribendo*].") What will emerge out of these improvements and emphases is indeed a new image of Cicero, a supreme synthesis of an active man and a man of culture, "pater patrie Romanorum" and "parens eloquii et litterarum nostrarum." In fine, this is an ideal Renaissance humanist par excellence. But, I think, this is as far as we can go on the matter of the Renaissance humanism. Whether Cicero as is represented in *Cicero Novus* conforms to, let alone proves, the idea of "Civic Humanism" is a question that I think is best left unanswered because, as will be clear from what I have said, Cicero there is not specifically presented as a lifelong champion of liberty and enemy of dictatorship.

Politics matters as always. But that is not the whole story. Bruni's "Cicero Novus" is, if not entirely free from encomiastic ambition, a remarkable attempt, as Fryde rightfully emphasises, at the "intellectual" biography. And as such it draws special attention to some of Cicero's personal characteristics. Of the distinct personal traits Bruni puts in relief, the following two are of specific interest and significance: "urbanitas" and the sense of humour.

Ioco et risu in omni vita pene intemperanter usus est, acumenque ingenii mirifica condimenta iocanti suppeditabat (p. 482). (Throughout his life, he enjoyed jokes and laughed almost immoderately, and acuteness of his genius helped him when he joked and provided him with marvelous wit.)

Or again,

Sunt enim pene innumerabilia eius dicta: non enim amicis, non inimicis, non domesticis, non sibi ipsi in hoc urbanitatis genere umquam pepercit (p. 482). (Of his witty sayings, there exist almost innumerable; he never spared this kind of wit and pleasantry toward his friends, his enemies, his servants, and even to himself.)

It is undeniable that Bruni must have been at some pains to approximate in this artistic endeavour his “desiderium animi.” But as the above quote clearly and wittily indicates, he does not seem to have had a hard time in describing Cicero’s personal characteristics, especially his sense of wit and his habit of pleasantry. It even reveals that Bruni had the similar sense of humour himself: Bruni appears to belong to those who could understand such a person who “never spared [. . .] wit and pleasantry toward [. . .] event to himself.” In this respect it is unfortunate that Fryde seems oblivious of the above-quoted passage when he concludes his otherwise excellent article by the following words,

Despite his genuine admiration for Cicero, Bruni was not the man to convey, or even probably to grasp, the things that mattered most. Not the ‘statesman, moralist and writer but . . . the vivid, versatile, gay, infinitely conversable being who captivated his society and has preserved so much of himself and of it in his correspondence. Alive, Cicero enhanced life.’¹³

Of this life-enhancing Cicero, as his *Cicero Novus* shows, Bruni was certainly in the know.

Notes

1 This essay is a revised version of the paper I read at the 4th Conference of the International Society for Classical Tradition, which was held at the University of Tübingen on 30th July, 1998.

2 Cf. Hans Baron (ed.), *Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe* (Leipzig, 1938); Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, 1955); Ditto, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (London, 1968); Ditto, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism* (Princeton, 1988); *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, translated by G. Griffiths, J. Hankins & D. Thompson (New York, 1987).

3 *English Historical Review*, 95 (1980), 533–52, rpt. in *Humanism and Renaissance Historiography* (London, 1983), 33–53.

4 *Epistola VIII 4*, quoted in Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 153.

5 Baron, *ibid.*, 104.

6 Leonardo Bruni, *Opere Letterarie e Politiche*, (Torino: UTET, 1996), 413–499. Henceforward quotations from Bruni are from this edition and their translations are all mine.

7 For the general situation in the early Renaissance of the various Latin translations of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, see R. V. Giustiniani, “Sulle Tradizioni Latine delle ‘Vite’ di Plutarco nel Quattrocento,”

Rinascimento: Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 2nda Serie Vol. 1 (1961).

8 For the reception of Cicero in Europe, see the classical study by Thaddaeus Zielinski, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte* (Berlin/Leipzig, 1912; 1967) and more recent and substantial Bruno Weil, *2000 Jahre Cicero* (Zürich/Stuttgart, 1962). Also cf. Yasunari Takada, *Cicero: An Intellectual Tradition in Europe* (Tokyo: 1999) [in Japanese].

9 Petrarch, however, was the first to discover the inconsistency between Cicero the philosopher and Cicero the politician, of which his famous letter to Cicero is a clear testimony.

10 See, Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* (Berlin, 1854–85).

11 See, Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the "Academica" in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1972).

12 *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, 1 (1991), 34–54; Y. Takada, "An Augustan Representaion of Cicero," *Enlightened Groves: Essays in Honour of Professor Zenzo Suzuki*, eds. P. Robinson et. al (Tokyo, 1996), 72–4.

13 R. D. Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero* (London, 1971), p. 280, quoted in Fryde, op. cit., 52.