CICERO AND P. SULPICIUS RUFUS (TR. PL. 88 B.C.)

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Depraved ('perditus'), abandoned ('pravus'), apparently regretting his former good qualities, unrestrained, reckless, cruel, bankrupt, grasping, and totally devoid of scruples—he sold Roman citizenship to freedmen and aliens, counting out the money on a table in the forum. In short, this monster was second to none in cardinal vices, so that the question was not whom he surpassed in wickedness, but in what respect he surpassed his own wickedness. He attracted as satellites the same men as Saturninus, Marius and Lepidus—corrupt, indigent, criminal, men interested only in violence and sedition. In his recklessness Marius found an instrument ideally suited to causing the destruction of the state. When let loose on the People, he caused utter confusion and chaos by his seditious harangues and use of violence. Admirer and imitator of Saturninus in most respects, except that he criticised the former's timidity and hesitancy in political action, he himself had no such scruples but maintained a private army of 3 000 swordsmen and went about with an armed bodyguard of 600 equites whom he called his anti-senate. These men, who were ready for anything, he ruthlessly used to secure his object, stopping at nothing, threatening the lives of the consuls, one of whom he eventually deposed, and even butchering the son of one of the consuls. His legislation was irresponsible, ruinous, pernicious, not to be tolerated by a free state. He instigated Rome's first civil war. Finally the Senate declared him a 'hostis'.

Such is the portrayal by our sources of P. Sulpicius Rufus, tribune of the plebs in 88 B.C.—a veritable Catiline or Clodius. But Cicero is not responsible.

Cicero's Sulpicius Rufus is a very pale shadow of the tribune depicted by our other sources. This is somewhat surprising since there would appear to be ample material for one who revelled in the condemnation of vice, irresponsibility, recklessness, violence and anything which constituted a threat to the res publica. Certainly, Cicero does not hesitate to level against Saturninus, Sulpicius' alleged model, precisely the charges made by others against Sulpicius—'audacia', 'furor', 'improbitas', violence, being 'effrenatus et paene demens'.

Cicero's picture of Sulpicius, however, is singularly free of such invective.

Cicero portrays Sulpicius Rufus, one of the interlocutors in his dialogue De Oratore, as the very close friend of M. Livius Drusus (tr. pl. 91 B.C.) and C.

1. This paper was read to the Conference of the Classical Association of South Africa in Johannesburg in February, 1979. I wish to thank Dr. P. Murgatroyd, Miss L. A. du Toit and Miss P. F. Le Roux who criticised an earlier draft.
2. But see E. Badian, Foreign Clientela, Oxford, 1958, 234 n. 1, on the notion of an equestrian bodyguard called an 'anti-senate'.
3. Vell. Pat. II, 18–20; Plut. Marius 34–35; Sulla 8; App. B. C. I, 55–56; Livy Epit. 77; Florus II, 9, 8; Sall. Hist. I, 77, 7; Val. Max. VI, 5, 7; Ampel. 40, 1; Iul. Exup. 3.
4. Vat. 23; Rab. Perd. 22; Har. Resp. 41; Cluent. 95.
Aurelius Cotta (later the consul of 75 B.C.); a protégé of the great orators L. Licinius Crassus and M. Antonius, and associate also of Q. Mucius Scaevola (augur) and Q. Catulus; a young man in whom, together with Cotta, their elders had placed high hopes. To this end he was to stand for the tribunate. Sulpicius’ brilliant oratorical talent is the subject of Cicero’s glowing praise on a number of occasions. More particularly, Sulpicius was a highly persuasive orator, who with Cotta not only surpassed his contemporaries (these two are said to be in a class of their own), but also was comparable with his elders. (I fail to see how Carney can give such a negative version of Cicero’s picture of Sulpicius as an orator.) Cicero has Crassus and Antonius, whom Sulpicius admired and imitated, awarding high praise to their protégé. During his tribunate Sulpicius moved away from the optimates; in his opposition to the illegal candidature of the aedilician, C. Julius Caesar Strabo, for the consulship, Sulpicius was carried by a ‘popularis’ breeze further than he wished. The case against Caesar’s illegal candidature in which Sulpicius’ colleague, P. Antistius, seems to have been the prime mover, Cicero elsewhere calls a ‘veram causam’. With this estrangement from the ‘boni’ is probably also connected Sulpicius’ bitter alienation from Q. Pompeius Rufus with whom he had been on the most intimate and affectionate terms, a rift which caused great amazement and outrage. It may be this incident to which Cicero is referring when he remarks of Sulpicius ‘quibuscum privatus coniunctissime vixerat, hos in tribunatu spoliare instituit omni dignitate’ (De Or. III, 11), since the only example of this in our evidence would be Sulpicius’ deposition of Q. Pompeius Rufus from the consulship—although Lintott has questioned this allegation in Plutarch, suggesting that Plutarch may have ‘misinterpreted a statement in his source about Sulpicius’ preventing Pompeius from effectively using his powers.

Cicero lists Sulpicius with other turbulent tribunes who constituted a threat to the res publica, the Gracchi and Saturninus, as ‘seditiosus’. They are all cited as ‘exempla’ of the tribunate originating in and promoting sedition, Saturninus and Sulpicius being specified as tribunes whom the state had to resist with armed force. The ‘contentio’ of Sulpicius (which could be that with Sulla or that with Strabo) is one of a series of disturbed periods from the Gracchi to Sulla.

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5. See especially De Or. 1, 24–25.
6. De Or. 1, 25.
7. In general see Har. Resp. 41; Brut. 201–204, 297, 333. Ascon. 66 C probably also reflects Cicero’s praise.
8. Har. Resp. 41; De Or. I, 30; Brut. 183, 202, 207.
10. De Or. I, 30, 97, 99, 131, 132, 137, 295; II, 88, 89, 197, 201; III, 31; Brut. 203.
11. Har. Resp. 43.
12. Brut. 226, cf. Ascon. 25 C: ‘Caesar... cu... iure Sulpicius resisteret’—a verdict possibly formed on the basis of Cicero’s view.
13. Am. 2.
when the *leges Aelia et Fujia* none the less prevailed. In a list of ‘civilis
dissensiones’ Cicero says ‘L. Sulla P. Sulpicium oppressit’ and as an example
of a political question creating the issue in a civil war, he quotes the dispute
between Sulla and Sulpicius concerning the legality of legislation which Sulla
said was passed *per vim.* When attaining the highest distinction of eloquence,
Sulpicius lost his life by the sword, the penalty for his rashness, but a penalty
that was not fixed without great ill for the *res publica.*

This in outline is Cicero’s picture of the tribune Sulpicius Rufus. Now it is
true that Cicero does mention some unpleasant facts about this tribune of 88,
but it is clear that his picture is very different from the lurid one painted by our
other sources. A closer look at the passages referred to above will reveal some
significant points. Cicero gives us unfavourable facts about Sulpicius without
embellishment—apart from describing Sulpicius together with the Gracchi and
Saturninus as ‘seditiosus’, Cicero uses no pejorative adjectives or adverbs, for
instance, he simply says that Sulpicius was one of several tribunes ‘quos ne
depellere quidem a se sine ferro potuit res publica’ (Leg. III, 20). In his third
Catilinarian oration, when reminding Romans of previous ‘civilis dissensiones’,
Cicero says of that involving Sulpicius Rufus simply ‘L. Sulla P. Sulpicium
oppressit’ (Cat. III, 24). He goes on to say of Sulla ‘C. Marium custodem huius
urbis, mulosque fortis viros partim eiecit ex civitate, partim interemit’ (ib.).
Attention is focussed on Sulla rather than Sulpicius, so that whatever respon-
sibility Sulpicius (and Marius and their followers) may have had in the civil
discord is overlooked. By the time Cicero reaches the end of this passage one is
left only with a strong impression of the horrifying bloodshed caused by Sulla,
Cn. Octavius, Cinna and Marius, Sulla again, and Lepidus.

Cicero does not omit the detail that Sulpicius’ legislation was passed *per vim.*
However, I find it interesting that when he mentions Sulla’s dispute with
Sulpicius over the legality of the latter’s laws as an example of a political issue
giving rise to civil war, he says ‘legum quas per vim Sulla esse dicebat’ (*Phil.*
VIII, 7. Laws which Sulla used to say were passed with violence.). It strikes me as
significant that Cicero does not simply say that Sulpicius’ laws were passed *per
vim,* as well he might, but that Sulla *said* they were.

Sulpicius’ estrangement in 88 from his close friend Q. Pompeius Rufus may
seem despicable. Cicero describes Sulpicius’ action as follows: ‘cum is tribunus
plebis capitali odio a Q. Pompeio qui tum erat consul dissideret, quocum
coniunctissime et amantissime vixerat, quanta esset hominum vel admiratio vel
querella’ (*Am.* 2). Yet although Cicero mentions the ‘querella hominum’ which
Sulpicius’ conduct provoked, he does not condemn Sulpicius, and nor should

18. Vat. 23; *Phil.* VIII, 7; Ascon. 25C.
we, when we realise that in fact it was Sulpicius who was betrayed by Q. Pompeius Rufus and his other optimate friends as Badian and, more recently, Lintott and Mitchell have demonstrated. Cicero makes it quite clear that Sulpicius felt very shabbily let down by the optimates on whose support he should have been able to count in his resistance to Caesar Strabo's illegal candidature. In addition Sulpicius was utterly deserted by his optimate friends, in particular Q. Pompeius Rufus, in his attempt to secure a fair deal for the newly enfranchised allies by having them distributed throughout all thirty-five tribes.

Elsewhere Cicero combines with criticism of Sulpicius approval which if not cancelling out the former at least weakens its force. In the introduction to his third book De Ora tore, Cicero calls the death of Licinius Crassus in 91 'beatam' because he did not live to see the fate of those taking part in the discussion, e.g. the 'horribiles miserisque casus' of Cotta and Sulpicius. He elaborates 'Sulpicius ... quibuscum privatus coniunctissime vixerat, hos in tribunatu spoliare instituit omni dignitate; cui quidem ad summam gloriæ eloquentiae efflorescenti ferro erepta vita est et poena temeritatis non sine magno rei publicae malo constituta' (De Or. III, 11). The sympathy naturally shown to a character in his dialogue is evident without the final clause. The comment that Sulpicius' violent end was detrimental to the res publica goes, I believe, beyond a natural expression of sympathy.

There is a similar combination of disapproval and commendation of Sulpicius in Cicero's speech De Haruspicum Responso, though here caution is necessary, as this combination is deliberate. Cicero's purpose is to demonstrate that Clodius, unlike others who were a threat to the state, did not have any redeeming features which offset his seditious conduct. Cicero's object detracts somewhat from his praise for Sulpicius here. Nevertheless this passage is instructive, for it illustrates a noteworthy feature of Cicero's treatment of Sulpicius Rufus—he is noticeably less hostile to Sulpicius than he is to other turbulent tribunes, the Gracchi and Saturninus. Here Cicero says 'Ti. Gracchus convellit statum civitatis ... securus est C. Gracchus ... Saturninus ita fuit

25. Har. Resp. 43. Lintott and Mitchell must be right in insisting contra Badian that Sulpicius' 'dolor' which prompted his denagogy was, like that of the other 'exempla' (viz. the Gracchi and Saturninus), the specific incident mentioned—viz. his resistance to Caesar's illegal candidature.
26. See e.g. E. Badian, art. cit., loc. cit.; E. Gabba, Republican Rome. The Army and the Allies (trans! P. J. Cull), Oxford, 1976, 135. In fairness, it should be pointed out that those who seem to have been most committed to Sulpicius' policy were either dead or in exile. Of those who were intended to carry out this policy, M. Livius Drusus had been assassinated in 91, and C. Aurelius Cotta was in exile after trial by the Varian commission. Licinius Crassus and Aemilius Scaurus who had backed Drusus were now dead. (Cic. De Or. I, 24). M. Antonius who shared Crassus' political views was, I believe, in exile, a victim of the Varian commission. (Cic. Tusc. Disp. II, 57; Brut. 304—contra Badian, Historia 18, 1969, 457 f., who believes 'aberat' is neutral and does not refer to exile; but cf. Cic. Brut. 227 where it is used of Cotta's exile.)
27. De Or. III, 9–11.
effrenatus et paene demens ut actor esset egregius et ad animos imperitorum excitandos inflammandosque perfectus.' But of Sulpicius, Cicero merely says 'Nam quid ego de Sulpicio loquar?', and proceeds to describe in glowing terms his captivating oratory. The criticism of Sulpicius as a disturber of the peace is of course implicit in the context, and Cicero could not approve of oratory the effect of which was 'vel ut prudentes errarent, vel ut boni minus bene sentirent.' Nevertheless, when one compares this slight censure with Cicero's more derogatory remarks about his other 'exempla', in particular the very strong language in which he couches the statement about Saturninus, and the effect of his rhetoric, one cannot help feeling that Sulpicius has been let off very lightly.

There is another instance of this in a list of the troubled periods when the *leges Aelia et Fufia* remained in force. Cicero makes his point as follows: 'leges, Aeliam et Fufiam dico, quae in Gracchorum ferocitate et in audacia Saturnini et in confluvione Drusi et in contentione Sulpici et in cruore Cinnano etiam inter Sullana arma vixerunt' (Vat. 23). The word Cicero uses of the strife caused by Sulpicius—'contentio'—is clearly far more neutral than the more pejorative words he uses in his other 'exempla'—'Gracchorum ferocitate, audacia Saturnini, cruore Cinnano' and 'Sullana arma.' 'Audacia', especially, as Wirszubski has shown, as part of the political invective of the late Republic is highly derogatory, 'audax' being virtually synonymous with 'improbus' and 'malus'. 29 In fact Cicero elsewhere describes Saturninus as 'improbus', and Gaius Gracchus as well. 30

There are other indications that Cicero's attitude to Sulpicius was less disapproving than to other turbulent tribunes with whom he is sometimes associated. Unfavourable remarks are made about Sulpicius in nine passages in comparison with twenty unfavourable passages about Saturninus, twenty-seven about Tiberius Gracchus and twenty-nine about Gaius Gracchus. Now it is true that some of these passages express approval and praise of those who resisted and took action against the Gracchi and Saturninus—Nasica, Opimius, Metellus Numidicus, Marius and Scaurus, whereas Cicero would hardly express approval of, still less praise, Sulla. Nevertheless, even without these passages Cicero still displays hostility to the Gracchi and Saturninus on more occasions than to Sulpicius—one-and-a-half times more in the case of Saturninus and twice as often in the case of each of the Gracchi. Of course in many instances mention of Sulpicius is not required by the context or may even be out of place. However, there are places where one might have expected Sulpicius to be included in the list with the Gracchi and Saturninus, if Douglas is right that there was 'an acknowledged “succession” of “seditiosi” from the Gracchi to Sulpicius'. 31 Certainly this would be supported by other passages which Douglas does not cite, where, as we have seen, Sulpicius is listed with the

30. Planc. 88; Rab. Perd. 22.
Gracchi and Saturninus, especially *Pro Corn. 71* (Ascon. 80C) ‘non dicam P. Sulpici, non L. Saturnini, non Gai Gracchi, non Tiberi, neminem quem isti seditiosum existimant nominabo.’ (It is strange that Douglas should omit the reference which best supports his statement.) There are two passages where one might have expected Sulpicius to appear in the lists of tribunes threatening the state against whom measures had to be taken, viz. *Cat.* IV, 4 and *Mil.* 14, because Cicero does on one occasion mention the need for the state to resist Sulpicius with armed force, yet he clearly does not always include Sulpicius with ‘exempla’ of this. Omission of Sulpicius from the two passages above may of course not be deliberate, but it none the less is part of the more lenient treatment Sulpicius receives from Cicero.

Other points may be noted. We have already noticed numerous passages in which Cicero praises the oratorical talent of Sulpicius. Only once is Cicero’s eulogy qualified by criticism. More frequent, on the other hand, is this presence of censure to qualify praise for the oratory of the Gracchi and Saturninus. Moreover, a greater hostility to the Gracchi and Saturninus is demonstrated, I believe, by an examination of Cicero’s criticism of them. All three are described as ‘seditiosus’ three times, Sulpicius only once. To Tiberius Gracchus ‘ferocitas’, ‘furor’, ‘conatus perditi’ are imputed; his tribunate is described as ‘turbulentissimus’, as a ‘dominatus’, and he is accused of aiming at and achieving a few months’ ‘regnum’. His threat to the state is described in various ways: ‘rem publicam dissipavit’, ‘rem publicam studuerit ... evertere’, ‘rem publicam vexantem’, ‘labefactantem statum rei publicae’, ‘otium perturbaret’.

Gaius Gracchus is described as ‘improbus’, charged with ‘ferocitas’, with inciting people, with draining the treasury, and his threat is described as ‘rem publicam dissipavit’, ‘rei publicae vulneravit’, ‘omnem rei publicae statum permutavit’. Saturninus is ‘effrenatus et paene demens’, has ‘audacia’, ‘improbitas’ and ‘furor’ imputed to him, and is charged with inciting the people.

Comparison of the above with Cicero’s portrayal of Sulpicius should make it clear that his treatment of Sulpicius is far less harsh than that of other ‘seditiosi’ tribunes. This preferential treatment of Sulpicius is, to my mind, a noteworthy feature of Cicero’s picture of him. The other important point to emerge from a study of Cicero’s remarks about Sulpicius is that made earlier—that Cicero’s portrayal of Sulpicius is far more favourable than that given by our other
sources. It is this Ciceronian version which is more apparent in accounts of modern scholars.41 Mommsen clearly recognized and rejected the 'Tendenz' in the other sources though he does not comment on it as others do.42

Several scholars in the last decade have reconstructed the tribunate of Sulpicius Rufus in the light of this acknowledged bias.43 Rightly they have emphasized Sulpicius' opposition to Caesar Strabo's illegal candidature, an incident ignored by all our sources except Cicero and his commentator, Asconius, and Quintilian,44 an emphasis which has made a substantial difference to our understanding of Sulpicius. While these scholars are to be thanked for their valuable work in thus redressing the balance in their reconstructions of Sulpicius' tribunate, I believe that many problems still remain. However, my purpose in this paper is not to find a satisfactory reconstruction of the tribunate of Sulpicius—motives, policies, events etc.—but to attempt to find an explanation for the important features, already noted, of Cicero's picture—viz. a greater leniency than towards other seditious tribunes, and an absence of the hostility found in the other sources.

The hostility towards Sulpicius displayed by sources other than Cicero is attributed partly to Sulla's Memoirs.45 Certainly the 'Tendenz' is most obvious in the Lives of Plutarch who used Sulla's Memoirs citing them on several occasions46 and Lintott has admirably demonstrated the distortion of motives, and misplacement and misrepresentation of facts resulting from Sulla's Memoirs.47 The influence of Sulla's Memoirs may seem to provide a very simple explanation of the discrepancy between Cicero's presentation of Sulpicius and that of the other sources. One could argue that Cicero's picture of Sulpicius is substantially correct, whereas Sulla's maliciously hostile and distorted account of 88 is responsible for all the bias in the other sources. But this means laying all the blame for bias squarely at Sulla's door, although it is by no means certain that Cicero is entirely innocent. For instance, while I believe that the silence of Livy's Epitomator, Velleius, Plutarch and Appian on Sulpicius' opposition to Strabo's illegal candidature is the result of wilful distortion by Sulla48 who could not allow that Sulpicius' violence may have been in any way justified, I also believe that Cicero is similarly guilty of suppression. It is striking that Cicero

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44. Quint. VI, 3, 75. I assume that it was this struggle which occasioned the violence between Sulpicius and Strabo in Quintilian's anecdote. Quintilian's bias is betrayed by his description of the disturbance as a 'seditio Sulpiciana', clearly holding Sulpicius responsible.
45. Münzer, op. cit., col. 846; Gabba, op. cit., 135; Badian, op. cit., 232 n. 3; Lintott art. cit., 422 ff.
46. Sulla 4, 5, 6, 14 (twice), 16, 17, 19, 23, 27, 28, 37; Marius 25, 26, 35.
48. Ib.

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never associates Sulpicius and Marius. This relationship surely cannot be a complete fabrication in our other sources. Carney who has remarked on Cicero’s ‘failure to define the relationship of Marius to Sulpicius’ and his silence about the Mithridatic command in references to Rome’s first civil war, has demonstrated the duplicity apparent in Marius’ relationship with the politically inexperienced, emotional Sulpicius. This may explain why Cicero, who, when not objective, displays a favourable bias towards Marius, and was even to identify himself with Marius, avoids mentioning Marius in connection with Sulpicius. Cicero may have had another reason. Mention of the relationship between Sulpicius and Marius may have led to a dangerous association of ideas—Sulpicius’ transfer of the Mithridatic command from Sulla to Marius which was the result of Marius’ selfish desire and ultimately led to civil war. Cicero does talk of the Civil War as being the responsibility of either Sulla or Marius or both and refers to the quarrel between the two, but elsewhere he gives the cause of the Civil War as the political dispute between Sulla and Sulpicius, and, as noted earlier, never mentions the Mithridatic command. Cicero, I suggest, was deliberately steering clear of an affair which did not show Marius in a very good light. Nor does the influence of Sulla’s Memoirs on tendentious accounts of Sulpicius explain why Cicero seems to adopt a more favourable attitude towards Sulpicius than he does towards other turbulent tribunes, for there is enough in Cicero’s own presentation of Sulpicius to suggest that this tribune of 88 could be regarded in much the same light as the Gracchi and Saturninus.

Some scholars have not ascribed specifically to Sulla’s Memoirs the hostility of the sources to Sulpicius, but have described the bias more generally as oligarchical, deriving from the senatorial tradition, and optimate. Seager has demonstrated the anti-‘populares’ elements in accounts of 88 in Livy’s Epitomator and Florus, and it is clear that the description of Sulpicius in Plutarch as ‘ἀντιπεριότητας’, for instance, must derive from an optimate tradition. Yet this obvious optimate bias will not account for the difference between Cicero’s Sulpicius and the Sulpicius of the other sources. For one would expect Cicero to show this same optimate bias, which he clearly does not. Seager has identified the anti-‘populares’ elements in the Livian tradition.

50. T. F. Carney, art. cit., 83-122.
52. Phil. XIII, 1.
53. Har. Resp. 54.
54. Phil. VIII, 7.
57. Marius 34, 1.
58. See Ch. Wirszubski, art. cit., esp. 21, for a discussion of ‘audax’ and its Greek equivalent, ἀπαντος, as a term of political abuse.
as: the description of Sulpicius’ laws as ‘perniciosas’; the information that Sulpicius resorted to violence against the consuls, the state’s representatives of law and order; the representation of Sulla’s march on Rome as a police action against a group designated by the pejorative term ‘factio’, action authorised by the Senate, symbolising law and order, by the declaration of Sulpicius, Marius and ten others as ‘hostes’. Now, as Seager says, the Livian tradition displays attitudes and uses terminology which we tend to think of as Ciceronian. Yet these elements are absent from Cicero’s picture. He never talks of ‘perniciosas leges’, nor of the Senate’s ‘hostis’ declaration, nor does he represent Sulla’s action against Sulpicius in the same way. He merely says in his list of civil wars ‘L. Sulla P. Sulpicium oppressit’, without mentioning that Sulla was consul.

There is nothing to suggest that Sulla was taking action as a representative of law and order in the State. In fact, as we have seen, the over-riding impression made by this passage is one of horror at the bloodshed caused by Sulla and others. It has also been observed that in passages where Cicero lauds the resistance offered by Nasica, Opimius, Metellus Numidicus, Scaurus, and Marius to riotous tribunes, Sulla’s action against Sulpicius is never included. Moreover, Cicero actually expresses the sentiment that the death of Sulpicius was a great ill for the res publica.

Clearly, then, the demonstrable optimate bias in the sources hostile to Sulpicius Rufus does not explain why they give a more unfavourable picture than Cicero whom we would expect to take the optimistic line. Nor does it explain why Cicero is less disapproving of Sulpicius than he is of other seditious tribunes towards whom he manifests a typically optimate attitude.

Cicero’s sympathetic treatment of Sulpicius can, I believe, be explained on a more personal level. Cicero had himself frequently listened to Sulpicius addressing the people as tribune, and seems to have had more personal contact with him—at least, I take Cicero to be referring to private conversations rather than public ‘contiones’ when he claims to have often heard Sulpicius say that he had not developed the habit of writing nor did he have the ability. In view of Atticus’ close relationship with Sulpicius private conversations between Cicero and Sulpicius are perfectly feasible. If, as Cicero says, ‘boni’ and ‘prudentes’ could be led astray by Sulpicius’ persuasive oratory, the young, impressionable Cicero may have similarly fallen under the spell of this captivating speaker whose talent Cicero makes Crassus extol as ‘divinus’. 68

63. De Or. III, 11.
64. Brut. 306.
65. Brut. 205.
66. See below.
67. Har. Resp. 43.
68. De Or. I, 131.

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Sulpicius could have made a very favourable impression on Cicero.

Atticus' relationship with Sulpicius may also partly account for Cicero's attitude to him. Sulpicius was an 'adfinis' of Atticus. A cousin of Atticus married Sulpicius' brother, Servius.⁶⁹ This relationship, according to Nepos, was to prove dangerous when Sulpicius was killed. That Atticus was much in the company of Sulpicius, we learn from Cicero.⁷⁰ So it would not be surprising if Cicero were well disposed towards one who had been on such close terms with his great friend, Atticus.

A further clue to Cicero's attitude is provided by others closely associated with Sulpicius, men whom Cicero held in high regard. Sulpicius' fellow interlocutors in Cicero's dialogue *De Ora*ro were L. Licinius Crassus, M. Antonius, Q. Mucius Scaevola (the augur), C. Aurelius Cotta, Q. Catulus, and C. Julius Caesar Strabo. The close association between all the characters in this dialogue has been elucidated by Badjan and Gruen, for example.⁷¹ More particularly, Sulpicius, together with Cotta and M. Livius Drusus, was a disciple of Crassus, and as tribune in 88 was marked out to succeed Cotta in carrying out a programme of reform initiated by Drusus in 91.⁷² Without more specific designation the natural way of interpreting Cicero's description in *De Or. I*, 25 of the political role envisaged for Sulpicius is that the 'maiores natu' who had such great plans for him are all three of the senior statesmen just mentioned, viz. Crassus, Antonius and Scaevola. Antonius is in fact described as 'et consiliorum in re publica socius et summa cum Crasso familiaritate conjunctus'.⁷³ Close ties existed between these politicians and two other distinguished men similarly admired by Cicero, C. Mucius Scaevola, pontifex maximus, and M. Aemilius Scaurus, princeps senatus.⁷⁴ Scaevola, the pontifex, cousin of the augur, was the colleague of L. Licinius Crassus in all magistracies except the tribunate and censorship.⁷⁵ Scaurus joined Crassus to provide strong backing for M. Livius Drusus in 91.⁷⁶ As close political associates of Crassus, Scaurus and Scaevola, pontifex, might also be expected to be sympathetic towards Crassus' protégé and Drusus' successor. The fact that Sulpicius was associated with such distinguished statesmen, all highly regarded by Cicero, would naturally colour Cicero's attitude to him.

According to Cicero, C. Aurelius Cotta, himself, was the source for the dialogue *De Ora*ro.⁷⁷ Now even if this is an artifice to lend authenticity to the discussion, still it is reasonable to suppose that Cicero's presentation of Sulpicius in this dialogue would be consistent with his claim that the discussion

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⁶⁹. Nepos *Att. 2.*
⁷⁰. *Am. 2.*
⁷⁶. Cic. *Dom.* 50; Ascon. 21C.
had been narrated to him by Sulpicius’ close friend, Cotta. In general Cicero might be expected to depict in a favourable light the friend of one whom Cicero calls ‘familiararem meum’. 78

Personal contact with other associates of Sulpicius is claimed by Cicero. His father is described as a ‘familiaris’ of the characters in the De Oratore dialogue. 79 Cicero’s mother’s sister married C. Visellius Aculeo, an eminent jurist and close friend of Licinius Crassus, 80 and the young Cicerones together with their cousins were taught by ‘doctores’ with whom Crassus associated. Furthermore if ‘domi’ is the correct reading in De Oratore II, 2 81 it seems that in Crassus’ home Cicero often heard Crassus speaking flawless Greek and expertly discoursing with these ‘doctores’. There is a further indication that Cicero frequented Crassus’ home in his assertion that he had known both Muciae. 82 Acquaintance with the younger Mucia, Crassus’ wife, must have been in the home of her husband, not of her father, Scaevola, for she died before her husband. Cicero also says that when he assumed the toga virilis his father took him to study law informally with Q. Mucius Scaevola, the augur, from whom Cicero transferred to his namesake, the pontifex maximus. 83 Cicero’s uncle, Lucius, was on the staff of M. Antonius during his campaign against the pirates in Cilicia, 84 and Cicero also claims to have had many discussions on various oratorical topics with Antonius. 85 In addition a link with Scaurus is attested. As consul in 115, Scaurus congratulated Cicero’s grandfather on his stand against a lex tabellaria at Arpinum, remarking that he should be in politics at Rome. 86

Now Münzer dismissed Cicero’s claims of familiarity with eminent figures as partly literary artifice designed to lend authenticity, and partly family vanity, 87 and would concede only that Cicero might perhaps have once in the company of others been in Crassus’ home. 88 Badian, too, warns against naively accepting Cicero’s statements about his youth, and has demonstrated how Cicero can touch up autobiographical details. 89 We may allow for some exaggeration, then, in Cicero’s claims to familiarity with these statesmen. There is no need, however, to reject such claims as complete and utter fabrication. For instance,
Badian, who has shown that Cicero transferred from Scaevola, augur, to Scaevola, pontifex, in 89 rather than after the former's death in 88 or soon after, none the less does not deny that Cicero studied law under these distinguished jurists.  

If Cicero had personal contact with these statesmen—and a certain degree of this we must allow—he may have had fairly precise knowledge of their attitude to Sulpicius, and it could be this which his portrayal of Sulpicius reflects. However, if this suggestion seems too conjectural, the very exaggeration of Cicero's claims to familiarity with these eminent men is instructive. For we must ask why he would want to make such claims. This desire must stem partly from an admiration for them. His veneration of Crassus, Antonius, the Scaevolae and Scaurus is well-known. It would be natural, then, for him to be favourably disposed to their protégé, Sulpicius. Furthermore, Crassus, the Scaevolae and Scaurus can all plausibly be shown to have influenced Cicero's political views.  

Thus it would not be surprising if these men who made such a profound impression on Cicero similarly influenced his view of Sulpicius.

Friendship with Atticus and Cotta, and the influence exerted by statesmen whose political judgement Cicero valued would explain his sympathetic treatment of their friend and representative whose persuasive oratory may have seduced Cicero himself. The Gracchi and Saturninus were not so fortunate. For his representation of them, Cicero was dependent on a received tradition. They were probably already well-established 'exempla' of seditious tribunes when Cicero studied rhetoric. That Sulpicius with his use of violence to achieve his ends, albeit legitimate, constituted a threat to the state, Cicero could not deny, but he has portrayed this idealistic tribune with a sympathy for which we must be grateful.

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90. See note 89.
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