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REPENTINVS IN CICERO, *BRVTVS* 242*

ABSTRACT

Cicero's use of the adjective repentinus *at* Brut. *242 (*C. L. Caepasii fratres … ignoti homines et repentini*) has a singularly negative and offensive meaning. Both Tertullian (*Adu. Marc. *4.7.7) and Ammianus Marcellinus (14.6.13, 21.16.3) echo Cicero, employing the same adjective in conjunction with* ignotus *or with its synonym* incognitus*, albeit without the same negative and defaming nuance.*

Keywords: Cicero; Caepasii brothers; *repentinus*; Latin lexicography; Roman rhetoric; Tertullian; Ammianus Marcellinus

When Cicero composed his *Brutus* in 46 B.C., he was already well acquainted with the Caepasii brothers.[1] First mentioned in the *Pro Cluentio* (66), Gaius and Lucius Caepasius were the unsuccessful defenders of Fabricius, defined in *Clu.* 57 as *homines industrii*, who considered the assignment of any task as an honour and a privilege (*ut quaecumque dicendi potestas esset data, in honore atque in beneficio ponerent*). If *industria* is one of the most appreciated qualities in orators, and also a typical trait of *homines noui*, it does not seem that Cicero's words directed at his rivals were meant in an appreciative tone.[2] *homines industrii* should be interpreted ironically, as an allusion to the stubborn and scheming zeal of the unknown orators, who, as will be clarified in the *Brutus*, had managed to climb to the rank of quaestors from their miserable anonymity.[3] The adjective *industrius* is also attested in *Verr.* 2.4.81 in reference to *homines noui*, as well as in *Brut.* 105, referring to Gaius Papirius Carbo, and by Quintus, Cicero's brother, in *Comment. pet.* 8 (*homini nouo, industrio, innocenti, diserto, gratioso apud eos qui res iudicant*)

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[1] Little is known about the Caepasii brothers. According to C. Nicolet, *L'ordre équestre à l'époque républicaine (312–43 av. J.-C.). Tome 1. Définitions juridiques et structures sociales* (Paris, 1974), 818, they may have originated from Southern Italy. G.V. Sumner, *The Orators in Cicero's Brutus: Prosopography and Chronology* (Toronto, 1973) includes them in the list of orators named by Cicero in the *Brutus* but provides no further detail. They are not even cited among the minor characters of the *Pro Cluentio* by J.T. Kirby, *The Rhetoric of Cicero's Pro Cluentio* (Amsterdam, 1990), 45–8. Apart from Cicero, who brings them up in the *Pro Cluentio* and the *Brutus*, only Quintilian mentions them as an *exemplum* of *facetia*, specifically at *Inst.* 4.2.19, 6.1.41, 6.3.39–40.

[2] For a comprehensive analysis of the concept of *industria*, see É. Benveniste, 'Notes de vocabulaire latin', *Rev. Phil.* 22 (1948), 117–26 and J. Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la République* (Paris, 1972²), 253–4, 482–3. *industria* denotes active participation in public life, especially through oratory, marked by a zealous quest for success and recognition. Hellegouarc'h connects *industria* and *diligentia*, portraying these characteristics as quintessential for *homines noui* in Roman society. Cicero's discussions about *uirtus et industria* highlight the importance of these qualities for public figures. *industria* was later included in the list of Tiberius' virtues (Vell. Pat. 2.126.2 *iustitia, aequitas, industria*). The adjective *industrius*, synonymous with *industriosus* or *laboriosus* (cf. *Tusc*. 2.35), is a descriptive term for someone who, 'whatever he did, would build within and devote himself to study at home' (*quicquid ageret, intro strueret, et studeret domi*, Paul. Fest. page 106 Lindsay).

[3] See V.M. Patimo, *La Pro Cluentio di Cicerone: introduzione e commento dei §§1–81* (Nordhausen, 2009), 446–7.

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with a positive connotation. Whereas *industria* was a virtue held in high esteem in Roman culture, Cicero's ironic usage, when referencing the Caepasii brothers, intimates a more complex perspective on this quality. Although hard work was essential for success, it alone was not adequate for attaining true excellence in oratory, which additionally demanded finesse, eloquence and a degree of learned sophistication.[4] The confirmation of the derogatory meaning of *industrius* is found shortly thereafter in *Clu.* 58, where the elder brother, Gaius, begins with an overly ambitious *exordium* (*incipit longo et alte petito prooemio respondere maior Caepasius*), and is associated with *impudentia*, depicted as the audacity to speak beyond the boundaries set by common sense, rhetorical norms and the audience's capacity to listen.[5] Gaius Caepasius, through his brazen conduct, provokes the judges' annoyance, to the extent that the episode, which generates general mirth, is also mentioned by Quintilian on more than one occasion in the *Institutio Oratoria*.[6] Caepasius' *impudentia* delineates their style of eloquence as both provincial and unrefined, characterized by a blatant disregard for established rhetorical principles and the expectations of the audience.

Cicero's critical assessment is intensified in *Brut.* 242 with a more explicit and radical tone:

> eodem tempore C. L. Caepasii fratres fuerunt, qui multa opera, ignoti homines et repentini, quaestores celeriter facti sunt, oppidano quodam et incondito genere dicendi.
>
> In that same period, the brothers Gaius and Lucius Caepasius, through relentless dedication and while being unknown men and upstarts, swiftly climbed to the rank of quaestor; their mode of oration was provincial and devoid of elegance.[7]

The Caepasii brothers, Gaius and Lucius, are here portrayed as *repentini* and *ignoti*: figures of unclear origin, skilfully achieving the rank of quaestors in a short span. The Caepasii brothers lived during a dynamic period in Roman history, marked by considerable social mobility and political upheaval. The social climbing of the Caepasii, despite their provincial and coarse eloquence (*oppidano quodam et incondito genere dicendi*), constitutes an example of the transformation in Roman society, where traditional barriers were becoming more permeable.[8] Their oratorical style, however, underscores the obstacles that 'outsiders' faced in attaining complete acceptance. Indeed, the brothers share the fate of many *populares*, criticized more for their political faction and social class, especially for the lack of *doctrina*, in their educational background. For instance, Q. Rubrius Varro of Casinum in *Brut.* 168 is described as *acer et uehemens accusator, in eo genere sane probabilis* ('a sharp and forceful accuser, in that field decidedly persuasive'), while Q. Sertorius of Norcia and Gaius Gargonius of Picenum, 'those who were plainly unlearned and uncultured, even rustic' (*qui et plane indocti et inurbani aut rustici etiam fuerunt*, *Brut.* 180), were utterly uneducated and boorish. Similarly, Lucius Octavius of Rieti spoke more boldly than preparedly (*ad dicendum*

[4] According to J.-M. David, 'Les orateurs des municipes à Rome: intégration, réticences et snobismes', in M. Cébeillac-Gervasoni (ed.), *Les 'bourgeoisies' municipales italiennes aux II^e^ et I^er^ siècles av. J.-C.* (Naples, 1983), 309–23, at 312, the brothers' rhetorical skills were attributed to forms of *eloquentia popularis*.

[5] See Patimo (n. 3), 453–4.

[6] Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.19, 6.1.41, 6.3.39–40.

[7] Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

[8] See also F. Santangelo, 'Municipal men in the Age of the Civil Wars', in K.-J. Hölkeskamp, S. Karataş and R. Roth (edd.), *Empire, Hegemony or Anarchy? Rome and Italy, 201–31 BCE* (Stuttgart, 2019), 237–58.

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ueniebat magis audacter quam parate, *Brut*. 241), and Gaius Staienus was known for his fervent, impudent and furious manner of speaking (*feruido quodam et petulanti et furioso genere dicendi*).[9] One of the criticisms Cicero directs at many Roman orators concerns their ignorance (*inscitia*), owing to their unfamiliarity with the essential works of Cato, as noted in *Brut*. 67.[10]

The sarcastic context of this passage from the *Brutus* clarifies that Cicero's ironic use of the adjective *repentinus* is analogous to that of *industrius* in *Clu.* 57. In general, both of these adjectives carry a neutral connotation and, in most cases, a positive one.[11] In the context of Cic. *Brut.* 242, *repentini* has been translated as 'newcomers' by Hendrickson and Hubbell.[12] The pejorative term 'upstarts' is a more appropriate choice for the context, as translated by Douglas, in his commentary, and more recently by Kaster, who translated *ignoti homines et repentini* as 'unknown upstarts'.[13] The Italian translation by Marchese, 'uomini sconosciuti e venuti dal nulla', captures the essence of the text well, emphasizing the anonymity and sudden emergence of the individuals. In contrast, Kytzler's German translation, 'obwohl sie unbekannte, plötzlich hervorgetretene Männer waren', highlights the main meaning of the adjective *repentinus*, suggesting the suddenness of their appearance as 'unknown men who emerged suddenly'; meanwhile, Ercole's old Italian translation adopts the French term 'parvenu', akin to 'upstarts', to depict the social climbing and ambition of the two brothers, emphasizing their swift rise from obscurity to prominence.[14]

Let us briefly examine the meanings and uses of *repentinus.* It generally conveys the sense of 'sudden' as noted in the *TLL* (s.v. *subitus*, *improuisus*, *inopinatus*) and in the *OLD* (s.v. *repentinus*: 'occurring without previous intimation, sudden', 'acting without warning', 'sudden in effect'). A secondary nuance of the adjective is linked to the notion of 'suddenly sprung into existence', 'existing without previous development, preparation', in relation to the rapid times of appearance and disappearance, especially referring to unknown or new men, that is, of unknown birth, never appeared before.[15] A similar sense, with a more negative connotation than 'sudden', is carried by 'impromptu' and 'extempore', which describe something done without planning or rehearsal in advance.[16] *repentinus*, translated as 'impromptu', is often used to refer to speeches, performances or actions that occur spontaneously and without a proper formal preparation, as illustrated in these occurrences: Cic. *Verr.* 2.3.175 *omnia quae dicimus rationibus populorum non*

[9] Cicero exhibits a tendency to keenly critique the peculiarities and excesses of orators from modest, municipal origins with his incisive irony. This is evident in his mentions of L. Aelius Lamia and Elvius Mancia in the *De Oratore*, specifically at 2.262 and 2.269 for Lamia, and at 2.266 for Mancia.

[10] Cic. *Brut.* 67 *sed ea in nostris inscitia est, quod hi ipsi, qui in Graecis antiquitate delectantur eaque subtilitate, quam Atticam appellant, hanc in Catone ne nouerunt quidem. . . . cur igitur Lysias et Hyperides amatur, cum penitus ignoretur Cato? antiquior est huius sermo et quaedam horridiora uerba.* For this passage, see C.S. van den Berg, *The Politics and Poetics of Cicero's* Brutus*: The Invention of Literary History* (New York and Cambridge, 2021), 205.

[11] On *industrius*, cf. *TLL* 7.1.1277.7–44. Although *Clu.* 57 is reported in this list, with the meaning of the term given as *assiduus*, *diligens*, this is further demonstration of how subtle Cicero's irony was. On the positive and neutral connotation of *repentinus*, cf. *TLL* 11.2.1177.16–66.

[12] G.L. Hendrickson and H.M. Hubbell (transl.), *Cicero. Brutus. Orator* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1939).

[13] A.E. Douglas, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Brutus* (Oxford, 1966); R.A. Kaster, *Cicero:* Brutus *and* Orator. *Translated with Introduction and Notes* (New York and Oxford, 2020).

[14] R.R. Marchese, *Cicerone. Bruto. Introduzione, traduzione e commento* (Rome, 2017); B. Kytzler, *Marcus Tullius Cicero. Brutus* (Darmstadt, 1998). See also P. Ercole, *Marco Tullio Cicerone. Il Bruto. Testo riveduto ed illustrato* (Turin, 1891).

[15] Cf. *TLL* 11.2.1180.63–75; *OLD*^{2} s.v. 2.

[16] Cf. *TLL* 11.2.1180.5–45.

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interpositis neque perturbatis neque repentinis, sed certis, institutis, ordine relata atque confecta sunt; Livy 40.12.8 *simul et illud quaesiuit, ut repentina et minime praeparata accusatio uideretur*; Apul. *De deo Soc*. prol. 1 *scripta enim pensiculatis et examinatis, repentina autem noscitis simul et ignoscitis*.[17]

Cicero's deployment of the adjective *repentinus* in *Brut*. 242 carries an ironic and disparaging tone, not merely indicating a quick ascent but also imbuing a negative shade related to its connotations of hasty improvisation. The term 'impromptu' encapsulates this notion, suggesting a lack of preparation and deliberateness, which underpins Cicero's critique. He disdains the abrupt and undeserved ascent of the Caepasii, as they prove to be unsuitable for their positions as orators and, consequently, as quaestors. Furthermore, he endows the adjective *repentinus* with an offensive connotation, thereby incorporating it into his extensive arsenal of tools for defamation. This strategy is characterized by the use of irony, a hallmark of his rhetorical style, which is similarly applied in his treatment of the term *industrius* in the *Pro Cluentio*.[18] Thus *Brut.* 242 is the first known occurrence where the adjective *repentinus* is used in a derogatory sense referring to individuals, marking an innovation in linguistic, or better sociolonguistic, usage to critically emphasize an unexpected and undeserved rise to success or attainment of a certain social status.

A confirmation of the unique and singular offensive value attributed by Cicero to *repentinus* is provided by three passages, one from Tertullian and the other two from Ammianus Marcellinus, which echo Cicero's usage. In these texts, the meaning of *repentinus* in conjunction with *ignotus* is confined to the general sense of 'coming or appearing from nowhere', or can be translated as 'unexpected' or 'unlooked for' (Tert. *Adu. Marc.* 4.7.7):

et tamen quomodo in synagogam potuit admitti **tam repentinus, tam ignotus**, cuius nemo adhuc certus de tribu, de populo, de domo, de censu denique Augusti, quem testem fidelissimum dominicae natiuitatis Romana archiua custodiunt? meminerant certe, nisi circumcisum scirent, non admittendum in sancta sanctorum. sed etsi passim synagoga adiretur, non tamen ad docendum nisi ab **optime cognito et explorato et probato**, iam pridem in hoc ipsum uel aliunde commendato cum hoc munere.

Yet again how can he have obtained admittance into the synagogue, appearing so suddenly, so unknown, no one as yet having certain knowledge of his tribe, of his nation, of his house, or even of Caesar's census, which the Roman registry still has in keeping, a most faithful witness to our Lord's nativity? They remembered, surely, that unless they knew he was circumcised he must not be admitted into the most holy places. Or again, even if there were unlimited access to the synagogue, there was no permission to teach, except for one excellently well known, and tried, and approved, and already either for this occasion or by commendation from elsewhere invested with that function.[19]

[17] See also J.E.G. Zetzel, 'Statilius Maximus and Ciceronian studies in the Antonine Age', *BICS* 21 (1974), 107–23, at 113 n. 19, on *repente* and *repentinus.*

[18] On Cicero's irony, see H.V. Canter, 'Irony in the orations of Cicero', *AJPh* 57 (1936), 457–64; M. Fox, 'Dialogue and irony in Cicero: reading *De Republica*', in A. Sharrock and H. Morales (edd.), *Intratextuality: Greek and Roman Textual Relations* (Oxford, 2000), 263–86; M. Fox, *Cicero's Philosophy of History* (Oxford, 2007), 241–73; L. Grillo, 'Irony in Cicero's *post reditum* speeches', in J. Lauwers, H. Schwall and J. Opsomer (edd.), *Psychology and the Classics: A Dialogue of Disciplines* (Berlin and Boston, 2018), 207–22; J. Kenty, 'Irony and figured language in Cicero's letter to Lucceius', *CJ* 118 (2022), 50–89.

[19] E. Evans (ed. and transl.), *Tertullian: Aduersus Marcionem*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1972).

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Tertullian challenges the propositions of the theologian Marcion, who claimed that Christ and the God of the Hebrew Scriptures were not the same entity. He refers to an episode reported in Luke 4:31–7 (Marcion's canon corresponds to Luke's, but Tertullian's contention is that Marcion tampered with Luke's text to fit his own theories and canon). Marcion's core doctrine was the dichotomy between the Old and the New Testaments, extensively elaborated in his now lost magnum opus, the *Antitheses*. He argued that the God of the Hebrew Scriptures was not the same figure revealed by Jesus, characterizing the former as unbending in His despotic justice, punishing sinful creatures through a war of extermination waged by His people, the Jews. Conversely, Jesus revealed the true God, the benevolent Father who forgives, loves and saves, even at the cost of suffering Himself for all. In the above passage, according to Tertullian, Christ is necessarily God; otherwise, who could have entered a synagogue *tam repentinus, tam ignotus*—so suddenly, so unknown? *repentinus* here carries the sense of having appeared abruptly, from nowhere, unknown, without prior knowledge of His rank, name and family lineage. Yet this interpretation bears a connotation far from defamatory or offensive. Instead, it highlights the divine and miraculous appearance of Christ, distinguishing His arrival and mission from conventional human expectations and societal norms, thus reflecting a profound theological insight. In this context, while the miraculous nature of His entrance is significant, the fact that He gains access despite being unknown to the congregation emphasizes the challenges to social norms and expectations regarding who is deemed worthy of such an entry, thus inviting a deeper reflection on the nature of authority and community within religious spaces.

In the two passages from Ammianus Marcellinus, the adjective *repentinus* is employed with a nuance quite akin to that used by Tertullian (Amm. Marc. 14.6.13):

hacque affabilitate confisus, cum eadem postridie feceris, **ut incognitus haerebis et repentinus**, hortatore illo hesterno suos enumerando, qui sis uel unde uenias diutius ambigente. **agnitus** uero tandem et ascitus in amicitiam, si te salutandi assiduitati dederis triennio indiscretus, et per totidem dierum defueris tempus, reuerteris ad paria perferenda, nec ubi esses interrogatus, et ni inde miser discesseris, aetatem omnem frustra in stipite conteres summittendo.

When, encouraged by this affability, you make the same call on the following day, you will hang about unknown and unexpected, while the man who the day before urged you to call again counts up his clients, wondering who you are or whence you came. But when you are at last recognized and admitted to his friendship, if you devote yourself to calling upon him for three years without interruption, then are away for the same number of days, and return to go through with a similar course, you will not be asked where you were, and unless you abandon the quest in sorrow, you will waste your whole life to no purpose in paying court to the blockhead.[20]

In this excerpt from one of Ammianus' digressions (14.6.1–25), the 'Archaeology' or ancient history of Rome, the historian remarks on the phenomenon that, after being graciously welcomed in an aristocratic Roman household, one finds oneself deemed insignificant the following day. *repentinus*, employed as a predicative adjective, carries a meaning similar to that in Tertullian's usage: 'unlooked-for', 'unexpected'.

Similarly, in 21.16.3, Ammianus references the process of promotion to civil positions at court, described as devoid of arbitrariness and randomness:

in conseruando milite nimium cautus, examinator meritorum non numquam subscruposus, palatinas dignitates uelut ex quodam tribuens perpendiculo, et sub eo nemo celsum aliquid

[20] J.C. Rolfe (transl.), *Ammianus Marcellinus. Volume I* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1935; rev. 1950), 43.

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acturus, in regia **repentinus adhibitus est uel incognitus**, sed qui post decennium officiorum magisterium uel largitiones uel simile quicquam esset recturus, **apertissime noscebatur**. ualdeque raro contigerat, ut militarium aliquis ad ciuilia regenda transiret, contraque non nisi puluere bellico indurati, praeficiebantur armatis.

In the maintenance of the soldiers he was exceedingly careful; somewhat critical at times in evaluating services, he bestowed appointments at court by the plumb-line, as it were. Under him no one who was to hold a high position was appointed to a post in the palace suddenly or untried, but a man who after ten years was to be marshal of the court, or head treasurer, or to fill any similar post, was thoroughly known. It very rarely happened that any military officer passed to a civil magistracy, and on the other hand, none were put in command of soldiers who had not grown hardy in the dust of battle.[21]

Ammianus emphasizes that without a lengthy period of service, as should be noted, no one attained high-ranking positions within the central administration under Constantius II:[22] no one, no newcomer, can be promoted to high-level roles without a long period of testing, as surprises and the unexpected have no place in a public career, where notoriety and competence are fundamental. These three passages highlight a significant contrast between the unexpected nature of social appearances and the quest for recognition: while Ammianus emphasizes the importance of merit and notoriety in gaining access to positions of power, Tertullian underscores how the sudden and divine appearance of Christ, *tam repentinus, tam ignotus*, challenges human conventions, suggesting that true authority can manifest outside social expectations and traditional networks of relationships. Therefore, these three analogous examples make Cicero's use of the adjective *repentinu*s in *Brutus* even more singular.

The story of the Caepasii brothers, eloquently presented by Cicero (and further by Quintilian), serves as a poignant microcosm: their path from anonymity to prominence embodies the subtle dynamics between opportunity and constraint within Roman social mobility, highlighting how entrenched cultural and societal codes could simultaneously empower and limit personal ambition.[23] Cicero's concept of true advancement transcends mere diligence and socio-political ambition: it necessitates a profound engagement with educational background and talent. In *Brut.* 182, Cicero emphasizes that, in a state of such historical significance as Rome, where eloquence was regarded as one of the highest rewards, many have aspired to speak, few have dared to try, and even fewer have succeeded. By distinguishing between mere declaimers and true orators, Cicero highlights that advancement in public life hinges on more than mere participation; it requires a discerning judgement of merit. Hence the story of two mediocre legal practitioners becomes a reflection on the delicate balance between merit, ancestry and education in the tumultuous and evolving scenario of the late Roman Republic.

University of Liverpool / University of Basel NICOLETTA BRUNO
nicoletta.bruno@liverpool.ac.uk

[21] J.C. Rolfe (transl.), *Ammianus Marcellinus. Volume II* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1940), 175.

[22] See the commentaries on this passage by J. Szidat, *Historischer Kommentar zu Ammianus Marcellinus Buch XX–XXI* (Stuttgart, 1977–96) and J. den Boeft, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXI* (Leiden, 1991).

[23] See E. Narducci, '*Brutus*: the history of Roman eloquence', in J.M. May (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Cicero: Oratory and Rhetoric* (Leiden, 2022), 418–22; M. Ledentu, 'Cicéron et l'histoire en 46 avant JC. Le *Brutus*: une somme historiographique', in S. Aubert-Baillot and Ch. Guérin (edd.), *Le* Brutus *de Cicéron. Rhétorique, politique et histoire culturelle* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), 52–72.

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