

What the Audience Fears: Cicero's Speeches Against Rullus

One of Cicero's first acts in what was to become a momentous consulship was to attack a "farm bill" (a term more germane to today's student, perhaps, than the usual "agrarian legislation"), which had been proposed by the tribune Publius Servilius Rullus. Scholars have seized upon Cicero's surviving speeches on the matter not only for what they reveal about the political climate of the period but also for their demonstration of Cicero's rhetorical versatility: in one speech Cicero addressed the senate, and in another, delivered on the following day, he pivoted to face the people in the form of a *contio*. Millar 2002, Morstein-Marx 2004, and Tan 2008 have cited the dichotomous pair, along with other contional episodes, to argue that the much vaunted power of the oligarchy in the Republic faced real limitations, and that "the people" were more influential, even if only informally, than previously thought. To Manuwald 2012, Cicero's *contiones* served to involve the crowd directly in the business and physical processes of government, insofar as those were being conducted across the forum in the senate.

This paper examines further the distinctions between the elements of the senatorial and of the popular in Cicero's oratory by exploring how he used fear as a political device differently in each speech, in keeping with the perceived interests of his two audiences. Building on the theoretical work of Robin 2002 in formally defining the terms "fear", "anxiety", and "terror" in political speech, I argue that *De Lege Agraria II*, given before the *contio*, played upon the people's 'anxieties' over their access to land and to the food supply—economic survival—while *De Lege Agraria I*, the senatorial speech, dealt in 'terror', focusing on the upheaval that Rullus's method of leadership foretold, conjuring the violence of a political revolution. The argument thus runs counter to

Kapust 2008, who, though productively noting Cicero's analysis of the power of emotions in the *De Oratore* and *Brutus*, saw only political fears, not economic ones, in Cicero's presentation on the Rullan proposal, and who did not distinguish between the senatorial and popular manifestations of the orator's project. Larger conclusions will also be drawn about the contexts of fear under which Cicero embarked on his (also informal) prosecution of Catiline and his followers later in the year.

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