

Cicero, Crisis Rhetoric and the Catilinarian Conspiracy

63 B.C. – The Timeline

20th October	Cicero informs the Senate of conspiracy.
21st October	<i>Senatus consultum ultimum</i> issued.
7th November	Cicero fights off assassins from his house.
8th November	First Catilinarian oration to senate, revealing extent of conspiracy.
9th November	Second Catilinarian oration to people, reporting senate's deliberations; Cataline has left the city, claiming wounded dignity.
3rd December	Third Catilinarian oration to the people after some conspirators captured, outlining proof of their guilt.
4th December	Senate decides conspirators have acted against the state
5th December	Fourth Catilinarian oration to senate as part of debate on what punishment the conspirators should suffer; senate votes to execute them; Cicero has the conspirators strangled.
62 B.C.	Death of Catiline in battle
58 B.C.	Cicero goes into exile

Key Features of Crisis Rhetoric

- Immediacy
- Quick solutions
- Reinforces strength
- Tackles misunderstandings
- Polarizing rhetoric
- Evokes lost golden age

The First Oration

How long, then, Catiline, will you abuse our patience? (1.1)

There are here, here in our body, O conscript fathers, in this the most holy and dignified assembly of the whole world, men who meditate my death, and the death of all of us, and the destruction of this city, and of the whole world. (1.9)

At Rome, Catiline, what is there, at the present time, that can possibly give you any pleasure? Aside from your degraded fellow conspirators, there is not a single person in this city who does not fear you, not a single person who does not hate you. Is there any mark of disgrace with which your private life has not been branded? Is there any dishonour in your personal affairs that does not besmirch your reputation? From what lust have your eyes, from what crime have your hands, from what outrage has any part of your body ever abstained? Is there any youth that you have ensnared with the enticements of corruption whom you have not then gone on to provide with either a weapon to commit crime or a torch to fire his lusts? (1.13)

The Second Oration

Salus populi Romani – the safety of the Roman people

What poisoner in all Italy, what gladiator, what bandit, what assassin, what parricide, what falsifier of wills, what swindler, what debauchee, what spendthrift, what adulterer, what woman of ill-repute, what corrupter of youth, what corrupted person, what wretched soul can be found who does not confess that he has lived with Catiline on the most familiar terms? (2.7)

On our side fights decency, on theirs wantonness; on ours fights modesty, on theirs defilement; here truth, there deceit; here piety, there evil; here steadfastness, there irrationality; here honour, there shame; here restraint, there lust; so, on our side equity, temperance, bravery, reason—all the virtues—fight against injustice, luxury, laziness, rashness—against all the vices! Finally, our wealth contrasts with their poverty, our good reason with their deranged plan, a sound mind with a witless one, and good hope with complete despair. (2.25)