



Morrison, T. (2021): 'Cicero's advert for the charms of rural life? The praise of farming and nature in *De Senectute*'

Rosetta **Special Edition CAHA Colloquium 2021: 8**

<http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/CAHAColloquium2021/Morrison.pdf>

---

## **Cicero's advert for the charms of rural life? The praise of farming and nature in *De Senectute***

***Tim Morrison***

In the longest and perhaps most memorable section of *De senectute*, Cicero presents Cato the Elder offering a highly poetic song of praise to the beauty of rural life. He discusses the philosophical pleasure of watching nature in action, as well as the practical benefits of farming. He also links farmers with moral and political rectitude, discussing great Romans such as Manius Curius and Cincinnatus who had to be called to the city from the countryside to attend to military and political business.

Given the very basic and practical nature of Cato the Elder's own work on farming (*De Agri Cultura*), readers are often struck by how poetic and philosophical Cato the Elder's speech is in Cicero's text. There have been a number of attempts to account for why Cicero chooses to depict him speaking in this way about the appeal of the countryside. Is Cicero, as some argue, simply representing what he thought were Cato's own views on the value of farming, albeit in slightly more polished language than Cato himself would have managed? Or should we see it, as others have suggested, as having a contemporary relevance for Cicero's reader? Was this in fact Cicero's call to the aristocratic youth of Rome to move past their obsession with urban life and return to the countryside? In this paper I will examine some of these theories before offering my own ideas about possible ways to approach this section of the dialogue, arguing that we should be more open to the possibility of literary playfulness on Cicero's part.