

In the last issue of *Labyrinth* (No. 43, January 1989) we looked in some detail at Cicero's defense of his young protégé and fellow-lawyer, Marcus Caelius Rufus, on a serious charge of *vis*, or armed violence. Though the *Pro Caelio* is a complicated speech (in fact, the precise details of the crimes alleged by the prosecution against Caelius never become completely clear) two elements stand out plainly right from the opening section (the *exordium*). First, M. Caelius is being defended by Cicero against the defamation of his character which his accusers have already made central to their case. Secondly, there is more to the prosecution than meets the eye: it is in fact trumped up to satisfy the passion for spiteful revenge of a notorious and decadent widow, Clodia.

The identification of Clodia is not absolutely confirmed, but most modern commentators accept the evidence for her being the sister of P. Clodius Pulcher who had been married to Q. Metellus, and who was the faithless mistress of the poet Catullus until she left him for a new lover or lovers, one of whom was M. Caelius.

Cicero admits Caelius' involvement with Clodia, a dozen years his senior, but in his mocking attacks on her character and past life suggests that it is she who has seduced the young man - in her usual style - and she who is urging on his prosecution in resentment at his recent rejection of her.

We also know that Cicero hated P. Clodius (the detailed reasons are not to the point here) and so we can assume that his attack on Clodia, Publius' sister, will have satisfied some of Cicero's own instincts for revenge as well as furthering his defense of Caelius.

Cicero does not name Clodia openly as he begins his speech, referring at first only to some wealthy, lustful and embittered woman whose hatred is fuelling the attack on Caelius. Not for some while do we learn that Caelius has been renting a house on the Palatine Hill, belonging to P. Clodius and close to Clodia's own home, though her name still doesn't appear.

Instead Cicero cunningly quotes some lines of Ennius already cited by the prosecution (presumably in a quite different context) and referring to Medea. This gives him an excellent opportunity to label the woman in the case the "Medea of the Palatine". No doubt the court laughed, as Cicero intended, at Clodia's expense.

Not until the speech was more than a third over did the court hear Clodia's name for the first time. But once Cicero brings her into the direct line of fire, he repeats her name four times in quick succession, and moves with relish to the assault on her character. After a slip of the tongue (so-called!) in which he refers to P. Clodius not as her brother but as her lover, and a snide comment about his reluctance to be unfriendly to a woman so well-known for her friendliness to all comers, Cicero conjures up one of her stern Republican ancestors, old Appius Claudius Caecus (the "Blind", as he was called), to scold her for sullyng the family's name: "ideo aquam adduxi ut ea tu inceste uterere? Ideo viam munivi ut eam tu alienis viris comitata celebrares?" ("What, did I bring water to Rome with the aqueduct I had constructed so that you could use it for your own dirty ends? Did I have the Appian Way built so that you can ride up and down it with other women's husbands?")

Next Cicero pretends to bring in a more modern and sophisticated character altogether, Clodia's younger brother, the one who used to climb into her bed when he had nightmares, the one who loves her best of anyone. Clodius' supposed advice turns out to be very cynical: "confer te alio. Habes hortos ad Tiberim ac diligenter eo loco paratos quo omnis iuventus natandi causa venit; hinc licet condiciones cotidie legas; cur huic qui te spernit molesta es?" ("Take yourself off somewhere else! You've got gardens down by the Tiber specially laid out just where all the young men go to swim; you can pick and choose your candidates there. Why are you nagging at a man who doesn't want you anymore?")

Now, half way through his speech, Cicero resorts to blatant innuendo again, asserting that Caelius will have no trouble in defending himself against the charges of misconduct if his name has been coupled with a woman - not of course, Clodia, says Cicero sarcastically, but someone quite different - who is cheap, easy, and a dissipated wanton widow! Young men who enjoy her favours may be foolish but they are hardly vicious seducers of a chastely innocent Roman matrona: "cum hac si

qui adulescens forte fuerit, utrum hic ... adulter an amator, expugnare pudicitiam an explere libidinem voluisse videatur?"

At this juncture, the details of some of the prosecution's case come into clearer focus. Cicero begins to concentrate on one of them: Caelius is alleged to have tried to obtain poison in order to give it to Clodia, for motives which Cicero cannot fathom at all. It's just one more damnable piece of falsehood concocted along with the rest of the case and emerging "ex inimica, ex infami, ex crudeli, ex facinerosa, ex libidinosa domo". But the mention of poison suddenly leads Cicero into a complete change of tone, as he remembers Quintus Metellus' sudden death, some said at the time (three years earlier) from poison administered by his wife Clodia who did not love him. "And is it this noble statesman's own roof from which that woman walks abroad and has the audacity to talk about fast-acting poison?"

Again Cicero's tone shifts, this time towards flippancy, as he claims to have had trouble continuing to speak about his grief at Metellus' memory. Now comes an extraordinary tale of an assignation to hand over poison in a little wooden box at the baths. Not, of course, Caelius himself, but a young friend, P. Licinius, is alleged to have been entrusted by Caelius with the poison to give to some of Clodia's slaves, supposedly so that they would administer it to her. Naturally, say the prosecution, her loyal slaves told all, and she sent some gentlemen to the baths to catch Licinius red-handed. And to make their admission fully-clothed into some hiding-place in the baths must have taken all the lavish generosity of that two-cent Clytemnestra, that favourite of the bath-keepers, Clodia! At this double-entendre there must have been laughter in the court once again, at the implications of a second Clytemnestra (only she murdered her husband in the baths with an axe, not poison) selling herself to the porter to win his help for the totally trivial sum charged to admit Roman men to the baths each afternoon.

As Cicero's speech draws to a close, he denounces Clodia one last time, coupling her name with that of a violent and vicious criminal whom she intervened to protect at his recent trial. He begs the court not to allow such a woman and her brother to succeed in ruining the promising career and the virtuous character of M. Caelius, despite her success at rescuing the most notorious and vilest of criminals from justice.

We may feel that it is hardly surprising that Clodia's name seems to have disappeared from sight after 56 B.C. Her licentious behaviour and her involvement in unscrupulous character-assassination must have finally caught up with her.