

Cicero on Clodia. Rome 56 B.C. (Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 13-16. [1] L) (translation provided by Diotima website, for use for educational purposes as permitted)

Cicero's exile was in large part due to the tribune P. Clodius Pulcher, who proposed this punishment as a result of his extrajudicial execution of some of the Catilinarian conspirators. After his return from Rome (56 BC), he had the opportunity to exact a small bit of revenge. One of Clodius' sisters, Clodia (already known to us as the former mistress of Catullus), attacked another of her lovers, M. Caelius Rufus. As it happened, M. Caelius Rufus was a former protégé of Cicero. M. Caelius Rufus was charged by L. Sempronius Atratinus (not a very big dealer in the overall course of events, by the way), a man with whose family Caelius had had a feud. This feud may have been the ultimate origin of the case, but what matters for our purposes here is that Caelius was charged with offences relating to Clodia. He was accused of the murder of one or more Alexandrian envoys and the attempted poisoning of Clodia herself after taking gold from her.

In order to defend his client, Cicero resorted to one of the most vicious character assassinations of a woman known from the Roman courtroom. Here is an excerpt:

(13) The accusations are two: the gold and the poison. And the same person is on the scene for both. The gold is supposed to have been taken from Clodia [2] and the poison to have been procured to use on her. Everything else is slander, not accusations, better suited to malicious gossip than a court of law. 'Adulterer, lecher, briber' are insults, not accusations. ... I see the author of these two charges, the source, I see a specific person, a mind. 'He needed gold; he took it from Clodia, without witnesses, and kept it for as long as he needed it.' That's the clear proof of an uncommon intimacy. 'Then he decided to kill her, stirred up those he could, got the poison, established the place, and brought it.' Again, this is clear proof of a deep hatred, conceived after having been cruelly jilted.

In this trial, gentlemen of the jury, we are concerned only with Clodia, a noble woman and a notorious one, but I will say no more than is necessary about her to rebut the accusations. However, you, Gnaeus Domitius, [3] smart as you are, understand perfectly that we are concerned only with this woman. If she does not affirm that she lent the gold to Marcus Caelius, if she does not accuse him of having procured the poison for her, our conduct is inappropriate. To use the name of Roman matron when the respect owed to respectable women does not allow it! If, however, this woman were removed from the case, the accusers no longer have a head nor any means to attack Caelius. And surely another thing entirely would be the vigour that I would use were it not for the animosity between me and this woman's husband—excuse me, brother, I always make that mistake. Now, however, I am obliged to proceed with circumspection; and I will not push beyond the limits that my obligations to my client and the case itself demand. And furthermore I never considered it wise to make an enemy of a woman, especially one who is generally considered everybody's friend.

(14) But I would nevertheless begin by asking her whether she wants me to adopt with her a severe, solemn, old-style tone, or whether she prefers something more easy-going and modern. If she prefers the austere style, then I shall have to summon up from the underworld one of those beards-no, not one of the fashionable jobs that she likes so much, but a really serious hairy beard out of the portraits and statues of days gone by-to reprimand her and to speak in my place. Then she can't blame me! Let us imagine, therefore, that appears a member of her own family: let's conjure up the famous Caecus, the Blind (it will be easier on him, as he can't see her). [4] If he were to rise up right now, he would say something like this:

'Woman, what do you have in common with Caelius? with a youth, a stranger? Why were you so intimate with him as to lend him the gold, or so inimical as to fear poison from him? Did you not see your father as consul? Weren't you told that your uncle, your grandfather, your great-grandfather, your great-great-grandfather, and his father were consuls too? And then, didn't you realize that till just now you were the wife of Quintus Metellus? [5] He, a man of ancient lineage and great energy, a man extraordinarily devoted to his country, had only to step outside his house to overshadow virtually all his fellow citizens in courage, glory, and reputation. Born of a noble house, married into one just as illustrious, how could you get mixed up with someone like Caelius? Is he a relative? a relative by marriage? a friend of your husband? Not at all. This was nothing but sheer, unbridled passion. If the images of your male ancestors don't move you, did not even Quinta Claudia, my illustrious descendant, push you to vie in domestic virtue with the women who brought glory to our house? Not even Claudia, the Vestal Virgin? She who, holding her father close, did not allow his enemy, the tribune of the people, to pull him down from his chariot during his triumph? Why did you let yourself be influenced by the vices of your brother rather than by the qualities of your father and forefathers? And yet these, ever since my day, have been kept going both in the males of the family and, especially, in the females. Did I break the peace with Pyrrhus so that you could make daily treaties with your filthy lovers? Did I built the aqueduct to provide water for your post-incest ablutions? Did I built the road so that you could parade with other women's husbands?'

(15) But why, gentlemen of the jury, did I bring in such a difficult character as old Appius, who might at any moment turn his censorious austerity against Caelius. But I'll get to that later, and in such a way, gentlemen of the jury, that I am sure I will be able to justify the the life of Marcus Caelius even to the severest judges. As for you, woman-that's right, it is I speaking now, for myself-if you intend to justify your actions, your declarations, your calumnies, your machinations, your accusations, then you're going to have to give an accounting, and a clear one, of this great intimacy. The accusers, for their part, speak only of orgies, love affairs, adultery, Baiae, [6] beach parties, banquets, revels, singing, concerts, boat rides; and at the same time they give us to understand that there is nothing they say without your approval. And you, gripped by some sudden madness-were willing to have all this mud dragged into the Forum in front of the jury. So you either have to deny the

charges and prove that they are lies or admit that neither your accusation nor your testimony deserve to be believed.

But perhaps you prefer that I behave more like a man of the world. Here's what I'll do with you: I'll pull the gruff, practically rustic old man off the stage and replace him with someone more to your liking, say, your little brother. He's so refined in this sort of thing! and, too, he loves you with all his heart and some faintheartedness, I suppose, and fear of the dark, the little brat always slept in your bed. What would he say now: 'Why all this fuss, sister? Why this madness?

Why, with shout and speech, inflate  
A little thing into a great? [7]

You saw a young man, a neighbour. He was tall and handsome, and you liked his face and eyes. You wanted to see him more often. You managed to frequent the same gardens. And now you, a fine lady, want to hold that young man tight with your wealth, given that he is still in the power of a stingy father. But you cannot. He kicks, he spits, he rejects you. He doesn't think your gifts are worth so much. And you turn to another! You have a garden on the Tiber and you were very careful to put it right where the young people go to bathe; there every day you can take all the opportunities you want. Why then pester this one, who doesn't want you?

(16) ... [Caelius'] case is all but won. Against what accusation can he not defend himself? I am not not speaking against that woman, but let us suppose that there is another woman, different from her, who gives herself freely to everybody-I mean everybody-who always has a lover to show off; let us suppose that in her garden, in her house, in her villa at Baiae, she gives complete freedom to the pleasures of all; that she goes so far as to maintain young men and to compensate with her largesse for the stinginess of their fathers; let us suppose that this woman is a widow and lives freely; that she is a hussy and lives brazenly; that she is a wealthy woman and lives extravagantly; that she is a slave to her appetites and lives like a whore. Should I consider a man an adulterer if he takes a little liberty when he meets her?

Notes:

1. See Geffcken 1973 on Cicero's use of ridicule to discredit Clodia.
2. This is the 'Lesbia' of Catullus. She was the sister of Publius Clodius Pulcher, Cicero's bitter enemy. Her husband was Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer (consul in 60 B.C.).
3. Gnaeus Domitius Calvinus, the praetor who presided over the trial.
4. Appius Claudius Caecus ('blind'), consul in 307 and 296 B.C. An aristocrat, he championed the lower classes and, as censor in 312 B.C., built the first aqueduct in

Rome, the Aqua Claudia, parts of which still stand, and the first of the great roads, the Via Appia.

5. Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, consul in 60 B.C., died suddenly in 59, giving rise to the suspicion that he'd been poisoned by his wife.

6. A spa on the Bay of Naples known for luxury and loose living. 'The mere mention of Baiae [in the Pro Caelio] contributed effectively to the impression of Clodia's immorality which Cicero was striving to establish' D'Arms 1970.

7. The translated of the couplet is by R.Y. Hathorn. Cicero is quoting a comic playwright, perhaps Caecilius Statius (c. 168 B.C.).