

## RHETORIC AND THE FEMININE CHARACTER: CICERO'S PORTRAYAL OF SASSIA, CLODIA AND FULVIA

*S Ige (University of Natal, Durban)*

The role of women in the ancient world has been extensively debated and a significant amount of work has been done in this area. Included in the texts that have received attention are Cicero's speeches which refer to women. All the women who feature in Cicero's speeches were those who have been acknowledged to have made their presence felt in the Roman public domain. Although Roman society regulated its socio-political activities around masculine values, it is nevertheless difficult to explain why so few women appear in such a voluminous *corpus* like Cicero's.<sup>1</sup> What is certain is that Ciceronian rhetoric is characterised by the use of invective and vituperation.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I shall argue that the women who were negatively portrayed in Cicero's speeches were victims of an already standardised form of communication within the hegemonic male order that dominated the Roman public domain in first century BC.

Three of these prominent women — Sassia, Clodia and Fulvia who feature prominently in the Ciceronian *corpus*, will be discussed in this paper.<sup>3</sup> These women had a direct influence on the public life of Rome and eventually their activities led to Cicero's involvement in judicial proceedings that concerned them.<sup>4</sup> While some of these women supported their sons' careers, others indulged in extravagant public pleasures. There were other women, however, who conformed with the patriarchal stereotypes created by Roman men. Such women receive the praises of the historians, literary writers and orators. In contrast, the three women who will be looked at in this article are depicted negatively by Cicero: Sassia represents the villainous mother, Clodia a notorious profligate and society woman, and Fulvia a woman of great political influence whose appearance in the public domain Cicero considers to be offensive to society.

These were not the only women to be mentioned in Cicero's speeches however. A simple comparison between Cicero's representation of Caecilia, who protected Sextius Roscius junior from the attacks of Chrysogonus in 80 BC (*S. Am.* 27. 147) and Chelidon, Verres' mistress, who, so Cicero alleged, influenced some of the inappropriate decisions that Verres had made (*Verr.* 2.1.104, 106, 2.1.137-141) affords us insight into Cicero's rhetorical construction of the unconventional practices of some women. This technique can be called

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1. On the masculine nature of Roman rhetoric see Richlin (1997:90-110) and Gleason (1994).

2. On rhetorical invective at Rome see Richlin (1983:96-104).

3. A list of all the women who are depicted negatively in Cicero appears in Richlin (1983:97). Scholars like J P V D Balsdon, Amy Richlin, Susan Pomeroy, Elaine Fantham, Marilyn Skinner, Judith Hallet, and Suzanne Dixon have written extensively on women in the ancient world. Richlin particularly has written on how women suffered in the public domain under those men whose preferred rhetorical device was invective (Richlin 1983:96-103). Plutarch (*Cic.* 27.1) remarks that this very technique undermined Cicero's rhetoric and created enemies for him (cf. 49.4). Katherine Geffcken (1995:1-2) has written specifically on the comic dramaturgy that is enacted against Clodia by Cicero in the *Pro Caelio*. In contrast to the *Pro Caelio* and consonant with the Aristotelian prerequisite for tragedy (Arist. *Poet.* 1425b), it can be suggested that in the *Pro Cluentio* Cicero uses the technique of tragedy.

4. On the relatively emancipated position of women in ancient Rome, see Balsdon (1968:45-62), Gardner (1986:257-266), Bauman (1992 *passim*) and Frascchetti (2001 *passim*).

“emphasised femininity”.<sup>5</sup> In the *Pro Roscio Amerino* Cicero contrasts Caecilia’s compassion with the power and undue harassment of Roscius junior by Chrysogonus and the Roscii brothers (*S. Rosc.* 27, 147). Although Caecilia is presented as an appropriate example of a virtuous woman under patriarchy, Cicero stresses her virtue in contrast to the abuse of power by Chrysogonus. Contrary to his depiction of Caecilia, Cicero portrays Chelidon in the Verrine orations as a woman whose activities are essentially subversive in their flouting of constituted religious and judicial authorities.<sup>6</sup> What is interesting is the different methods that Cicero adopts in constructing the character of Chelidon and Fulvia. For Chelidon he adopts an explicit naming device, while, as we shall see below, for Fulvia he employs the device of anonymity.

Common to these women and what he characterises as part of their femininity, are their notoriety, their “anti-cultural” and “barbarous” activities, and their “unnatural” behaviour, which automatically depict them as abnormal. The foregoing could suggest to a male audience that these were women who shared unconventional traits.<sup>7</sup> Cicero could perhaps want the reader in these speeches to see them as oppressive and villainous, yet clever, influential, and passionate women. In some of these speeches, Cicero subtly compares these so-called “notorious” women with other women, ancient and contemporary, who were considered to be virtuous, such as the Claudias for example in *Cael.* 34. But in each speech, Cicero’s representation of women, whether positive or negative, is consistent with the position that he holds in the particular case, either as the prosecutor or defender, and this representation is set against the expectations of Roman tradition and convention.

Cicero uses common Roman stereotypes in his narratives as a means of constructing the identities of individuals who are involved in his cases. How does he achieve this? How important is the female identity to Cicero’s rhetorical strategies? What use does Cicero make of various stereotypes of feminine identity in attempting to secure the acquittal of one client or to belittle the allegations that have been levelled against another?

The key question in this article is whether Cicero in his speeches treats women differently from men. This question is rather difficult to answer. Cicero can be said virtually to discount morality in his rhetorical performances and this apparently amoral stance gives him room to represent women in any way that will give credence to his arguments. He may have capitalised on the enforced silence of those women who were associated with his cases, however, by attacking them when they were unable to reply.

To view Cicero’s portrayal of some women as “guilty of misconduct” is rather simplistic, since Cicero consistently attacks the morality of whoever represented the opposition regardless of whether they were male or female.<sup>8</sup> Cicero’s interpretation of the involvement of these women in public matters should be understood within its forensic context. Cicero needs to look for appropriate rhetorical *topoi* that he would use to undermine his opponent’s professional competence. Men like Hortensius, Erucius, Verres, Chrysogonus, Piso and

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5. For discussions on emphasised femininity, see Prinsloo (1999:47), Connell (1987:183) and Ige (2002:29-33).

6. For more on Caecilia see Ige (2002:172-173, 205-207); on Chelidon see Ige (2002:278-282) and Bauman (1992:66-67). See also Hillard (1992:37-64).

7. Richlin (1983:97) remarks that Cicero’s main weapon was invective against the women who appeared as witnesses for the opposition.

8. Cicero once defended a woman of Arretium, but unfortunately, the speech is lost and practically nothing has been recovered in respect of that defence. It would have been very interesting to see how he defended this woman against Sulla’s offensive political bills and how he here constructed Sulla’s character.

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Catiline suffered under Cicero's invective. These men were accused of effeminacy and incompetence, both qualities that were opposed to the Roman conception of *virtus*.<sup>9</sup> For women, masculine daring was a grievous offence in the eyes of traditional Roman males.

Cicero uses invective as a means of representing his own version of reality — one that best favours his client or subject.<sup>10</sup> The powerful metaphors he uses against his opponents serve as a tool for bridging the gap between reality and fiction in his oratory. The epithets and similes used to underpin his invective can be construed to be part of the general exchange of communication in Roman culture, and, more specifically, the emotional and imaginative effects that they generate help the audience to understand what sort of character Cicero is attempting to construct of his opponent. According to Richlin, Cicero's characterisation and definition of characters in his speeches reflect the reality of Roman society.<sup>11</sup>

Cicero's paradigm in constructing his oratorical models can be considered to be a-moral in the sense that he speaks in a professional capacity both as an advocate and as a persuasive orator.<sup>12</sup> Since it is part of the practice of the orator to argue *in utramque partem* ("on both sides of the question"), the orator manipulates both sides of his arguments in the forensic space, and that helps him successfully attack his opponent and consequently to gain dominance. In cases where it is apparent that Cicero had been directly or indirectly involved, his rhetoric gains *venustas* ("charm") and *auctoritas* ("authority") through the first-hand information that he offers.<sup>13</sup> For the three women in question, Cicero constructs their social activities against the backdrop of the Roman conception of virtue and its construct of a virtuous woman, mother and wife.

1. *Sassia as mater*

Cicero's portrayal of Sassia in the *Pro Cluentio* of 66 BC is that of a cruel mother, which runs contrary to the Roman cultural conception of a mother.<sup>14</sup> The Romans generally saw the

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9. On *virtus* see Van Omme (1974:109-113), Earl (1967:11-43), Williams (1999:125-135).

10. The relationship that rhetorical constructs bore to reality remains a disturbing phenomenon for Richlin (1983:102). Since Cicero's constructs appear to reflect common social behaviour, Cicero's representations of the feminine character afford an unfavourable impression of female values in the Roman republic.

11. Richlin (1983:96) compares the role of an orator with that of a satirist in her discussion on representation and the use of invective in public performances.

12. In *Pro Cluentio* 10 Cicero asserts that the interest of his client is paramount. On Cicero's paradigm for practice see Ige (2002:80-92).

13. Cicero's *In Verrem* and the *Pro Caelio* are examples of the orator's personal involvement in cases.

14. The *Pro Cluentio* is not a political speech as much as it is a speech that treats relationships in the private sphere and reflects the social life of Rome during the time of Cicero. This case apparently is an appeal against a previous court verdict in favour of Cluentius, Cicero's client (*Cluent.* 19-48). As Cicero claims, Sassia, Cluentius' mother, sponsored Oppianicus junior to accuse Cluentius on a two-count charge, first, that the latter had bribed the court in order to receive a favourable verdict (9), and secondly, that he had attempted to murder Oppianicus junior (166). In an attempt to secure the acquittal of his client, Cicero proves that his client had no motive to bribe the court (62, 82) and that Statius Albius Oppianicus who was responsible for nine murders, had a strong motive to for bribery. In treating the second allegation, Cicero takes advantage of the enmity between Sassia and Cluentius in order to insinuate that she had induced Oppianicus to file the appeal. Sassia perhaps appeared in court as prosecution witness. Hoenigswald (1962:109-123) has written an impressive scholarly article in an attempt to reconstruct the probable true character of the case. This involves a "detective" approach in his attempt to discover what version of the story the prosecution would have presented. See also Kirby (1990) for discussions of some of the key characters in the *Pro Cluentio*.

ideal mother as soft-hearted, compassionate, and the ally of her children.<sup>15</sup> The narrative in *Pro Cluentio* 12-14 largely explains the origin of the animosity between mother and son that culminated in the present legal duel. This enmity originated from the implied disagreement that emanated from the children's attitude to their mother's behaviour. Cicero's contrast between the son and the mother emphasises the personality conflict that Cicero is attempting to portray. Sassia and Cluentius are made to assume antithetical *personae*. According to Cicero, Sassia is a mother who victimises her daughter by snatching away her husband (*Clu.* 10-12), seeks the demise of her son (17-18, 44, 175, 178), is a tragic character (18), is encouraged by the death of Oppianicus' children to marry him (28), is savage (177) and daring (184), is a murderess (185) and unremorseful about her first husband's death (188), seeks the destruction of her children (18, 188, 190, 191), and incites Oppianicus against Cluentius (44, 169). All those who are closely connected to Sassia are constructed as her accomplices in crime: Melinus conceived a passion for his mother-in-law and was insensitive to his wife's plight (16); Oppianicus is a legacy hunter (27, 44), a murderer (27, 28, 30, 35, 125), and is ungovernable and violent (44), and is guilty of bribery (62-65).

Cicero depicts Sassia as an oppressive mother with Cluentius and Cluentia as her victims. Cicero portrays Cluentius as quiet and persevering and as a person who would resort to legal action only when his life was in danger (*Clu.* 11). Cicero rejects the charge of bribery that has been instituted against Cluentius because he maintains that not only is his client not the kind of person that would accept a bribe but also that there was no reason for him to accept it (9-10). Cicero further exonerates Cluentius from the charge of poisoning Scamander (52) and he completely absolves him from the charge relating to the poisoning of Oppianicus (169). While Cicero considers Cluentius to be a son tolerant of a vicious mother (17-18), Cluentia is portrayed as a victimised but respectful daughter who maintained her respect for her mother (11-13).

Cicero's portrayal of Sassia as a deviant mother strengthens his argument in favour of his client, Aulus Cluentius Habitus. Cicero uses words in constructing a negative (or anti-maternal) *persona* for Sassia that mostly has abusive and derogatory connotations (*Clu.* 12, 14-15, 18). Cicero seems to be trying to elicit a hostile reaction from the jury to the *persona* of Sassia that he presents, by referring to her as *mater* ("a mother") rather than *mulier* ("a woman", *Clu.* 12). Stress on her being a "mother" at the same time stresses her unnaturalness as mother. Given the formal situation in which the *Pro Cluentio* was presented, the use of *mulier* in referring to Sassia probably would have been more appropriate, but Cicero presumably wanted to play on contemporary social sentiments in presenting his case. Had he used another word, for example, *femina* ("female person") or *matrona* ("lady of the house"), the image of a mother would still have been suggested, again negatively, as Sassia did not conform to the cultural "symbol" evoked.<sup>16</sup> Cicero explicitly states the terms with which he will refer to Sassia and how he wants the audience to see her:

Nam Sassia, mater huius Habiti—mater enim a me in omni causa, tametsi in hunc hostili odio et crudelitate est—mater, inquam, appellabitur, neque umquam illa ita de suo scelere et

15. Dixon (1988:1).

16. Santoro L'hoir (1992:29-46) discusses the female categories of *mulier* and *femina* but seems not to note that, in the *Pro Cluentio*, *mulier* gains the meaning of "mother" after chapter 12 and not simply "woman," since Cicero specifically sets a boundary to the character of Sassia and the *persona* that will be ascribed to her. After the elaborate definition of Sassia in *Pro Cluentio* 12, it is apparent not only that he no longer represents her merely as a woman, but also that the only representation of her that Cicero is attempting to maintain is that of a "bad mother".

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immanitate audiet, ut naturae nomen amittat: quo enim est ipsum nomen amantius indulgentiusque maternum, hoc illius matris, quae multos iam annos et nunc cum maxime filium interfectum cupit, singulare scelus maiore odio dignum esse ducetis. ea igitur mater Habiti, Melini illius adulescentis, generi sui, contra quam fas erat, amore capta, primo, neque id ipsum diu, quoquo modo poterat, in illa cupiditate se continebat: deinde ita flagrare coepit amentia, sic inflammata ferri libidine, ut eam non pudor, non pudicitia, non pietas, non macula familiae, non hominum fama, non filii dolor, non filiae maeror a cupiditate revocaret (*Pro Cluentio* 12, ed. A. C. Clark 1905).

For Sassia, the mother of this gentleman Habitus— a mother, yes, for I shall call her a mother throughout this case, although she has treated this man with implacable hatred and cruelty, nor will she lose the name nature gave her, whatever stories she hears of her monstrous crime. You will believe this exceptional crime of that mother who for years before (and especially now) has wanted her son dead is worthy of greater detestation inasmuch as people who call themselves mothers are usually more loving and kind. So that mother of Habitus was at first in love with that young man Melinus, her son-in-law, contrary to what is right, nor was she able to contain her lust for long, whatever she did; so much did her madness burn, and she was so far carried away by her fiery desire that modesty, duty, the family name, scandal, her son's unhappiness and her daughter's tears could not recall her from her passion!

From this passage it is apparent that his insistence upon calling Sassia “mother” not only reveals Cicero's main strategy in pleading the case but also locates her in the private sphere and evokes a mother figure that fails to meet the standards that society sets for a mother. This private sphere is implied by the repetition of the word *mater*. Nevertheless, in this situation, the essence of motherhood is lost within a rapacious desire that results in the murder of a previous husband and the marital discomfiting of her daughter. Cicero attempts to rouse the indignation of the jury against Sassia through the character that he constructs for her. During the time of the first century Roman republic the concept of *natura* (“nature”) suggested convention, revered traditions and institutions. Thus *natura* has ascribed to Sassia certain roles that are informed by her social and reproductive responsibilities. Cicero uses the concept of *natura* as a rhetorical tool to appeal to the emotions of the presumably conservative jury.<sup>17</sup> The use of the word *mater* by Cicero seems intended to evoke severe indignation against Sassia by implying that she had no regard for important societal values associated with this word.

If Cicero's account is to be believed, Sassia's involvement in the lives of her children was exploited by Cicero when he attempts to construct a credible narrative around her “mothering”. Sassia is positioned as the adversary of both her children. Sassia had possibly organised the marriage between her nephew, Aulus Aurius Melinus, and her daughter, Cluentia (*Chu.* 12).<sup>18</sup> According to Cicero, the marriage was successful for a while, after which Sassia developed a passion for her son-in-law (12-14). She was deterred for a while from pursuing the relationship, but she finally seduced Melinus. When the daughter, Cluentia, realised what had happened, she eventually sought a divorce. After the divorce had been approved, Sassia married Melinus (12-14). In *Pro Cluentio* 14 Cicero alleges that Sassia viewed this marriage as a victory over her daughter:

Tum vero illa egregia et praeclara mater palam exsultare laetitia, triumphare gaudio coepit, vitrix filiae, non libidinis. (*Pro Cluentio* 14)

17. For discussions on nature and the role of woman as mother see Ortner (1996:21-42), Weininger (1906:214-235), Sydie (1987:148-156).

18. Dixon (1988:215) argues that a mother had the power to arrange the first marriage for her daughter, but subsequent marriages were supposed to be arranged in consultation with the daughter concerned.

Indeed, this excellent and honourable mother then began openly to jump for joy in her triumph, she who had overcome her daughter but not her lust.

The result of Sassia's marriage to Melinus was the estrangement of both children from their mother (16).

Although Sassia's activities and involvement in the events that led to the presentation of the *Pro Cluentio* do not portray her as an exemplary maternal figure, the character portrayed by Cicero is shown to exercise certain powers that women possessed in the first century BC Rome.<sup>19</sup> Sassia represents for the audience an abnormal kind of mother whose activities contradict tradition. So, according to Cicero, Sassia's proclivities as a mother are at odds with societal expectations. The kind of maternal character that Cicero constructs for Sassia contrasts with the character that a good mother should possess. Cicero may have based his rhetoric on the available facts but he was concerned to present these facts in such a way that they represent Sassia as the worst type of mother. By first century BC standards it would have been difficult for a jury to acquit Sassia had they been trying her for the murders and infanticides that Cicero attributed to her. After this "mother" who did not act like a mother, we now proceed to examine a "lady" who acted like a tramp.

## 2. *Clodia, the meretrix*

Cicero's *Pro Caelio* has received most of the attention of scholars who have written on comedy in Cicero in the last half-century.<sup>20</sup> What makes the speech appealing to scholars is the peculiar circumstances that surrounded its delivery.<sup>21</sup> Cicero's performance entailed dexterous comic enactment to gain the attention of the audience and to sustain their interest in view of other activities that may have been taking place in the theatres on that day.<sup>22</sup> Cicero first finds a means of belittling the gravity of the offences of which Caelius stands accused, then directs the attention of the audience from his client to some other characters, particularly to Clodia. Cicero attempts to maintain the interest of the audience in his speech with the use of his wit.<sup>23</sup>

19. For more on the powers that the mother could exercise in regard to a daughter's marriage, see Dixon (1988:215) and Philips (1978:79).

20. For scholarly discussions on Cicero's portrayal of Clodia see Boissier (1946:166-176), Baldson (1968:54-55), Stroh (1975:243-295), Wiseman (1985:15-53) May (1988:110-115), Bauman (1992:69-73), Geffcken (1995 *passim*).

21. Marcus Rufus Caelius, one of Cicero's proteges was arraigned in court on a five count charge. The charges relate to sedition in Naples, violent attack on an Alexandrian diplomat, pillaging of the property of Palla, involvement in the murder of Dio and lastly an attempt to poison Clodia. Considering the seriousness of the case, the court had to meet on a festive day, and Cicero asserts that the gravity with which the litigation was being undertaken could lead one to mistake it for a trial on charges of high treason (cf. *Cael.* 1). See Austin (1960:151- 157) for the details of the speech.

22. For further discussion on the social context of the speech, see Geffcken (1995:3).

23. Cicero's personal grudges can be adduced as a reason for treating Clodia in a spiteful manner in the *Pro Caelio*. From Cicero's letters it is apparent that Clodia's brother, Clodius Pulcher, had been victimising Cicero for quite a while, and he had promulgated a decree that resulted in Cicero's flight into exile (cf. *Att.* 1.16.4, 2.20.2, 2.21.6). Although Cicero states that his attacks on Clodia are not based upon a personal grudge, his use of *paraleipsis*, a rhetorical device used by the orator to say what he professes not to be saying, suggests otherwise (*Cael.* 50). Earlier in the speech Cicero claims that he does not want the world to think that he is fighting with a woman (32); however, his non-vindictive stance is difficult to accept as being genuine. Although one may concede that Cicero's personal grudges helped him to locate himself within the context of the entire case, the representation of Clodia as a *meretrix* ("courtesan") would also

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Here again, Cicero's primary mission as an advocate is to obtain absolution for his client at the expense of his opposition. From the beginning of the *Pro Caelio* Cicero implies that a woman has sponsored the prosecution (*Cael.* 1). The question is: what kind of woman? The answer is, one he calls *meretrix* ("whore").<sup>24</sup> The kind of woman he says is involved in the case undermines the gravity of the allegations brought against his client. Moreover, it throws the credibility of the male prosecutors into jeopardy. Cicero, assuming the *persona* of a respected senior advocate, attempts to intimidate Attratinus, the young prosecutor, by saying that he excuses his childish obligation to a woman (*Cael.* 1). An earlier metaphor, referring to the prosecution as the "force of a whore" (*opibus meretricis*, 1) subordinates the characters of the (male) prosecution team to that of a woman that Cicero would then rhetorically construct to be "disreputable". Cicero's almost consistent construct of the female body as essentially bad appears in *Pro Caelio* 18 when he alludes to the character of Medea. By this means, Cicero introduces a tragic stage with a strong comic feel by quoting the same line of Ennius that had been used by Crassus, one of the prosecutors. Hence introduction of the character of *era errans* ("a deluded mistress", 18) resituates the thrust of the discourse, moving it from a logical argumentation in a judicial defence to the construction of a female character based on *pathos*. The character of *era errans* becomes clearer when Cicero gives her name:

Medea, animo aegra, amore saevo saucia . . . (*Pro Caelio* 18)

Medea, sick in her spirit, wounded by savage love . . .

The Medea *persona* becomes a semantic representation for the Roman woman whom Cicero wishes to portray as similar to the Greek tragic character. This Medea, then, is relocated from Greece to the Palatine in Rome.<sup>25</sup> The Medea *persona* suggests a negative connotation for the character Cicero is about to construct. The audience presumably would have understood his use of a comic portrayal of the Greek tragic character and perhaps would have become curious as to how Cicero would manipulate the character he was about to delineate (*Cael.* 17-18).<sup>26</sup> This *persona* anticipates the impetuosity that Cicero will later associate with Clodia's character.<sup>27</sup> Cicero then argues that the moral stature of his client towers above that of the common herd and thereby he adds a moral dimension to the case (29-30), thereby particularly highlighting the immorality of Clodia.

Subsequently Cicero introduces the two accusations with which he will deal: the first charge concerns Caelius's alleged murder of Dio, an Alexandrian diplomat; the second deals with Caelius' alleged attempt to poison Clodia. Since Clodia is associated with both allegations, it is possible for Cicero to direct all his rhetorical aggression against her (*Cael.*

have helped him to entertain the audience. While Quintilian suggests that Cicero capitalised on the ignorance of his audience (*Inst.* 9.139), presumably Cicero's use of sexual imagery in the *Pro Caelio* was designed to maintain the interest of the male-dominated audience.

24. For a discussion of *meretrix* see Geffcken (1995:34, 37); also Wiseman (1985:15-53).

25. In *Pro Cluentio* 39 Cicero cites Terence, *Adelphoe* (120-121), where a "foreign woman" is mentioned. Medea is strange to Greece and so is her impetuosity. Solomon's construct of the "foreign woman" (Proverbs 7) helps modern readers to understand what the general perception of a strange woman was in antiquity. For a discussion of Medea and the changes in her representation throughout history, see Clauss and Johnston (1997 *passim*).

26. The reader of the *Pro Caelio* is left to imagine the degree of dramatisation that would have accompanied the quotations in Cicero's comic introduction of Medea into his speech. For a discussion on how Cicero may have dramatised the passages in the *Pro Caelio*, see Austin (1956:141-143).

27. On the character of Medea, see Clauss and Johnston (1997: *passim*).

30).<sup>28</sup> Cicero capitalises on the amorous relationship that formerly existed between Caelius and Clodia and he insinuates that Clodia is still sexually harassing Caelius. Cicero indicates that his client is not guilty of the charges levelled against him but focuses on Clodia who gave the gold in question to Caelius. In *Pro Caelio* 32, Cicero, with almost leering innuendo, stresses the kind of woman he is addressing:

Neque enim muliebris umquam inimicitias mihi gerendas putavi, praesertim cum ea quam omnes semper amicam omnium potius quam cuiusquam inimicam putaverunt. (*Pro Caelio* 32)

I never thought that I would get involved in a quarrel with a woman, much less with a woman whom everybody has always regarded as a friend of all and nobody's enemy.

Gardner suggests that the word *amicam* means "girl-friend" or "mistress", but perhaps a better term would be "sugar-mummy" given the nature of the relationship between Clodia and Caelius.<sup>29</sup> For Cicero the Clodia character is a slippery paradox (*mulier nobilis sed nota*, "a noble woman, but notorious", *Cael.* 31). Cicero considers it wrong to refer to a woman as *matrona* who betrays the commonly held cultural perception of the title (32). He manipulates his portrayal of the character of Clodia in such a way as to censure her in terms of the accepted morality of a Roman *matrona* (32); furthermore, he combines the image of a *meretrix* and the *persona* of Medea in the character of Clodia. To further denigrate Clodia, Cicero insinuates that she has committed incest with her brother (32). Progressively Cicero describes a female character that is in all ways un-Roman and by any standard not noble.

Cicero further assumes the *persona* of a comic actor, to dramatise his construction of Clodia and to animate his performance. He chooses the *familia* ("family", *Cael.* 33) as his setting. The orator calls up one of her famous ancestors, depicting him as a grim and grumpy old man, who severely rebukes Clodia (33-34). The purpose is to convince the audience that Clodia's family has a tradition of sound morality and discipline but that Clodia herself has deviated from her family's values. So, to castigate Clodia further for her indecent relationship with Caelius, Cicero impersonates Appius Claudius (consul 307-296 BC), one of Clodia's ancestors. He portrays his character as questioning his descendant's reasons for associating with a male person younger in age than herself and for not regarding the enduring reputation of the family for high moral standing and political achievements. In addition, her deceased husband's reputation should have deterred her from having a physical relationship with Caelius. Moreover, she could have followed in the footsteps of two valiant women in her family: Quinta Claudia and the Vestal Claudia, who were respectively known for their feminine virtues and almost masculine courage (Liv. 29. 14, Ov. *Fast.* 4. 305, Cic. *Har. Resp.* 13. 27). While still impersonating Appius Claudius, Cicero suggests that Clodia has been under the harmful influence of her brother Clodius (*Cael.* 33-34).

Before proceeding to call up a travesty of her brother to rebuke her in the same fashion, Cicero addresses her directly in a violent and acrid tone:

Tu vero, mulier (iam enim ipse tecum nulla persona introducta loquor) . . . (*Pro Caelio* 35).

As for you, woman (for now, I am addressing you personally, without the use of a fictitious character) . . .

Cicero addresses Clodia in a manner that does not seem to expect a response, but he demands, if she should still want to respond, a full explanation for such an extraordinary

28. cf. n 27.

29. Gardner (1965:445).

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intimacy between herself and the young man. Thereafter the *persona* of Clodius Pulcher is made to rebuke Clodia in a manner that is suggestive of "sexual harassment" (*Cael.* 36).

In order to appear to be impartial in rebuking Clodia, Cicero then calls forth various other characters, who in their turn rebuke Caelius but these are not chosen from Caelius' ancestry.<sup>30</sup> Cicero absolves Caelius Rufus by arguing that the moral fault (philandering) that the prosecutor has imputed to Caelius is common to most men of his age — the "boys will be boys"-argument *par excellence* (*Cael.* 38). Cicero offers a critique of the ideas of various philosophical schools on pleasure, then describes Clodia's actions as subversive and seductive, leaving anybody who makes friends with her unable to escape from her machinations (39). Cicero tries to convince the audience that Clodia's sweetness is a snare to entrap both young and old (41). It was unavoidable that Caelius should have slipped into the seductive traps that Clodia set for him. In his treatment of the morality of both Caelius and Clodius, Cicero pleads with Romans to be more indulgent towards youthful lusts: *vincat aliquando cupiditas voluptasque rationem* ("let desire and pleasure sometimes prevail over reason", 42) thereby implying that Caelius' involvement with Clodia is excusable, while Clodia should be reprimanded for having an affair with a young man (42). Cicero then makes a general reference to some eminent men of old and of Cicero's days who have committed similar moral mistakes but were absolved by their other (masculine) virtues (43). In addition, Cicero uses his own credibility to sketch a favourable profile of Caelius as his former student (44-47).

In *Pro Caelio* 49 Cicero intimidates Lucius Herrenius, one of the prosecutors, who believes that Caelius should suffer for his alleged immorality. Since the "lady", around whom the whole case revolves, is said to be a "whore", Cicero pleads that Caelius should be excused for wanting to gratify his sexual desires (*Cael.* 48-50). Cicero again addresses Clodia directly and puts numerous (rhetorical) questions to her, to which he knows very well that she cannot possibly answer. Cicero questions the rationale behind Caelius' alleged intention to kill Clodia and argues that the opposition has fabricated the allegation against him (54-57). Cicero then relates his own version of the origin of the alleged poisoning incident (58-60) and continues to extemporise about the possible reason for plan behind such an alleged poisoning. All of it works to point to Clodia as not only profligate, but as an accomplished liar, who has fabricated all the charges against his client. She is drawn as different in every way from her illustrious ancestors.

The success of this speech lies in the fact that Cicero is able to make use of recent events, which are supposedly known to the audience and the gravity of which therefore can be appreciated. Cicero works on the imagination and common knowledge of the audience. Clodia is from a noble family and everybody present in the audience would have been aware of her family history. By this means he has made a well-known woman into a notorious one. Next we move from a "lady" who did not act like one to a *woman* who tried to be a "man" — a "grey mare who was the better horse".

### 3. *Fulvia, a woman in politics*

I shall limit my discussion of Fulvia to Cicero's portrayal of her in the *Philippics*. The *Philippics* were a set of Cicero's delivered (an undelivered but published) political speeches that was delivered in response to Mark Antony's attacks against the orator. Among other

30. For further discussion on the representation of these characters, see Vasaly (1984:174-176).

reasons, Cicero attempts to prove to the senate that Mark Antony had become morally bankrupt and professionally incompetent in his administration and the management of state affairs. One of the factors to which Cicero can attribute to Antony's waning sturdiness of character is the overpowering influence of his wife, Fulvia.<sup>31</sup> Yet Cicero's use of the Fulvia character in the *Philippics* is unique because he does not once mention her name.

Fulvia's situation is slightly different from those of Clodia and Sasia. Sasia is represented as a woman who has full control in the domestic domain, while Clodia is depicted as having influence in the public sphere but not in such a way as to affect state policies.<sup>32</sup> Cicero's portrayal of Fulvia is similar to that of Chelidon, who is said to have directly influenced those politicians who were her husbands or lovers. Fulvia is said to have had a strong political character, that is, that she acted in the way normally expected of men. She was married in turn to Clodius, Curio and Antony (*Phil.* 2.11). What makes Fulvia peculiar in Cicero's portrayal of her is that she is mostly shown to have been active in historical accounts in those arenas normally exclusively meant for men. There is consensus among ancient (male) historians about the "masculine" character to be ascribed to Fulvia. According to Plutarch, Fulvia possessed what could be termed a hegemonic attitude, since her desire was not only to participate in the events of the public sphere, but also to subordinate men who were supposed to be public leaders (*Ant.* 10.3) and who had fuelled violence in public (*Vell. Pat.* 2.74). The idea of a woman controlling a typical man in the public domain would have contradicted the Roman concept of the essence of being a *vir*, that is, his *virtus*. Plutarch asserts that Fulvia had already "domesticated and tamed" Antony by the time he met Cleopatra and that that made it easy for Cleopatra to control Antony (*Ant.* 10.3). Sallust suggests that Fulvia inherited her "femino-masculinity" from her mother Sempronia, whom he describes as having had masculine daring (*audax virilis*, *Sall. Cat.* 25.1).<sup>33</sup>

Fulvia certainly was not the only woman who had great influence on public men. We saw above that Chelidon was reported by Cicero to have had a negative influence on Verres, especially in his decision-making processes. In the *Philippics*, Cicero manipulates stories of Fulvia's public appearances to his advantage. The following could be Cicero's reasons for involving Fulvia's name: first, to imply that Antony's character has changed for the worse, secondly, that Antony has no regard for the Roman army and the republic, and that Antony lacked the moderation that served as the hallmark of the Roman *vir* (cf. *Lucil.* 1326-1338).

Fulvia's presence is used in the *Philippics* as a rhetorical tool. Cicero does not cast Fulvia as a minor character, but makes her appear in every scene in which he questions the morality of Antony's actions in implementing policies that concern the interests of the state. Cicero thus exploits the cultural bias of Romans against the presence of women in the public sphere and their influence upon political figures. In the process of attempting politically to emasculate Antony, Cicero constructs a bloodthirsty Fulvia. In *Philippics* 1.33 we see Fulvia represented as having a corrupting influence upon Antony:

num te, cum haec pro salute rei publicae tanta gessisses, fortunae tuae, num amplitudinis, num claritatis, num gloriae paenitebat? unde igitur subito tanta ista mutatio? non possum adduci ut suspicer te pecunia captum. licet quod cuique libet loquatur, credere non est necesse. nihil enim

31. For further details on the *Philippics* see, Bailey 1971:227-247, Smith 1966:236-258, Lacey 1978:150-159, May 1988:148-161, Habicht 1990:83-86.

32. Discussion of Fulvia as a political woman occurs in Bauman (1992:83-89).

33. For scholarly discussion of Sempronia's involvement in politics see Pomeroy (1975:185).

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unquam in te sordidum, nihil humile cognovi. quamquam solent domestici depravare non numquam; sed novi firmitatem tuam. atque utinam ut culpam, sic etiam suspicionem vitare potuisses! (*Philippicae* 1.33)

After these magnificent contributions to the welfare of the state, were you [Antony] not satisfied with your success? Were you not great enough, famous enough, glorious enough? If you were, why this sudden reversal? I cannot bring myself to suspect that you were corrupted by money. People may say what they please; one does not have to believe them. I have never seen anything mean or sordid in your character. True men are sometimes corrupted by those [e.g. Fulvia] close to them. But I know your sturdy character. It is a pity that you could not avoid the suspicion as you avoided the guilt.

Cicero's subtle reference to Fulvia in this passage gives the impression that the audience would have known her already, but Cicero constructs her as being incompatible with the true personality of Antony. Cicero in this passage refers to Antony as a man of integrity, but immediately discredits him by alluding to his relationship with Fulvia and suggests that he has been under Fulvia's corrupting influence: *quamquam solent domestici depravare non unquam . . .* "although men are sometimes corrupted by those who are closest to them . . ." (*Phil.* 1.33). Cicero acknowledges the strong-mindedness and *firmitas* ("steadfastness") for which Antony was formerly known. Nevertheless, it does not seem that Antony could sustain his moral rectitude when he came under the power of Fulvia. Cicero alleges that Antony has misappropriated public funds and that this crime is traceable to the influence that Fulvia has had upon him (*Phil.* 5.11).

The portrayal of Fulvia in the *Philippics* is rather disturbing and somewhat sinister. Cicero claims that she was frequently present at death scenes, especially where Roman soldiers were involved (*Phil.* 2.11, 2.113, 3.4, 5.22, 13.18). It would have been generally inappropriate for a Roman woman to be present at any event that was generally associated with military men. Cicero records Fulvia's presence at a massacre scene at Brundisium when the blood of Roman soldiers is said to have splattered on her face (3.4). Cicero is perhaps insinuating that her presence either contributes to the rash decisions made by Antony or compromises the seriousness of the event. Cicero's strategy is to suggest that Antony has been influenced by a woman and he implies that the strength of Rome is being diminished from within by the involvement of a woman in the public sphere. There are other examples in the *Philippics* in which Fulvia's influence is portrayed as negative, but for the sake of comparative brevity, we shall stop here in order to draw together the threads of discussion and come to some general conclusions.

#### 4. Conclusion

From these studies I have attempted to demonstrate that Cicero's constructions of Sassia, Clodia and Fulvia were rhetorically determined and that Cicero exploited as a rhetorical tool what the audience would have considered to be the debasement of femininity by these women. Cicero's representation of the female identity is principally informed by the role that the woman in question is said to have played in the events that led up to a particular speech. The extent to which Cicero persuades his audience is dependent upon the degree of speaker-audience collaboration that he is able to achieve. The generally held negative Roman perception of the presence of women in the public domain also helped Cicero to present a negative picture of those feminine characters that he mentioned in his orations. In each case the woman is drawn as the opposite of the expected, Sassia is an unnatural mother, Clodia

does not act like a lady, Fulvia intrudes in the political and military domain. These kinds of rhetorical construction of the feminine identity would be impossible in modern law-courts. Cicero's negativity about women needed a Roman audience with fixed ideas about the "proper place" for women, and that place was not the public domain or the presence of an audience with patriarchal notions of gender relations.

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