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Cicero, *Cael.* 18 and the Educated Elite

At *Cael.* 18 Cicero mentions that Crassus, speaking earlier, used the words *utinam ne in nemore Pelio* to refer to the beginning Caelius' woes with the arrival of Ptolemy Auletes in Italy. Crassus was quoting the opening words of Ennius' *Medea*, though Cicero does not mention this, clearly expecting his audience to be familiar with the passage. It is hardly surprising to find Cicero quoting Ennius, but it is perhaps surprising to find Crassus doing so, and even more surprising that Cicero expected the jury to be so familiar with the whole quote that they would recognize its subject and its drift from its first five words. Seeing how Cicero, Crassus, and their audience became so familiar with this passage from the *Medea* opens up an interesting window on the shared educational heritage of first-century elite Romans.

The opening of Ennius' *Medea* was a popular passage with Roman writers; the rest of the play was not. Cicero quotes from the play's opening six other times in various works, and it also quoted by the *rhetorica ad Herrenium* (*RH*), Varro and Quintilian, while Jocelyn identifies another half dozen more or less convincing echoes of the passage in other first-century bc and ad authors. It is clear that Cicero was familiar with the whole play and not just its opening; apart from Cicero, however, only Varro and the later grammarians quote anything other than the play's opening words, and Jocelyn identifies only two other echoes.

Cicero never quotes the full nine-verse passage, elsewhere alluding to it only by its opening words, but the *RH* does, as an illustration of a particular rhetorical flaw, that of tracing a chain of causality further back than is necessary. Quintilian quotes the opening words (the same used by Crassus) to illustrate the same flaw, as does Julius Victor in his *ars rhetorica*.

Most interesting is Cicero's partial citation of our passage in his *de inventione*. A comparison of other citations in the *RH* and the *inv.* shows that both used many of the same passages as illustrations of good and bad rhetorical practice. Taken in isolation this might suggest that one was dependent upon the other, but the familiarity with the *Medea*'s opening shared by Cicero, the *RH*, Crassus, and especially Caelius' jury suggest that they all drew their knowledge of the play's opening from a common source. That source was most likely a *Latin* text on rhetoric along the lines of the *RH* and the *inv.*, which served widely as a teachers' manual or school book for the education of the Romans of Cicero's generation who could afford this education.

Crassus and Cicero were not speaking to a jury of *literati* in the Caelius case, but to a broad cross-section of their own class. Both expected the jurors to recognize in the words *utinam ... Pelio*, with no further prompting, a shorthand way of referring to a long causal chain resulting in an innocent victim's eventual misfortune. All this argues that, in their youthful study of rhetoric, Crassus, Cicero and the jury had studied this passage so attentively that Crassus and Cicero knew this so that they could still recall it in later life.

The passage from the *pro Caelio* reflects an education based on the intensive study of a relatively small number of common texts. It also shows us how remembered fragments of a shared education could become part of the common coin of conversation for Rome's elite.