

## Teaching Transgressive Roman Women: The *Persona* of Fulvia in Cicero's *Philippics*



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### Introduction

Using Cicero's portrayal of Fulvia in the *Second Philippic* as *exemplum*, our presentation will examine how elite Roman women who undertook public action beyond accepted gender boundaries are negatively portrayed in traditional Latin texts, women such as Tullia Minor (wife of Tarquin), Julia Augusti, Vistilia, Amesia, Afrania, Messalina. As with the portrayal of Clodia Metelli in *Pro Caelio*, Cicero creates a monstrous *persona* of Fulvia in place of the historical woman that Cicero found so threatening.

We intend to show how such portrayals can be interrogated to reveal the identity of the women beneath the literary constructs, through the contemporary theory of intersectionality—the idea that distinctive personal identity is a matter of lived experience arising out of the intersections of categories like class and gender. We will discuss the ways that Roman writers manufacture these *personae* with the help of well-worn genre conventions. Within the genre of invective oratory such latitude in the service of character assassination was not only permissible but expected, a critical strategy that an orator would indulge in to win his case. In this way Cicero is able to manipulate the social and political identities of two powerful, and well-connected aristocratic woman.

A brief review of the life of Fulvia will show how literary genres—particularly oratory, comedy, and elegy—intersect with historical experience to produce false identities and counter-narratives. Referring to other examples found on the pages of the website [Online Companion to the Worlds of Roman Women](#) we will suggest how a curricular unit on the topic of the transgressive Roman woman might be constructed.