

# **"Teaching Transgressive Roman Women: Fulvia in Cicero's *Philippics*"**

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## **I Intersectionality and its Applicability to Latin Literature**

“Intersectionality” is the theory that distinctive personal identity is a matter of experience arising out of the intersections of categories like class, gender, age, wealth, and multiple other factors. The term was coined in 1989 by the Harvard-trained legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who analyzed the way black women’s concerns could not be adequately addressed in the criminal justice system because their concerns as “women” and as “Black” occurred at a kind of “crossroads” of identity that constituted a separate class. The “crossroads” metaphor is helpful. As Kathy Davis (p. 75) writes, “The image of a crossroads . . . seems applicable to nearly any context, providing a useful way for visualizing how differences intersect within a particular person’s identity or in a specific social practice or location.” These differences are multiple. Particularly helpful to literary analysis is her theory of “representational intersectionality” which holds that images of women in popular culture “are produced through a confluence of prevalent narratives of race, gender” and other factors, but paradoxically stimulate critiques of sexist representation that marginalize women. Feminist critics of Latin literature and others have long since understood that there are “prevalent narratives” of gender and class embedded in our sources that produce false images of women, yet such awareness is relatively recent. It scarcely needs repeating that Latin literature was written by and for elite men with little interest in accurately recording women’s experience; but similarly for generations it was read by those with no interest in probing the surface to determine the historical accuracy of female experience with its known differences of identity. Instead readers digested a tiny menu of familiar female stereotypes; intersectional theory can be a useful tool to identify the piling-on or intersection of

these stereotypes in Cicero, what they obscure, and the importance of a critique that does not perpetuate sexist readings. The *Second Philippic* is a useful case study.

## II Application of Theory: Fulvia in the *Second Philippic*

Fulvia is mentioned in *Philippics* 3, 5, 6, and 13 of 44-43 B.C., but she plays a crucial thematic role in five passages in the famous *Second Philippic* (see [webpage](#) in [Companion](#))

The passages are scattered throughout the speech, which has a straightforward structure, opening with a brief exordium, closing with a short peroration and devoted in the main to sustained and detailed invective arguments in two parts.

I. Exordium (1-2)

II. Tractatio (3-114)

1. Refutatio (3-43): accusations regarding Cicero's public career: major charges:

**Fulvia ss. 11**

2. Confirmatio (44-114): Antony's career and private life: **Fulvia ss.77, 48, 95, 113**

III. Peroratio (115-119)

Fulvia appears as a kind of latent player in sections 11, 48, 77, 95, and 113, carrying us from early in the *refutatio* to the end of the *confirmatio*.

### **Passage 1: 2.11**

Quis autem, meum consulatum praeter te Publiumque Clodium qui vituperaret, inventus est? cuius quidem tibi fatum sicut C. Curioni manet, quoniam id domi tuae est, quod fuit illorum utrique fatale.

Translation (Perseus C.D. Yonge 1903): "But who was ever found before, except Publius Clodius, to find fault with my consulship? And his fate indeed awaits you, as it also awaited Caius Curio; since that is now in your house which was fatal to each of them."

The first reference to Fulvia is typically indirect. Addressing Antony, Cicero warns him that his current wife has proven deadly for her husbands, who had both met violent ends. Fulvia

in fact was responsible for neither death: Clodius was murdered by Milo in 52 BCE, and Curio, a Caesarian, died in 49 BCE leading an invasion of Africa during the Civil War. Fulvia is not named; we don't even know Cicero speaks of a woman; instead she is signified with the neuter pronouns *id . . . quod* and figured as *fatum*. Like the *domina* of elegy and the *matrona* of comedy she is located within the home and is discussed without speaking for herself.<sup>1</sup> As Ann has made clear, Fulvia never observed such limitations.

### **Passage 2: 2.48**

Intimus erat in tribunatu Clodio, qui sua erga me beneficia commemorat; eius omnium incendiolorum fax, cuius etiam domi iam tum quiddam molitus est. Quid dicam, ipse optime intellegit.

Translation: "He was very intimate with Clodius at the time of his tribuneship; he, who now enumerates the kindnesses which he did me. He was the firebrand to handle all conflagrations; and even in his house he attempted something. He himself well knows what I allude to."

Speaking of Antony in the third person, Cicero implies that Fulvia and Antony were lovers while she was still married to Clodius, an accusation which could have been believed because the two men had been close friends since their youth and Antony had a reputation as a womanizer. Fulvia continues to be objectified as an unknown *quiddam* lying in wait in the home, the metaphorical match to her husband's *fax incendiolorum*, classic elegiac imagery for destructive love.

### **Passage 3: 2.77**

At videte levitatem hominis. Cum hora diei decima fere ad Saxa rubra venisset, delituit in quadam cauponula atque ibi se occultans perpotavit ad vesperam; inde cisio celeriter ad urbem advectus domum venit capite obvoluto. Ianitor: 'Quis tu?' 'A Marco tabellarius.' 'Confestim ad eam, cuius causa venerat, [deducitur] eique epistulam tradidit. Quam cum illa legeret flens (erat enim scripta amatorie; caput autem litterarum sibi cum illa mima posthac nihil futurum; omnem

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<sup>1</sup> VRoma: "[I]hree of Plautus' plays have no speaking female parts at all: the *Captivi*, *Pseudolus*, and *Trinummus*; likewise in Plautus 7 women are discussed but never appear."

se amorem abiecissem illum atque in hanc transfudissem), cum mulier fleret uberius, homo misericors ferre non potuit, caput aperuit, in collum invasit. O hominem nequam! Quid enim aliud dicam? magis proprie nihil possum dicere. Ergo, ut te catamitum, nec opinato cum te ostendisses, praeter spem mulier adspiceret, idcirco urbem terrore nocturno, Italiam multorum dierum metu perturbasti?

Translation: "But mark now the trifling character of the fellow. When about the tenth hour of the day he had arrived at Red Rocks, he skulked into a little petty wine-shop, and, hidden there, kept on drinking till evening. And from thence getting into a gig and being driven rapidly to the city, he came to his own house with his head veiled. "Who are you?" says the porter. "An express from Marcus." He is at once taken to the woman for whose sake he had come; and he delivered the letter to her. And when she had read it with tears (for it was written in a very amorous style, but the main subject of the letter was that he would have nothing to do with that actress for the future; that he had discarded all his love for her, and transferred it to his correspondent), when she, I say, wept plentifully, this soft-hearted man could bear it no longer; he uncovered his head and threw himself on her neck. Oh the worthless man (for what else can I call him? there is no more suitable expression for me to use)! was it for this that you disturbed the city by nocturnal alarms, and Italy with fears of many days' duration, in order that you might show yourself unexpectedly, and that a woman might see you before she hoped to do so?"

In 45 BC, hearing a rumor that Caesar was dead, Antony, as second in command, rushed back to Rome, stopping on his way to see his wife. Cicero describes their meeting as a kind of farce, portraying Antony simultaneously as sexually aggressive (*in collum invasit*) and subservient to his wife (*catamitum*), hinting that Fulvia was the dominant partner in the marriage. Several genres collide in this tableau. The time of night, the location in the home, the unexpected arrival of the disguised lover fooling the doorkeeper to gain an erotic encounter with the mistress within recall the conventions of Roman elegy, with Antony playing the role of the *exclusus amator* and Fulvia the controlling *domina*. Dialogue, costuming, and the recognition scene turns the intimacy of an erotic elegiac into the travesty of comedy and farce. The matron of comedy, whose status is usually bolstered by the healthy dowry she brought to the marriage is invoked as well: what made Fulvia so attractive to three men on the brink of brilliant careers was her ability to pay for them. Nonetheless emotion, not control, rules this *matrona*: marked only by the generic pronouns

*eam, illam, and hanc* and twice as *mulier*, the standard term for a wife in Roman comedy, Fulvia weeps but does not speak. Yet she is simultaneously figured as a predatory Zeus to whom Antony plays the subservient Ganymede. Finally, Antony's mistress, the unnamed Volumnia, appears as a *mima*. Elegiac, comic, mimic, and epic narratives intersect.

**Passage 4: 2.95**

Syngrapha sestertii centiens per legatos, viros bonos, sed timidos et imperitos, sine nostra, sine reliquorum hospitem regis sententia facta in gynaeccio est, quo in loco plurimae res venierunt et veneunt.

Translation: "A bond for ten millions of sesterces was entered into in the women's apartment (where many things have been sold, and are still being sold), by his ambassadors, well-meaning men, but timid and inexperienced in business, without my advice or that of the rest of the hereditary friends of the monarch."

Here Cicero substantiates his claim that the business of the Republic is carried out illegally in Antony's home. In April, 44 BCE, a decree, forged in Caesar's hand, was sold to the agents of King Deiotarus of Galatia, returning to him the territory Caesar had taken in 47 BCE. Cicero reduces Fulvia's role to the sale of sexual favors by a Greek prostitute in her private quarters (*gynaecio*), although in a letter to Atticus in April of 44 B.C. (*Att.*14.12.1) he confirmed that she herself had made the deal.

**Passage 5: 2.113**

Eripiet et extorquebit tibi ista populus Romanus, utinam salvis nobis! Sed quoquo modo nobiscum egeris, dum istis consiliis uteris, non potes, mihi crede, esse diuturnus. Etenim ista tua minime avara coniunx, quam ego sine contumelia describo, nimium diu debet populo Romano tertiam pensionem.

Translation: "The Roman people will take them from you, will wrest them from our hands. I wish that they may do so while we are still safe. But however you treat us, as long as you adopt those counsels it is impossible for you, believe me, to last long. In truth, that wife of yours, who is so far removed from covetousness, and whom I mention without intending any slight to her, has been too long owing<sup>1</sup> her third payment to the state."

Addressing Antony just before the peroration, Cicero argues that better men stand ready to lead the Republic, darkly hinting that Antony's wife may owe Rome the payment of a third dead husband. As in passage 2.11 Fulvia is a man-killer, entering the firmament of ambitious Roman wives accused of poisoning their husbands.

### III Conclusion

#### Fulvia's Intersectional Identity

- Wealthy plebeian noblewoman
- Wife of three influential men on the cusp of prominent careers
- Pro-active mother, daughter, and family member
- Supporter of Caesar during Rome's constitutional crisis
- Ruthless player in the civil wars after Caesar's death
- Persuasive leader of men, both politicians and soldiers
- Prophet of Rome's political future

Referred to only a handful of times, Fulvia's role in the speech is to reinforce Antony's deficiencies in character, which she shares: she is greedy, sexually immoderate, a proven lethal agent deeply invested in *domus*-based politics--characteristics equally enacted by male politicians of the same period. Cicero's representation comprises an intersection of stereotypes: she is at once the *domina*, *matrona*, *mulier*, *meretrix*, and *coniunx* of elegy, comedy, and invective oratory wielding sexualized power at home. Stereotypes map poorly onto the contours of her life. The historical Fulvia's identity is the sum of multiple factors, several of which are unique to her; the literary Fulvia is also the sum of many parts, NONE of which is unique to her. Representational intersectionality explains the strategy behind the rhetorical construct "Fulvia": to leave the complex, powerful historical Fulvia as nothing but roadkill in the crossroads of identity.

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