

## Sulpicia: Elegiac Mistress and Lover

As the only extant female elegist in Latin literature, and one of the few from ancient Rome, the poetry of Sulpicia has been misunderstood and criticized both for being ridiculously complicated and simply ridiculous. Being female posed an unusual dilemma: given societal mores concerning marriage and the idea of the *matrona*, how would a Roman woman write about an extramarital affair according to the conventions of the genre as defined by men? Some have dismissed her writing as that of a silly girl, with a terrible mastery of language. This opinion has become more moderate recently in light of modern scholarship. In this light, others have argued that she was a fine Latinist, and that her only crime was “an excess of intellectual control,” as phrased by Lowe.

Of particular interest is Sulpicia’s use of elegiac constructs and themes in order to portray herself as both the mistress and the lover in her poetry. Sulpicia uniquely blends a male and female perspective, identifying herself at one time as lover and another as mistress, even within the same poem. Additionally, she makes reference to the work of other elegiac poets, sometimes seriously and sometimes playfully. This paper will relate examples of Sulpicia’s poetry to the work of other elegiac poets in order to reveal exactly how she blurs gender roles and asserts her place as a *puella docta*, in both a literal and elegiac sense.