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Taking the poet's part: Sulpicia's elegy

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Taking the Poet's Part: Sulpicia's Elegy

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Greek and Roman Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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Introduction

A woman poet does not fit easily into Roman love elegy. As Wyke (1994, 110) notes, the male elegist engages in "crucial play with Roman categories of gender," presenting himself as, for example, the emasculated slave of his domineering love interest. Subversive though this convention may prove for the male elegist's self-presentation, elegy's roles for women are decidedly rigid. Even when figured as a *domina*, the elegiac *puella* remains always the erotic object of elegy, a "work of art" created by the poet (Sharrock 1991, 36). When elegiac women are figured as artistic objects, a woman taking the role of artistic subject is necessarily marked. Sulpicia, in her rendition of elegy, embraces her own subversive potential within the genre, repeatedly identifying herself as a *puella* (3.14.3, 15.1, 17.1) even as she clearly occupies the role of poet as well.[1]

Critical analyses often strive to resolve the ambiguities of Sulpicia's position in her genre. Many have treated Sulpicia's poetry as if a *puella* has walked off the page of elegy to write poetry which parrots all the dynamics of that genre. To others, Sulpicia is "just another Roman poet" producing elegy which is thematically indistinguishable from the canon (Merriam 2006, 15). Either treatment confines Sulpicia to a single role—either *puella* or poet—without considering her often contradictory combination of the two. Sulpicia, upon taking the role of elegiac *puella*, immediately laments that she is not permitted to live "by her own judgement" (*arbitrium…meum,* 3.14.8), recalling Wyke's (1994, 112) assertion that the *puella* is always "subservient to the

[1] In this paper I will discuss only [Tib] 3.13-18, leaving aside the so-called "Garland of Sulpicia" (3.8-12). Recent scholarship attributes these poems to Sulpicia as well (e.g. Hallett 2011, Keith 2008; see also Parker 2006 for a convincing parody of the frequent exclusion of the garland from Sulpicia's collection), and it would certainly be hypocritical to rely on a tradition of attribution which sources to Gruppe's (1838, 49) identification of a "feminine Latin." I will nevertheless restrict my discussion to those six poems, following the proposal of Milnor (2002, 268-9), who argues that 3.13-18 should be considered separately from the preceding poems "not so much because the two sets of text are 'really' of different authorship, but because that is the way that they perform themselves….it seems to me clear that we as readers are meant to *think* that they were authored by two separate people."

narrator's poetics." Since Sulpicia is herself the narrator, does she become subservient to her own poetics? Or does her authority as poet transfer to her role as *puella*? It is my intention to argue that Sulpicia's poetry highlights these moments of tension with the intent of exposing the inflexibility of a woman's position in the genre. Perhaps the male elegist can be seen to "take the woman's part" in his subversions of gender roles (Wyke 1994, 111). Sulpicia makes us wonder: if the man has the woman's part, where is the woman? Her response seems to be that she has run off to write her own poetry.

Sulpicia's work has long been dismissed as the artless, confessional writings of a teenage girl. Gruppe (1838, 50) refers to Sulpicia as a "charming Roman girl" whose poetry presents "natural, simple expressions for everyday ideas without conscious and artistic elaboration of style." Smith (1913, 79-80), nearly a century later, calls her a "slip of a girl" who, although "she certainly does not rank among the great poets of the world," nevertheless possesses a "gift of straightforward simplicity." The attitude of these early scholars persists nearly unaltered well into the twentieth century: Luck (1969, 107) describes her poetry as "written spontaneously by a woman with no literary pretensions"; Quinn (1979, 190) suggests that her style is that "of a writer who is not expert enough in the use of words to say what she wants to say without sacrifice of clarity"; Pomeroy (1975, 173) declares that "she was not a brilliant artist: her poems are of interest only because the author is female."

These older perspectives are guided by a willful disbelief in female literary merit. Confronted by a style which Flaschenriem (2005, 184) describes as "dense and rather complicated," critics who are predisposed by considerations of gender to disregard Sulpicia's work have drawn up short. Gruppe's (1838, 49) notion of a "feminine Latin, impervious to analysis by rigorous linguistic method" has proved easier to swallow for such scholars than Lowe's (1988,

205) identification of an "agile and distinctive poetic imagination" and a style with "the precision of an algebraic formula."

More recent work, beginning in 1979 with Santirocco's "Sulpicia Reconsidered," has moved away from such evidently gendered bias. A trace of it has nevertheless survived in the tendency to treat Sulpicia's poetry as a genuine record of the historical author's feelings and experiences, where "the content, tone and style speak firmly of reality, the reality of a young woman in love" (Currie 1983, 1758). This tendency at its most simplistic seeks to reconcile Sulpicia's love affair with notions of acceptable behavior for Roman noblewoman by assuming that she must be "respectably betrothed" to the man about whom she writes (Treggiari 1991, 302-3)—an approach that Hallett (2006, 39) argues is motivated by a desire to preserve an image of chastity. A more egregious instance of this stubbornly historical perspective is perpetuated by Hubbard (2005, 187), who denies Sulpicia's authorship and argues that the poetry attributed to Sulpicia should instead "be conceived as Cornutus' Matronalia present to Sulpicia," where Cornutus is figure from a poem of Tibullus. Hubbard criticizes assumptions of Sulpicia's authorship as "naively autobiographical," but the basis for his own argument rests on supposedly realistic details, suggesting it would not be "seemly" for someone of Sulpicia's position to be writing such poetry (177-8).

This tendency to map poetry onto the life of the historical poet is, of course, hardly exclusive to Sulpician scholarship. James (2003, 3) suggests that "readers conditioned by romanticism to expect sincerity" are frequently "unable to reconcile [elegy's] apparent emotion with its evident artifice," so that despite attempts to view elegiac scenarios as purely literary constructions we continue to look for the historical reality of their affairs. Sulpicia's poetry particularly invites biographical readings, as Hallett (2012, 283) shows: Sulpicia "foregrounds

autobiographical and realistic detail" more than other elegists, lending a "powerful element of realism" to her work. It is precisely this quality that has led to hundreds of years' worth of scholars assuming that her poems are little more than entries in a diary—even exceedingly well-constructed, poetic entries.

Her position as a woman writing elegy provides additional temptation for a biographical reading. She offers a unique opportunity to gain insight into the lives and feelings of Roman women, and as such it is appealing to imagine that her poetry offers a genuine glimpse into her lived experiences. So Santirocco (1979, 239) claims that she "held a mirror up to the private world inhabited by the women of her class." The potential is expounded by Sulpicia's own seemingly candid expression of her thoughts as a woman poet dealing with the specter of *fama* and *pudor* (cf. 3.13) and grappling with an impulse to "conceal her desire," (*ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum,* 18.6). The access apparently granted in her poetry to her inner struggle leads critics such as Flaschenriem (2005, 187), in an otherwise consciously literary analysis, to conclude that Sulpicia herself attempts to "preserve a kind of privacy, and even propriety, within her scenarios of disclosure," suggesting a transfer of poetic anxieties to the historical woman. When analyzing a writer with such an historically marked position, the words of Fear (2000, 154) on the study of elegy are more useful than ever: "The elegiac text is neither a simple window onto Augustan reality nor a transcendent linguistic artifact that has no relation to its historical moment of conception." We should neither remove Sulpicia from that social context to which she gives us such precious access nor assume that her vision of that context is less literary or constructed than that of her fellow elegists.

Sulpicia's claim on the role of elegiac *puella* presents its own interpretive challenges. She does not shrink from identifying herself as a *puella* throughout her collection (3.14.3, 15.1, 17.1),

although her position as poet necessarily complicates this identification; no elegiac *puella* has such control over her own speech, which James (2010, 316) claims is "doubly ventriloquized" by both poet-lover and historical poet. Despite this difficulty, Sulpicia's play with the role of *puella* is overly convincing to readers primed by canonical elegy to view women in the genre only as elegiac love objects. Hubbard (2005, 180) exhibits this very tendency when he suggests that Sulpicia, rather than author of her poetry, is merely "an object of discursive construction by male poets just like the other women of Roman elegy." Less egregious instances involve readily perceiving Sulpicia as a *puella* come to life, equipped with the displays of devotion and tantalizing flirtations which the elegiac poet-lover would desire. Merriam (2006, 14) describes her as "quite clearly throwing herself" at a disinterested Cerinthus, offering a distinctly gendered version of what is probably a riff on the trope of a lover's pathetic devotion (cf. 3.17). A similar lens no doubt leads to such terminology as that of Liveley (2012, 421), who describes the collection's movement towards disclosure as a "poetic strip-tease." Such perspectives cater to only one of the roles which Sulpicia claims within her poetry, accepting her characterization of herself as a *puella* without regard to the complications she brings to that identification.

The impact of Sulpicia's gender on her writing has often been overstated by critics who view it as a discredit to her ability; disregarding the role gender necessarily plays in Supicia's elegy certainly avoids that critical pitfall, but does Sulpicia no great service as a woman elegist. As Milnor (2002, 262) shows: in elegy "the act of speaking itself is coded male," which renders Sulpicia's task of "claiming a feminine authorial persona" more difficult than if she were a man. Inevitably this unique position as a woman writing in a genre full of women who are written about creates tensions which emerge in the course of Sulpicia's interactions with that genre. To ignore her gender is to ignore those tensions. Such is the mistake of Merriam (2006, 15), whose

conclusion that Sulpicia should be viewed as "just another Roman poet" implies that our approach to her approach should be identical to analytical work on male poets. Liveley (2012, 411, 414) likewise uses Sulpicia as an example "in miniature" of elegiac narratology, arguing that her poetry straightforwardly exhibits the "same agents and…the same events" as masculine elegy. Both, in their treatment of Sulpicia as a typical elegist, assimilate her to a genre of male poets and ideals.

Such assimilative tendencies trace back to early attempts to fairly evaluate Sulpicia; these attempts rest on the same comparisons to the literary canon which led earlier scholars to prematurely judge her lacking, implying that her gender is an obstacle to be surmounted through purposeful assimilation to the tradition. Santirocco (1979, 237), the pioneer of fairer critical assessments of Sulpicia, attributes to her a "determination to observe the conventions of love poetry at all costs," as well as a "desire to conform with the literary practice of Roman love poetry…even if that meant reversing traditional sexual roles." In Santirocco's admittedly prototypical view, Sulpicia's poetic choices are guided by the literary traditions to which she attempts to belong.

Santirocco is not the last to evoke the canon to justify Sulpicia's poetic worth. Lowe (1988, 205), in his analysis of Sulpicia's syntax, emphasizes her "generic affinities…with the Hellenistic-neoteric epigram" rather than her resemblance to other Augustan elegists to support his suggestion that she is "not such a minor figure." Roessel (1990, 250) offers a similar approach; after observing that the name *Cerinthus* is associated with wax and therefore with the writing process, he concludes only that this "links Sulpicia's poems to the poetic tradition," confirming that "whether or not she is judged the equal of the other elegists…she intended to compete with them." This referential impulse persists in much more recent discussions such as that of Merriam (2006, 15), who uses Sulpicia's apparent allusion to the *Iliad* to argue that her poetry possesses "the same quality of

literary sophistication" as her contemporaries; it is precisely this view which leads Merriam to her errant conclusion that Sulpicia's participation in elegy is unaffected by gender. An overemphasis on Sulpicia's participation in convention suggests that her worth rests on her ability to conform to the masculine literary canon and pays no regard to the ways in which she subverts canonical expectations both as a result of her unusual position and as a conscious avoidance of the "literary game" of elegy (Milnor 2002, 265).

In a subtler evolution of Santirocco's (1979, 237) initial claim that Sulpicia owes a "debt" to her literary predecessors, the poet's success in negotiating tensions of gender and genre is sometimes sourced to literary models. James (2003, 220), examining elegy through the perspective of the historical women behind the elegiac *puellae,* argues, in her discussion of Sulpicia, that the genre's privileging of a female audience and female subjects "allows a female voice to speak of its own erotic concerns." Keith (1997, 296), upon identifying allusions to the Dido episode of the *Aeneid* in Sulpicia's work, similarly claims that Dido provides Sulpicia with "a framework in which to articulate a woman's love for a man," as if her ability to express herself relies on a man's model of a woman.

Isn't Sulpicia's difficulty precisely that her precedents are solely male-written models? Indeed Hallett (2012, 282) points out that the poet's "self-representations evoke, rewrite, and vie solely with earlier representations of totally fictional female figures in male-authored poetic texts," including Vergil's depiction of Dido. To suggest that Sulpicia is reliant on a male-authored framework to articulate herself disregards the essential difficulty presented by these models. As Milnor (2002, 263) observes, "the terms which the genre offers to define 'woman' are not compatible with the position of poet, inasmuch as elegy's gender system is framed around the distinction between male lover and female mistress, male speaker and female spoken, male author

and female textual object." Flaschenriem (2005, 184), commenting on this difficulty, proposes that the pervasive question in Sulpicia's elegy is "'how do I fully articulate my desire?'"—because literary precedent does not supply an answer for a woman speaking of her own accord.

Sulpicia's poetry, resistant as it might be to elegiac convention, cannot, of course, exist in isolation from the genre in which it is clearly situated from her opening declaration "at last love has come" (*tandem venit amor,* 3.13.1). Nor is her negotiation of gender roles without precedent in that genre which so notoriously presents subversive sexual dynamics. Wyke (1994, 115) observing this fact, offers that "it is precisely elegy's pervasive occupation with questions of gender categories that makes the genre readily available for appropriation and transformation by a woman writer." Milnor proposes, as a counterpoint to Wyke, that "Sulpicia's poetic voice is destabilizing to social and literary norms beyond canonical elegy's usual play with gendered positionality," by the very fact of her position as a woman writing (262). Sulpicia's subversions cannot be those of canonical elegy, even if she builds on that transgressive character of the genre in which she has chosen to write.

Sulpicia's resistance of the canonical gender play of elegy illuminates its limitations. The core of elegy's subversive play with gender is in the pervasive trope of *servitium amoris,* wherein the poet-lover presents himself as subjugated to his domineering *puella.* The trope serves as a vehicle for elegy's most transgressive qualities; James (2003, 129) characterizes the poet-lover as "violating all standards of upper-class Roman masculinity, through both servile behavior and inertia of character." The violation of these standards allows the elegist, as McCarthy (1998, 175) puts it, to "stake out a place for himself in the complex hierarchies that shape Roman life" by establishing his identity in contrast to "socially excluded persons," i.e. women and slaves. The poet-lover may participate in "crucial play with Roman categories of gender" through his

emasculated servitude, but the benefits of such play is restricted to men of his social standing (Wyke 1994, 110) Despite his adoption of their traditional roles, neither the slave nor the woman is liberated through this trope; rather, the poet preserves his own "mastery and masculinity" by maintaining authorial control over these figures as he mines their experiences of objectification for their perceived "subversive potential" and its rhetorical effect (178).

Sulpicia does not offer her own version of *servitium amoris*; she never uses the term *domina* or *dominus*, and in fact her first poem implies a "mutual worthiness" between Sulpicia and her lover (*cum digno digna,* 3.13.10; Keith 1997, 302). James (2003, 220) suggests that this is due to an inherent "foreshortening" of the "trajectory of her poetic narrative" due to the limitations of her gender; Hinds (1987, 39) similarly argues that the effect of a reversal of this already-subverted trope would "not be so much to create a paradox as to destroy one." Is she so limited in her engagement with the genre? Why, then, engage? Sulpicia does not otherwise keep her distance from elegiac convention because of the awkwardness of her gender. Her presentation of helplessness in 3.17, when she declares that "I would not otherwise wish to conquer my unhappy illness than if I thought you also wanted me to" (*a ego non aliter tristes evincere morbos | optarim, quam te si quoque velle putem,* 3-4), recalls what James (2003, 111) terms the conventional "pathetic suffering" of the elegiac lover. Her simultaneous presentation as an ailing *puella* results in a confused meeting of figures, a seemingly straightforward presentation of a girl helplessly in love—and a convincing one at that, as we have seen in the tradition's history of viewing Sulpicia precisely in those terms. It is clear from this example that Sulpicia hardly avoids an awkward blending of roles. The reason for the absence of *servitium amoris* lies instead in the trope's marked position as an existing transgression of elegy. By neglecting such a prominent aspect of male elegy, Sulpicia draws attention to it; the trope is placed in contrast with the subversive qualities of her

own disruptive voice, and it is made all the clearer that in this trope the *puella* remains "subservient to the narrator's poetics" (Wyke 1994, 112).

Sulpicia's linguistic choices may also riff on elegy's traditional portrayal of women. McCarthy (1998, 185) argues that the "proud indifference" of the *domina* puts the lover "into a position of submission" and renders herself "inscrutable," a quality which "is both powerfully attractive and threatening" in a woman. This same inscrutability allows the lover to regain dominance, as through her silence "we are constantly reminded of the poet's control over her" and "she becomes a vehicle for the poet's own voice." Sulpicia purports to speak openly, thus defying the conventional silence of the *domina*; she emphasizes this defiance by foregrounding the struggle between expected concealment and desired revelation (cf. 3.13, 18). Although Sulpicia declares an intention to be publicly consumed through her poetry (cf. *non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis / me legat ut nemo quam meus ante velim,* 13.7-8), this consumption is moderated by her dense syntax, what Lowe (1988, 205) identifies as an "excess of intellectual control." Her style, with its "gnarled diction," is inscrutable (Flaschenriem 2005, 172). She retains the power of an unreadable *domina* while reclaiming the authority denied to the voiceless *puella.* She makes her exposed self (*nudasse,* 13.2; *me legat,* 8) the vehicle for her own inscrutable voice, claiming both the advantages of inscrutable femininity and the authority of a poet in charge of her own voice and self-presentation.

Sulpicia's play on exposure, wherein "the difference between publication and silence is expressed in terms of dressing and undressing," further capitalizes on traditional gender dynamics within elegy (Milnor 2002, 260). James (2010, 340, 342) characterizes the *puella's* speech as "no more than a mirror of her lover's predilections," so that the *puella* herself serves only as a "reflecting surface for her lover-poet." The words of the *puella*, constructed by the poet, are

"desired rather than reported" moments; the *puella* says only what the poet wants to hear (339). Sulpicia superficially plays the part of an obliging *puella*. Keith (2008) points out that there is a connection between Sulpicia's exposure in her programmatic poem and the elegist's conventional persuasion of his *puella* to put aside fancy dress and adornment and embrace naked sincerity. Yet Sulpicia does not wait to be persuaded to this course of action by a lover; at the start of her poetry she has already decided to expose her desire. As Milnor observes, in Sulpicia's poetry "to speak publicly is to appear naked before the reader" (260). And this reader is not figured as her lover, like the *puella* is presented as the privileged audience of male elegy. As Pearcy (2006, 32) shows: her "primary readers are her public audience" (cf. *non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis | me legat ut nemo quam meus ante velim,* 3.13.7-8). Sulpicia's self-presentation is ultimately guided not by the desires of a lover, but by her own desire for public recognition. She "denies Cerinthus his place as primary and privileged reader," because centralizing the perspective of her male lover would suggest that her words are intended above all, as those of the elegiac *puella,* to appease a male perspective (32).

This adoption of and simultaneous distancing from elegy's expectations for women speaks to Sulpicia's construction of her *persona* at the place where the roles of *puella* and poet meet. Her self-identification is inherently unsustainable. Sharrock (1991, 36) discusses the "eroto-artistic relationship between the poet and his *puella*" with its implication that the *puella* herself is a "work of art" created by the poet-as-artist. As Sulpicia represents herself as both *puella* (art-object) and poet-lover (artist), she troubles the relationship between the two roles by collapsing the dynamic. Milnor (2002, 263) writes that Sulpicia "draws on aspects of both the male and female halves of the literary equation for her self-representation…and thus confounds categories not only of elegiac gender, but of speaker and spoken object, of author and text." Rather than writing what Pearcy

(2006, 33) terms "masculine poetry with the genders changed," Sulpicia neglects to center her lover, constructing herself as both lover and loved.

Unlike the male elegist who Sharrock (1991, 49) "creates the erotic object" as he writes her, however, Sulpicia does not create herself in her poetry. As the poet she necessarily predates the text, as 3.13 makes clear in its reference to the preexisting promises which Venus fulfills (*exsolvit promissa Venus,* 5). She belatedly adopts the role of *puella*, holding off this identification until her second poem; her gender in the first is not even made explicit until *digna* in its last line (14.3; 13.10). Her role as poet predates the text but her constitution as *puella* is a part of its progression, an artificial aspect of her elegiac scenarios. She does not so much create herself as erotic object as impose the role onto herself. Where Sharrock (1991, 49) explores how, like Pygmalion in Ovid's semi-parodic exposure of elegy's "womanufacture," the poet-lover can be seen as "vivifying the inert material" that is the *puella,* Sulpicia repeatedly paints her love affair as an artifice, an artistic endeavor within which she herself assumes the role of inert object.

Sharrock's (1991, 49) discussion of the Pygmalion episode of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a "disclosure of a way of reading love poetry generally and elegy specifically" is suggestive for a reading of Sulpicia's poetic goals. Sharrock suggests that Ovid "reflects and exposes" the character of elegy retroactively from an epic context (36). Sulpicia's poetry performs a similar function from within the genre itself, using and subverting such elegiac themes as the role of the *puella* to expose the dynamics of the genre from the inside out. James (2003, 120) performs a similar task by using the female perspective which is already written into elegy in the *docta puella* to "unravel" the poems and expose the poet-lover as, among other things, "hypocritical." Her work operates within the confines of female representation in male elegy; she focuses on the perspective of the *docta puella* as designated by the genre. Sulpicia, not as a *docta puella* but as, in the words of Pearcy

(2006, 36), a *puella scribens,* offers a perspective that necessarily moves beyond that which is provided in male elegy. Yet she begins precisely from that pre-written role.

In examining each of the poems in turn, I shall attempt to examine the progression of Sulpicia's overturning and ultimate transformation of elegiac convention. She moves through conventional scenes of elegy in turn, presenting versions that examine, in Milnor's (2002, 279) words, "the disruptive possibilities of the female poetic voice" and its impact on the traditional elegiac narrative. Her programmatic opening 3.13 introduces Sulpicia as elegiac poet, articulating her poetic goals for a wide readership and establishing an authoritative voice which resounds throughout her collection. She holds off the start of her elegiac narrative until 14, when she introduces characters (including her lover Cerinthus), setting, conflict, and addressee. It is in 14 that Sulpicia first moves to adopt the role of *puella* after her opening has already established the limits of this identification: she came to use as poet first. 14 and 15 together reimagine the elegiac propempticon, a trope which Sulpicia uses to explore her lack of agency afforded by the identity *puella* as well as the potential for her poetic authority to restore that agency. 16 expands on this potential, foregrounding Sulpicia's authorial identity (*Servi filia Sulpicia,* 4) and distancing her from the roles of passive *puella* and helpless lover in a reworking of the elegist's complaints of infidelity. 17, which forms a counterpoint to 16, attempting to reconcile these roles where 16 rejected them; the result is confused blending of the lovesick poet-lover and ailing *puella* which underscores how easily gendered expectations eclipse the unique quality of Sulpicia's poetic voice. 18, the concluding poem of the set, returns to the opening theme of disclosure, as Sulpicia apologizes for her desire to conceal her feelings and at last articulates a vision of her poetic identity free from the confines of elegiac convention.

Sulpicia's poems both "conform to and differ from the elegiac rules" so that her poetry is witness to a "particular poetics" different from that of other elegists or Roman poets in general (Skoie 2013, 84, 90). Her transformations allow us to turn from her poetry back to that of male elegy and examine its restrictions for women who are really "generic set pieces" (James 2003, 315)—a fact highlighted by Sulpicia's creation of new and manifold roles for herself in a poetic program that necessarily moves beyond the conventions of elegy.

1: 3.13

Tandem venit amor, qualem texisse pudori
quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.
exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis
attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.
exsolvit promissa Venus: mea gaudia narret,
dicetur si quis non habuisse sua.
non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,
me legat ut nemo quam meus ante, velim,
sed peccasse iuvat, vultus componere famae
taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar. (3.13)

At last love has come, of such a sort that the rumor that I have covered it
would be more for shame for me than the rumor that I have exposed it to someone.[2]
Cytherea, persuaded by my Muses, has brought that one
to me and placed him on my lap.
Venus has fulfilled her promises: let anyone tell of my joys
if they will be said not to have had their own.
I would not want to entrust anything to sealed tablets
so that no one would read me before mine,
but it pleases to have transgressed, to construct a face for reputation
wearies: let me be said to have been a worthy woman with a worthy man.[3]

3.13 serves as a programmatic introduction to the collection. Focused on the publication of Sulpicia's elegy, it establishes a framework for the elegiac narrative which begins properly in 3.14 with the introduction of an addressee, setting, characters, and conflict. 3.13 has no such specificity: there is no addressee, a lover left unnamed, and agents (Venus, the Muses, Sulpicia, and her audience) who are concerned only with the production, consumption, and reproduction of Sulpicia's report of her affair rather than the events of the affair itself. Beyond declaring her poetic goals, Sulpicia uses her opening to establish her identity as a woman writing elegy. As Milnor (2002, 276) observes, the poem introduces "the very concept of the female poetic self, whose

[2] Milnor (2002) n2: "Many translations choose, for the sake of clarity, to leave out *fama* in line 2 and render the infinitives dependent on it as the subjects of *sit* rather than indirect statement….Strictly speaking, however, and following the Latin carefully, it is the story (*fama*) that she has told, or the story that she has not, which *pudori* . . . *sit mihi* . . . *magis*. See Santirocco 1979: 234-35."
[3] All translations are my own.

relationship to her written text is inescapably different from that of her male counterparts." Supicia takes advantage of her precarious position, figuring herself as both elegiac subject and object and therefore troubling the canonical elegist's relationship to genre and text. In foregrounding the poetic process and specifically her desire for public readership, Sulpicia ensures that she is viewed as a poet before elegiac *puella* and that her collection is read as a poetic construction produced by her own hand.

Sulpicia repeatedly draws attention to the ongoing nature of her poetic process. She declares that love came "at last" (*tandem,* 3.13.1), suggesting that she has been waiting for it. And not passively: if Venus was "persuaded by [her] Muses" (*exorata meis…Camenis,* 3) to bring "that one" (*illum*) to her, she clearly had poetry written with which to persuade the goddess. Her assertion that "Venus has fulfilled her promises" (*exsolvit promissa Venus,* 5) further develops what Pearcy (2006, 32) calls "a history of negotiation between Sulpicia and Venus." Santirocco (1979, 234) prefers to view these details as evidence that 3.13, as a "preface to the reader," looks retroactively at the rest of the collection which forms the "background to the affair." In his view, the poems which persuaded Venus are the ones in this set. A more straightforward interpretation, and indeed the reading which is supported by the existing order of the collection, would have 3.13 looking forward to poems which are not yet written, i.e. 14-18, and backward on Sulpicia's preexisting history of composition. Her "love" (*amor,* 1) is the consequence of her writing, not the impetus; the collection introduced by 3.13 is but a continuation of a longer career.

Sulpicia's role as poet thus predates both her participation in her elegiac affair and, more significantly, her entire pursuit of the genre. She makes a positive choice to enter elegy and therefore to persuade Venus to bring her the opportunity to write it. This is a significant departure from canonical elegy, in which the male elegist portrays his generic participation as reluctant and

his relationship with Amor, or Eros, the god of love, as tumultuous. Propertius reports in his first poem that "Love pressed hard on my head with his feet placed upon it" (*et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus,* 1.1.3). Ovid riffs on the same tense dynamic between elegist and Amor in the introduction to his own elegiac collection, declaring that "I am burned and Love reigns in my empty chest" (*uror et in vacuo pectore regnat Amor, Am.* 1.1.26). Even Vergil's supposed portrait of the early elegist Gallus includes a reference to this dynamic: "Love conquers all, and we must yield to Love" (*omnia vincit Amor and nos cedamus Amori, Ecl.* 10.69). Sulpicia's opening declaration that "at last love has come" (*tandem venit amor,* 3.13.1) recalls and reimagines the male elegist's attitude towards the god of love. In invoking Amor, she characterizes her own collection as elegiac, but she does not characterize herself as the conventional elegist. Her words are celebratory: "at last" love has come.

The impression that Sulpicia needs no coercion to embark on her poetic pursuits is elaborated in the rest of her opening couplet as she explains her decision to publish based on the sort of love that has come to her. She again subverts generic expectations. Recognizable is the justification for the writing of elegy as the result of Amor's influence. Milnor (2002, 260) observes that "anxiety over the effects of publication are not unusual in Latin erotic poetry," so that the poets often begin their collection by justifying their chosen genre as the result of forces beyond their control. Propertius claims that "Wicked [Love] taught [him] to hate chaste girls and to live without a plan" (*me docuit castas odisse puellas | improbus et nullo vivere consilio,* 1.1.5-6) and further complains that he is "forced to hold opposing gods (i.e. Amor)" (*adversos cogor habere deos,* 8). Tibullus more overtly embraces his chosen occupation but spends the bulk of his introductory poem justifying his choice of genre for which he expects to be called "lazy and idle" (*segnis insersque,* 1.1.58). Ovid parodies the same theme, blaming Cupid for stealing a foot from

his meter and thereby forcing him to write elegy rather than epic with its respectably "serious meter" (*gravi numero, Am.* 1.1.1). Portraying themselves as compelled to write by Love is a common tactic for elegists to provide an excuse for their apparently questionable poetic choices.

A superficial reading might suggest that Sulpicia offers a similar line, since her love is "of such a sort" (*qualem,* 3.13.1) that she is practically obligated to speak of it. But whereas Love is an antagonizing influence for Propertius and Ovid, for Sulpicia, as we have seen, it is clearly a welcome motivator. And she does not give Love all the credit, focusing on considerations of "rumor" (*fama*, 2) and "shame" (*pudori,* 1). Langlands (2006, 18) defines *pudor* most generally as "a sense of shame…which placed constraints upon the behavior of an individual." The male elegists, embarking on their disreputable choice of genre, disregard *pudor* and the bad reputation which is a consequence of the poetry that apparently can't help but write (e.g. *quaeso segnis inersque vocer,* "I ask that I be called lazy and idle," Tib. 1.1.58). Sulpicia instead emphasizes the influence of *pudor* and *fama* on her choices, reimagining these would-be inhibiting forces as motivators: for Sulpicia, a bad reputation is not the (however disregarded) consequence of writing elegy, but of not writing it.

Langlands (2006, 19) emphasizes that *pudor* affects "social relations more generally" than the related concept of *pudicitia,* which deals specifically with "sexual relations." Sulpicia's reference to *pudor* is then perhaps not automatically gendered, especially as the poem does not explicitly confirm its poet's gender until the feminine adjective *digna* in the last line. But Sulpicia's concerns are already clearly not those of masculine elegy; she frames her decision to publish as a matter of dressing and undressing, between "exposing" (*nudasse,* 3.13.2) her love or "concealing" (*texisse,* 1) it. Milnor (2002, 260) proposes: "Sulpicia is either to clothe demurely her passion for Cerinthus or reveal it in its nakedness…[she] draws a close connection between the poetic display

of her love and the display of her own body." The focus on physical imagery has led scholars such as Hallett (2011, 91) to interpret *pudor* more specifically as "sexually motivated shame" in this context.

With *pudor* carrying the weight of social expectations for women, it is doubly surprising that Sulpicia considers her exposure of her poetry, and by extension of herself (*nudasse,* 3.13.2), the less shameful option. The word order nods to the inversion of expectation: although *pudori* is usually taken with *sit mihi fama magis* (see Lowe 1988 203-4), its placement creates a close association with *texisse,* invoking a secondary sense of "to conceal for the sake of shame." Although Sulpicia claims to have chosen the path of least shame, she simultaneously displays an awareness that "the ideological slippage between privacy and respectability in a patriarchal society such as ancient Rome means that a woman who offers her words to the reading public has notionally prostituted herself" (Milnor 2002, 260). The couplet introduces a major tension of the whole collection, at once displaying what Keith (1997, 307) calls "an acute sensitivity to the transgressive role of female sexuality" and prioritizing Sulpicia's desire to be heard as a poet.

Keith (2008, 193, 196) claims that Sulpicia's decision to expose herself recalls both the elegiac *puella's* "conventional movement from (partial) concealment to open revelation" and the "naked emotion" of the male elegist, so that she presents as "both an elegiac *puella* casting aside her robes and an elegiac poet stripping all pretense from her amatory narrative." In her view, the metaphor of disrobing, rather than being a distinctly gendered image, resonates ambiguously with canonical elegy. Sulpicia cannot so easily occupy this ambiguous position between roles: in a woman's voice, the suggestive *nudasse* necessarily emphasizes the erotic exposure of a *puella*. Keith is correct in her suggestion, however, that Sulpicia's evocation of a *puella's* nudity, which occurs as a result of the lover's determination to "strip his mistress of her finery in order to enjoy

her naked charms," is less than straightforward (194). Sulpicia does not disrobe at the request of her lover, who has yet to even be identified; rather she begins her collection with the resolution to reveal herself, stripping at her own behest. She removes herself from the conventional narrative of elegy even as she invokes it imagery, retaining the active force of a poet even as her language dresses (and undresses) her in a *puella's* clothes. As Milnor (2002, 261) writes, "Sulpicia turns her poetry back on herself, offering up herself to the reader as the target of his or her desiring gaze. Instead of being invited to look *with* the poet *at* the female body, we are invited to look *at* the poet *as* the female body." By equating the publication of her love as a woman poet with the exposure of her body as an elegiac woman, Sulpicia introduces the collapsing of roles which is central to her poetic collection.

Not all agree on the extent of Sulpicia's exposure. Whereas Milnor views her revelation as that of both body and love, Flaschenriem (2005, 171) offers the less provocative interpretation that "what will be revealed here is not a woman's body, but the story of her love." Her argument points to the "gnarled diction" of the first couplet as evidence for the poet's "unease about exposing herself" and an overall need for "self-protection" through language (172). The vulnerability of Sulpicia's charged revelation is qualified by the reticence of her syntax. The language is certainly difficult; Lowe (1988, 203) calls the opening couplet "syntactic morass." To assume, as Flaschenriem does, that this difficulty sources to an anxious desire for privacy plays closely into Hallett's (2006, 39) observation that scholars frequently "try to protect [Sulpicia] from one particular definition of *fama*: ill-repute, chastity-wise." Instead of a measure of privacy, we might view Sulpicia's linguistic reticence as a deliberately constructed appearance of reserve with the aim of making explicit that her desire is to be publicly consumed only through the moderation of

her own language and diction. Sulpicia equates publication with the exposure of her body but does not grant unrestricted access: we consume her exposed self on her terms alone.

Sulpicia's regulatory presence is felt so strongly that she invites her audience to read not her poetry but her own self (*me legat,* 3.13.8). Milnor (2002, 275) links this identification of poet and poem with the physical imagery of the opening couplet and argues that Sulpicia, in identifying herself with her text, becomes "both the subject and object of the poetic action, both author and the thing authored, inseparable from the poetry which presents her to the reader." In identifying with the text, Sulpicia renders herself both erotic and textual object, highlighting how "canonical elegy obsessively returns to constructions of a woman's body as the representative site of the poetic text" (261). She, as the woman in her elegy, becomes the text—but this role is limited to the scope of her poetry. We must remember that Sulpicia's role as poet necessarily predates the text she has authored, a fact that she herself underscores in her repeat references to prior dealings with Venus. Sharrock's (1991, 49) characterization of the "eroto-artistic relationship between the poet and his *puella*" centers on the male elegist's creation of the *puella* as he writes her. Sulpicia cannot create herself; as author she is, obviously, a preexisting entity. She inserts herself into the role of object, her identification with the text serving as a prelude to her identification with the *puella* in the rest of the collection.

Echoing Sulpicia's equation of self and text is an emphasis on the poet and her wishes: the hyberbaton *ego…velim* (3.13.7-8) frames her expressed desire to be read, and first-person references abound throughout the poem (*mihi,* 2; *meis,* 3; *nostrum,* 4; *mea,* 5; *ego,* 7; *me,* 8; *meus,* 8). We really do read Sulpicia in her lines, over and over again. Her prominence is paired with an almost complete elision of her lover Cerinthus, who goes unnamed until the following poem (*Cerintho,* 3.14.2) and is here markedly deemphasized. Pearcy (2006, 31) argues that Sulpicia

ultimately "writes Cerinthus out of her poetry." He is alternately reduced to the possessive adjective *meus* (3.13.8) and dodged completely with Sulpicia's oblique reference to her "joys" (*mea gaudia,* 5). The abstract *amor* (1) and vague *illum* (3) could refer to him rather than to the god Love or to her love as desire, but the language is decidedly ambiguous. As we have seen, an abstract interpretation of *amor* suits Sulpicia's programmatic entrance into elegy. Reading *amor* as Love also creates a parallel with the *Aeneid*, first identified by Keith (1997, 301): as Venus, called Cytherea (*Aen.* 1.657) sends Cupid in the guise of Ascanius to sit on Dido's lap and make her fall in love with Aeneas, so "Cytherea brought that one [i.e. love] and placed him on [Sulpicia's] lap" (*illum Cytherea…attuilit in nostrum deposuitque sinum,* 3.13.3-4). If *amor* and *illum* are meant to be Cerinthus, they are certainly not exclusively so. The vagueness is no doubt intentional, serving to diminish the figure of Sulpicia's lover so that he is indistinguishable from Love as an abstract concept and therefore subordinated to metapoetic considerations. The most overt reference, the adjective "worthy" (*digno,* 10), occurring in the final line, serves to mark the transition between this metapoetic opening and the narrative in which Cerinthus might actually participate.

The most marked reduction to Cerinthus' position coincides with Sulpicia's rise to prominence as the text itself when she declares that she "would not want to entrust anything to sealed tablets so that no one would read me before mine" (*non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis | me legat ut nemo quam meus ante velim,* 3.13.7-8). The "sealed tablets" (*signatis…tabellis,* 7) which she rejects are a familiar figure in elegy, where they serve as a "means of communication with the beloved" (Roessel 1990, 246). By refusing to use sealed tablets, Pearcy (2006, 32) argues that Sulpicia "denies Cerinthus his place as primary and privileged reader," granting the position to "her public audience." She does not purport to write private love letters;

the events of her elegy are public from the start. Of course, the privacy of elegy is always a fiction; in foregrounding the lack of privacy, Sulpicia merely removes the suspension of disbelief required by canonical elegy. When she addresses her lover in the rest of the collection, it is to be understood by the audience as a situational fiction, her entire affair rendered an explicitly poetic construction.

The implication that the poet herself (*me legat,* 8) is up for public consumption must, as Pearcy (2006, 32) suggests, "be understood as in some sense erotic." This eroticism is particularly provocative in that it refuses to prioritize male desire. As Sulpicia earlier denied her lover the privilege in taking part in her exposure, here she refuses him private access to herself as text. The effect is stronger for the sheer scale of Sulpicia's desired audience: "let anyone tell of my joys if they will be said not to have had their own" (*mea gaudia narret | dicetur si quis non habuisse sua,* 3.13.5-6). Pearcy (2006, 33) proposes that we translate *si quis* not as "if anyone" or "if any man," but specifically as "if any woman." Milnor (2002, 272) argues that the "poetic transaction…is figured as occurring between a trio of female presences—poetess, muses, and goddess"; Pearcy's translation preserves this female literary circle. His interpretation also explains the odd detail this reader is not said to have their own joys, suggesting that Sulpicia references "not those who do not experience the joys of love, but those who her society believes or states are without that experience," i.e. Roman women. It is certainly appealing to think of Sulpicia as working toward the altruistic goal of giving voice to silenced women and as totally overhauling the elegiac world with female agents. The nondescript *si quis*, however, makes it impossible to tell precisely who belongs in Sulpicia's intended audience, effectively universalizing the reach of her poetry and the scope of her readership.

As Sulpicia's desire for public readership emerges, her relationship with *fama* develops accordingly. In her opening couplet, the choice to publish was framed as a means of escaping the

more "shameful" (*pudori,* 3.13.1) form of *fama,* which is treated as an inevitability in either case; as the poem nears its close, she emphasizes instead her own will (*velim,* 8) in seeking out public recognition and dismisses *fama* as wearisome (*taedet,* 10). That the word is repeated in a scant ten lines is nonetheless indicative of its central position as a thematic concern for Sulpicia. It continues, throughout the poem, to play an indirect role; as Santirocco (1979, 235) observes, "the poem is not just about love but also about reputation." The poem repeatedly returns to the act of speaking (*narret,* 5; *dicetur,* 6; *ferar,* 10). Sulpicia's desired readers are only "said" to have no joys of their own; she similarly exhorts them to "tell" of her own, rather than simply read them; her closing wish is expressed as a desire "to be said" to have been a certain way. Santirocco further points out that "the poem's gratuitous indirect discourse with its emphasis on what *is spoken* resonates with the theme" (235; cf. 3.13.1-2, 6, 10). Sulpicia encourages the word-of-mouth diffusion of her poetry, a method reminiscent of the sense of *fama* as rumor.

Such an emphasis on hearsay recalls the seeming inevitable role of *fama* as presented in the opening couplet; no matter how she acts, Sulpicia will be talked about. The difference is that Sulpicia, in producing the source material, controls what is said about her. In the opening couplet, she chooses between two options with consequences already dictated to her; her ability to control rumor is limited to her choice between outcomes. By the poem's close, she rejects *fama* as a predominant influence over her actions and embraces it as a tool for gaining wider renown. She asserts her authorial control—through her syntax, through her prominent position as both producer and product, through her embrace of being talked about. Her final exhortation is a script for the *fama* over which she now has influence: "let me be said to be have been a worthy woman with a worthy man" (*cum digno digna fuisse ferar,* 3.13.10). Sulpicia offers a resolution for her seemingly

paradoxical claims to the roles of both elegiac woman and poet: in gaining power over what is said about her and how, she gains control of the elegiac narrative in which she is about to partake.

2: 3.14 & 15

Invisus natalis adest, qui rure molesto
  et sine Cerintho tristis agendus erit.
dulcius urbe quid est? an villa sit apta puellae
  atque Arretino frigidus amnis agro?
iam, nimium Messalla mei studiose, quiescas:
  non tempestivae saepe, propinque, viae.
hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo,
  arbitrio quam vis non sinit esse meo. (3.14)

The hated birthday is here, which must be spent sadly
in the tiresome countryside and without Cerinthus.
what is sweeter than the city? Or is a villa suitable for a *puella*,
and the cold stream in Arretium's field?
May you now be calm, Messalla, too devoted to me:
often, kinsman, journeys are not timely.
here I leave my mind and my senses, carried off,
whom force does not allow to be under my own authority.

Scis iter ex animo sublatum triste puellae?
  natali Romae iam licet esse meo.
omnibus ille dies nobis natalis agatur,
  qui nec opinanti nunc tibi forte venit. (3.15)

Do you know that the sad journey has been lifted from the mind of your *puella*?
now it's allowed for my birthday to be in Rome.
let that birthday be spent by all of us,
which comes by chance now to you, not imagining.

After 3.13's introduction of Sulpicia's poetic program, 14 and 15 abruptly usher us into the elegiac world. The content of these two poems is closely linked, detailing in Santirocco's (1979, 232) words "a trip and its happy cancellation." As her poetry turns to narrative, trading meditations on publication for more quotidian concerns (like a birthday), Sulpicia first assumes the textual role of a *puella* (3.14.3, 15.1). This identity brings with it a loss of the agency which was assumed in the poetic declarations of 3.13 (cf. *non ego…velim,* 3.13.9-10). The shift from unconventional poet-lover to seemingly conventional *puella* is jarring, and serves to underscore the contradictions inherent to Sulpicia's position. Flaschenriem (2005, 182, 180), discussing these contradictions,

proposes that Sulpicia's odd status as a *puella*-turned-poet "engenders a division—or fragmentation—of the narrator's poetic self" which she here "dramatizes…in spatial terms." Her framework is the elegiac propempticon, which James (2003, 141) defines as a "sending-off song" meant to "lament the separation of lover and *puella*." Sulpicia provides a collapsed version of the trope: while the male poet-lover means to "persuade the *puella* not to go," Sulpicia emphasizes her lack of choice in the matter, thereby protesting her lack of agency as an elegiac *puella* (141). She serves as the advocate for her own absent self, reasserting her authorial voice in counterpoint to the silence of her conventional counterpart.

A sense of realism governs 3.14 and 15 which no doubt contributes to the assessment by scholars such as Lowe (1988, 202) that they are merely a "pair of light epigrams." Gone are the mythological figures of 3.13 (Venus, the Muses, Amor) and with them abstract discussions of poetry, as Sulpicia introduces a physical setting and cast of characters for her affair. 3.14 finally names the lover (*Cerintho,* 2), no longer easily conflated with the god of love, as well as Sulpicia's guardian Messalla. There is an emphasis on physical space, as Sulpicia laments her birthday spent in the "tiresome countryside" (*rure molesto,* 3.14.1) and "Arretium's field" (*Arretino agro,* 4) rather than the "city" (*urbe,* 3) where she could be with her lover. When she announces that plans have changed, she specifies that her birthday will now be spent "in Rome" (*Romae,* 3.15.2). These "realistic" details herald a more "realistic" thematic concern that Sulpicia, subject to the "force" (*vis,* 8) of her guardian, is hindered as an elite Roman woman from living by "her own authority" (*arbitrio meo,* 3.14.8).

After the assertion of Sulpicia's poetic goals and disregard for the societal forces of *pudor* and *fama* in 3.13, her diminished control is surprising despite its roots in more "realistic" considerations for a woman of poetry. Her transition from poetic subject to poetic object is signaled

by her self-identification as a *puella,* the trademark figure of elegy. The impersonal language at the start of 3.14 underscores the loss of agency which results from this transition. Sulpicia refers to herself in the third person (*puellae,* 3.14.3), suggesting that as a *puella* she is an entity discrete from the speaker of the poem. No longer is she so closely tied to her poetry that to read it is to read her (cf. *me legat,* 13.8). Her birthday plans are laid out with the passive periphrastic *agendus erit* (2), and *natalis* (1) is not even identified as hers. Such impersonality is significant after the liberal usage of possessive adjectives and personal pronouns in 3.13. Sulpicia sets herself at a remove, lessening her authorial presence and portraying herself as a passive participant in the poem's events. She describes herself as "carried off" (*abducta,* 3.14.7), which Milnor (2002, 264) calls the "language of rape" and which consequently evokes the plight of many literary women. Sulpicia claims these women as her predecessors; by portraying herself as a *puella* and as a passive poetic object, she implies that within the world of elegy, as a woman she is necessarily confined to the role given to "totally fictional female figures in male-authored poetic texts" (Hallett 2012, 282).

This role is frequently misrepresented in canonical elegy, a fact which Sulpicia's version of propempticon helps to illuminate. James (2003, 142) characterizes this trope as a "persuasive lament intended to keep the *puella* from going," implying that the *puella* conventionally leaves of her own accord. Propertius particularly emphasizes this aspect at various instances: he laments that Cynthia leaves while he is "unwilling" (*invito,* 2.19.1); he accuses her of being a "madwoman" who "flees" (*demens...fugis,* 2.32.18); in 1.8 he lingers on her active role (*ire velis,* 4; *audire potes,* 5; *iacere potes,* 6; *potes ferre,* 8) and her "cruelty" (*crudelem,* 16) in departing. Such an attribution of control to the *puella* is not atypical for elegy, being the basis of *servitium amoris*. Pearcy (2006, 35) observes that the elegiac *puella* is frequently granted *arbitrium,* so that "her judgments define

[the poet's] reality." This control is a facsimile: granted by the poet-lover, it is immediately undermined by his own poetic control over her as erotic/poetic object.

Sulpicia's version of propempticon exposes the reality of the canonical *puella*'s position. Unlike Cynthia, she does not decide to leave, but is "carried off" (*abducta,* 3.14.7). Her *arbitrium* (8) is rendered impotent by masculine *vis.* That she loses her agency at the same moment that she adopts the role of *puella* is no coincidence. In portraying herself as a *puella* who cannot act according to her own will, Sulpicia offers a perspective beyond the façade of elegiac convention: in canonical elegy, a *puella* has no power.

The situation is not so clear cut in Sulpicia's elegy; she cannot conform wholly to a canonical role. When she calls herself a *puella,* she steps into a distinctly literary position and leaves behind her meditations as a poet; these meditations are nonetheless held in recent memory by the reader, so that Sulpicia's self-identification as a *puella* is secondary to her first impression as a poet. Although 3.14 and 15 leave behind metapoetic discussions, embracing "aspects of everyday experience to create the illusion of authenticity," as readers we have already been exposed to the limits of that authenticity (Milnor 2002, 264). 3.13 ensures that Sulpicia is known to her own collection as a poet before *puella.*

A contradiction arises: Sulpicia purports to lack agency but is herself the agent behind this portrayal. That she first identifies herself as a *puella* in the context of asking what is "suitable" (*apta,* 3.14.3) for one is an ironic nod to this tension. Is the role of poet suitable for a *puella*? Perhaps not, and yet Sulpicia is both. Unconventional indeed is the *puella* who has the capacity to lament her own lack of agency. Her self-imposed linguistic distance is not consistent; in the middle of 3.14, she writes herself back in. She addresses Messalla directly, beseeching him to "be calm" (*quiescas,* 5); she claims her "mind and senses" (*animum sensusque*, 7) and "judgment" (*arbitrio,*

8) both with possessives (*meos,* 7; *meo,* 8); she juxtaposes the passive *abducta* with the active *relinquo* (7). As the poem progresses, Sulpicia reminds the reader of its author: the *puella* herself. Although its close features Sulpicia at a loss against Messalla's "force" (*vis,* 8), she has reinstated the predominance of her poetic voice. Destined though she may be as a woman in poetry to be "carried off," the fact that she is a woman in *her own* poetry allows her to retain control in a narrative of her own making.

Where 3.14 moves to establish Sulpicia's authorial control despite her adoption of the term *puella,* 3.15 once more distances author from text. *Animo* (3.15.1) echoes *animum* (14.7), underscoring the transition back to passivity: whereas *animum* was attributed directly to the speaker (as implied by the parallelism of *meos,* 14.7), *animo* belongs only to the *puella* (15.1). To match her return to third-person references, passive and impersonal constructions abound. Her journey is "lifted" (*sublatum,* 1) by some unnamed agent; the impersonal *licet* (2) permits her birthday to occur in Rome, where it is to be passively "spent" (*agatur,* 15.3) by the non-specific "all of us" (*omnibus…nobis*, 3). Although she applies a possessive adjective to the first mention of her birthday (*natali…meo,* 2), it is isolated by hyperbaton; by the second mention, it has become merely "that birthday" (*ille dies natalis,* 3). Finally, although the sequence suggests that Sulpicia's plea in 3.14 persuaded Messalla to change his mind, she herself implies that it only occurred "by chance" (*forte,* 4). She is apparently at such a remove from the decisions being made on her behalf that they might as well be random. Sulpicia's return to a passive role illustrates that there is no easy resolution to the complications which arise from a *puella* becoming poet.

Despite Sulpicia's wavering agency, her lover does not supersede her in prominence. Pearcy (2006, 34) discusses at length the lack of emphasis of Cerinthus, who "appears first by name as an absence: *sine Cerintho*." His role is more pronounced in 3.15, the first poem to address

him directly (*tibi,* 3); Sulpicia even makes him the subject of two active verbs (*scis,* 1; *opinanti,* 4). Both are cognitive verbs, suggesting that he is little more than an observer, in Milnor's words (2002, 273) "an intelligence without a body." Arguably *scis* and *non opinanti tibi* could address a generic reader—a reader who has already been invited to consume elegy alongside Cerinthus (cf. 3.13.5-8). The effect is strengthened by Sulpicia's vague reference to the "all of us" (*omnibus…nobis,* 3.15.3) who are to partake in her birthday celebrations. Ostensibly the reference is to family or a circle of friends, but the unspecified presence of others also recalls the wider community of readers which Sulpicia foregrounds in 3.13. Sulpicia brings her audience into the poem, reiterating that although Cerinthus may be (vaguely) addressed, she has already denied him the privilege of being the first to read her poetry. The presence of readers also serves to highlight the constructed nature of the text that she, elided but never erased, herself has authored.

Cerinthus serves a similarly metapoetic purpose in 3.14. James (2003, 143) notes that the male poet-lover achieves success with his propempticon because "a faraway girl leaves no occasion for poetry." When Sulpicia laments that in the countryside she is "without Cerinthus" (*sine Cerintho,* 3.14.2), she mourns not only the absence of her lover but the loss of her poetic inspiration. Roessel (1990, 243) first observed that the name *Cerinthus* is associated with "bees, honey, and wax" and therefore carries "literary implications," in particular an association with wax tablets. To be without Cerinthus is to experience a "crisis in composition," as he is the means by which Sulpicia writes (248). The vehicle for Sulpicia's poetic composition, he makes a requisite appearance as part of the trope but does not maintain his position of prominence. By the end of 3.14, Sulpicia has moved to protest not separation from her lover, but from her "mind and senses" (*animum sensusque,* 7). Sulpicia's concerns are revealed to be centered on the obstacles posed to her as a poet by the loss of her *arbitrium*.

In de-emphasizing her lover and foregrounding poetic concerns, Sulpicia collapses the conventional propempticon. The act of persuasion is transformed by her hand from a lover's lament to a protest of her loss of agency as a woman in her social sphere and in elegy. The triumphant conclusion found in 3.15 suggests that her poetic efforts in 3.14 were successful. Her authorial power, however elided here, has implicitly prevailed; through her poetry, her agency is restored. Although she assumes the passive role of *puella*, this position is always qualified by her prevailing authority as elegiac poet. A new, ambiguous role, what Milnor (2002, 279) calls "the ironic and unresolved position of the female poet," emerges for Sulpicia, in which she may function simultaneously as poetic object and subject, at once eliding herself from the text and continuing to preside over it, absented but certainly not silenced.

3: 3.16

Gratum est, securus multum quod iam tibi de me
permittis, subito ne male inepta cadam.
sit tibi cura togae potior pressumque quasillo
scortum quam Servi filia Sulpicia:
solliciti sunt pro nobis, quibus illa doloris
ne cedam ignoto maxima causa toro. (3.16)

It is welcome that you, untroubled about me, now allow yourself much,
lest I, wretchedly foolish, should suddenly fall.
Let the care of the toga and the *scortum* burdened with the basket
be better to you than Sulpicia daughter of Servius:
they are worried for us, to whom that greatest cause of grief
is that I should yield to an unknown bed.

Sulpicia reasserts her authorial presence in 3.16 with the inclusion of her full name as she rebukes Cerinthus for his infidelity. Juxtaposed with "Sulpicia, daughter of Servius" (*Servi filia Sulpicia*, 3.16.4) is a woman "burdened with the basket" (*pressumque quasillo,* 3) whom Sulpicia refers to with the pejorative *scortum.*[4] Complaints about the *puella's* faithlessness are typical for elegy, frequently emphasizing a rival figure as Sulpicia does here (cf. Prop. 1.15, 2.9, 2.16; Tib. 1.6). Sulpicia's rendition displays, however, a reserve that is atypical for the male poet-lover whom James (2003, 129) describes as "weak, spineless, and hopelessly in love." She likewise keeps her distance from the role of *puella,* a term she does not adopt here as she has elsewhere (3.14.3, 15.1, 17.1). The poem which gives her authorial name rejects both roles from elegy, asserting her unique poetic identity. She presents neither as poet-lover nor *puella* but as Sulpicia, daughter of Servius and elegiac poet.

[4] The word *scortum,* literally "leather, hide" and frequently a pejorative word for a sex laborer (Adams 1983, 322, 325) is often translated as "whore" or another derogatory English word. Witzke (2015, 13), however, criticizes this practice in translations of Roman comedy, as "translations such as 'whore' and 'harlot' are coded, negative terms that carry moral judgment and biblical connotations in English which are irrelevant in Latin." It is better to understand the meaning and tone of *scortum* without seeking an English translation which might warp its original sense.

Despite Santirocco's (1979, 233) suggestion that "we sense the pain" in Sulpicia's version of this well-trod trope, the reaction she represents herself having to Cerinthus' infidelity is far from the male elegists' wounded entreaties. In laments of a *puella's* faithlessness, Propertius and Tibullus both characterize themselves as "miserable" (*misero,* Prop 2.9.42; *misero,* Tib. 1.6.2; *miser,* 9); Propertius even seems to think his condition will prove fatal (*ego nunc pereo,* 1.15.41). There is furthermore an emphasis on their continued devotion. Tibullus equates Delia's betrayal with "snares" (*insidias,* 1.6.4) and "nets" (*casses,* 5) contrived by Amor himself (2), the implication being that he is caught in love despite the actions of his *puella.* Propertius similarly laments that, although Cynthia is treacherous (*quamvis sis inimica,* Prop. 2.9.44) still "nothing will be more pleasing" than she (*te…acceptius…nunc quoque erit…nihil,* 43-44). Complaints about infidelity, for the male poet-lover, do not serve to negate that he is still "hopelessly in love" with his faithless *puella* (James 2003, 129).

Sulpicia adopts quite a different approach to Cerinthus' infidelity in 3.16, which Skoie (2013, 92) calls a "highly ironic" poem. The tone is immediately set by *gratum est* (3.16.1), which elides into the grumbling *gratumst* and kicks off a line of brooding spondees. Cerinthus' behavior is so ironically "welcome" (*gratum,* 1) because as a result Sulpicia does not "suddenly, wretchedly foolish, fall" (*subito ne male inepta cadam,* 2). The sense of *cadam* is ambiguous. Lowe (1988, 200-1) lingers on the word's "difficulty," preferring the "*prima facie* meaning 'make a mistake'" yet cautioning that the mistake in question is left unspecified. Skoie (2013, 92) translates the phrase as "so that I do not trip in some mad folly," while Flaschenriem (2005, 179) prefers the more literal "so that I don't without warning foolishly take a fall." Regardless of precise translation, *cadam* has interesting implications for Sulpicia's stance within her affair. Sulpicia accuses Cerinthus of taking liberties (*securus multum quod iam tibi de me / permittis,* 16.1-2), contrasting his carefree

attitude with her own restraint. The negative result clause suggests that Cerinthus' infidelity is responsible for the prevention of sudden foolishness. That this sudden fall might be prevented implies that it has not already occurred, suggesting that Sulpicia has heretofore been holding herself back in her affair. This suggestion of cautious restraint is markedly different from the male poet-lover's woeful devotion. Rather than lament that she is hopelessly ensnared in an affair with a faithless partner, Sulpicia thanks that partner for saving her the trouble of becoming ensnared at all.

Sulpicia's display of restraint marks her return to control after her bout of diminished agency in 3.14 and 15. Her reproach of Cerinthus likewise focuses on his own inflated sense of authority; she describes his misdeeds in terms of what he "allows" (*permittis*, 2) for himself. Permission has a reoccurring role in these poems: in poem 14, Sulpicia laments that "force does not allow" (*vis non sinit*, 8) her to act by her own "judgment" (*arbitrio*), while in 15 she rejoices that "it is allowed" (*licet esse*, 2) for her to spend her birthday in Rome. In both instances, the permitting agent was separate from Sulpicia, underscoring her lack of agency in the matter of her birthday. Now Sulpicia focuses on what Cerinthus permits for himself (*tibi*, 1), criticizing his flagrant use of his own, unquestioned and "untroubled" (*securus*, 1) authority. And Sulpicia is no longer so passive: whereas in the birthday poems she introduces her role in the third person (*puellae*, 14.3, 15.1), now she immediately uses the first in the emphatically placed *de me* (16.1), underscoring her active (and restrained) participation in her affair.

The poem's syntax develops the impression of controlled restraint. Scholars have called this poem difficult, even the most difficult of Sulpicia's elegies (Skoie 2013, 92; Lowe 1988, 200). Lowe attributes its "density and difficulty" to "convoluted hypotaxis," characterizing it as an "intricate network of interlocked conceits, developing a central ironic idea through a web of

secondary and tertiary implication" (201-2). The linguistic difficulty of this poem is no doubt intentional, serving to modulate the emotional content and to promote an image of poetic reserve to match Sulpicia's implied restraint regarding Cerinthus. Furthermore, as we saw in 3.13, syntactic density forces the reader to focus on the poem's written nature and on its writer as moderator. This effect is more marked for the poem's placement after the birthday poems, which Lowe calls "virtually free of hypotaxis" and which, as discussed above, feature Sulpicia in a position of diminished control (202). As Sulpicia returns to "rococo flourishes of thought and syntax," she restores her own authority as poet and regains explicit control of her elegiac narrative (202).

Sulpicia may further, as proposed by Skoie (2013, 92), gain authority in her affair via the class distinctions she draws between herself and her rival, whom she characterizes as clad in a toga (3.16.3) and "burdened with the basket" (*pressumque quasillo,* 3). The *toga* is a metonymy for the sex laborer who wore one (L&S s.v. *toga* IIB3), while the basket suggests that this woman weaves for a living. She juxtaposes her own upper-class lineage with a sex laborer and weaver, a move which James (2003, 220) argues recalls the "male lover-poet's disdain for a lower-class rival." But while the canonical elegist portrays himself as "violating all standards of upper-class Roman masculinity," Sulpicia draws attention to her apparently unmarred position within society with the use of her full name (129). As observed by Flaschenriem (2005, 182), the emphasis on her "public guise" serves to separate her from "her elegiac role as the lover of Cerinthus," i.e. her role as poet-lover. The figure of her rival "serves as the 'other' in contrast to whom Sulpicia attempts to characterize herself," the emphasis on her identity as historical poet in her social sphere rather than on her elegiac persona (181).

Sulpicia's juxtaposition with her rival in the central couplet also serves to distance her from the role of a *puella*. That she doesn't adopt the word is itself significant, marking a departure from her characterization in the preceding two poems and in 3.17 to come. The omission is more significant for the presence of an altogether different sort of third-person reference: her own name. This marker lends her voice a specificity beyond any canonical elegiac woman, who are all, as James (2010, 341) argues, "generic…set pieces" rather than "distinct, individuated" figures.

Skoie (2013, 92) further observes that the emphasis on Sulpicia's social standing distinguishes her from the *puellae*, whom she views as separate from the "lowborn rival." Are these figures so distinct? The double emphasis on the profession of the rival (*togae* and *scortum*) suggests a closer connection to the *puella*, who James (2003, passim) argues is implicitly a sex laborer, her character inspired by the *meretrix* of Roman comedy. Witzke (2015, 8), in her discussion of the terminology used for sex laborers in that genre, dismisses the frequent interpretation of *scortum* as "referring to an impoverished sex laborer on the streets," arguing that *scortum* is merely a "more pejorative" term for a *meretrix*. Sulpicia, of course, writes elegy and not comedy; *scortum* may very well have a distinct connotation in the context of her poem. But if the *puella* is borrowed from a comedic figure often called *scortum*, then Sulpicia might use the same word to evoke that connection and thereby to extricate herself from the professional implications of the elegiac role she has adopted. The moment makes clear the profession of the *puella*, left implicit in male elegy, so exposing the absurdity of the male poet-lover's own complaints of infidelity.[5]

[5] Tibullus riffs on this hypocrisy in 1.6 when he laments that "[Delia] denies so much, but it is hard to believe her: so she also perpetually denies (much) concerning me to her husband" (*illa quidem tam multa negat, sed credere durum est / sic etiam de me pernegat usque viro*, 8-9).

The final couplet completes what Santirocco (1979, 232) calls the "'audiovisual' frame" of the poem formed by *ne…cadam* (3.16.2) and *ne cedam* (6). Lowe (1988, 201) observes the "wider symmetry" formed by this echo and by the parallel of *securus…de me* and *solliciti…pro nobis.* There is an additional echo in sense: the fear that Sulpicia "might yield to an unknown bed" (*cedam ignoto…toro*, 6) recalls both Sulpicia's less specific fear of a foolish fall in the first couplet and the second couplet's focus on the social status of the *scortum.* Indeed, *ignoto toro* is generally taken to refer to this rival's bed, so that *cedam* has the sense of "to yield," i.e. give up her place.

An additional meaning for *cedo* with the dative is "to come to," as in to become possessed by (L&S *s.v.* IIC). This suggests a secondary interpretation that Sulpicia might herself come to occupy an "unknown bed." The elision of *cedam* into *ignoto* is evocative of this interpretation, as the words literally run together. Is Sulpicia suggesting that she herself is at risk of becoming as "unknown" as her rival and by extension as the elegiac *puella*? Flachenriem (2005, 181) does not address this interpretation of *cedam* but picks up on the potential slippage between roles, observing that the poem "establishes a kind of kinship…between the two female figures," not least through "their involvement with the same man." Sulpicia might distinguish herself from her rival in terms of class, but in writing elegy about a man who presumes to have authority (*permittis,* 2) she is, poetically speaking, only separated from the role of *puella* by her own authorial control. The feared bed is *ignoto*, "unknown," or "unrecognized," occupied by the voiceless and unpublished *puella* who, for all the differences, is Sulpicia's written kin.

The metapoetic potential for *ignoto* is supported by the reference to an unspecified third party that is "worried for us" (*solliciti sunt pro nobis,* 3.16.6) which once more recalls Sulpicia's ever-present audience of invested readers.[6] Lowe (1988, 202) terms "the watching world and its

[6] Cf. *mea gaudia narret / dicetur si quis non habuisse sua,* 3.13.5-6; *omnibus ille dies nobis natalis agatur,* 15.3.

judgment," evoked by *solliciti*, a "Sulpician hallmark." The invocation of Sulpicia's audience serves to remind us and Cerinthus of the perpetually public nature of her poetry, a companion to the textual purpose of "reminding Cerinthus of her formidable connections in the public world" due to her social standing (Flaschenriem 2005, 192). The presence of the audience, like the use of Sulpicia's full name, emphasizes her primary role as poet over her secondary roles as poet-lover and *puella*. The conclusion of 3.16 reiterates the importance of Sulpicia's authorial identity and control as a combatant to the "problem of the divided self" which arises through the ambiguities of her position within elegy (180).

4: 3.17

estne tibi, Cerinthe, tuae pia cura puellae,
    quod mea nunc vexat corpora fessa calor?
a ego non aliter tristes evincere morbos
    optarim, quam te si quoque velle putem.
at mihi quid prosit morbos evincere, si tu
    nostra potes lento pectore ferre mala? (3.17)

Do you have devout care for your *puella*, Cerinthus,
because heat now shakes my tired body?
Oh, I would not wish to overcome the sad disease
otherwise than if I thought that you also wanted it.
But what does it benefit me to overcome disease, if you
are able to bear our suffering with a slow heart?

The transition from the proud anger of 3.16 to the devoted pleading of 3.17 is jarring. The two poems form a pair of contrasting rebukes for Cerinthus, whose *cura* for Sulpicia is consistently lacking (*cura*, 3.16.3; *cura*, 17.1).[7] Where in 3.16 Sulpicia calls on her "real" identity and threatens Cerinthus with both support network and her own restraint, in 3.17 she adopts the suppliant tone of the poet-lover who is always "hopelessly in love" (James 2003, 129). This abruptly helpless posture is difficult to reconcile with the secure assertion of identity (*Servi filia Sulpicia*, 16.4) so recently made. Accordingly, discussions of the Sulpician corpus tend to gloss over 3.17, which Lowe (1988, 199) deems "less instantly attractive" than its successor 3.18. Milnor (2002, 278) references the poem only in passing, while Flaschenriem (2005), who treats each of the others in her analysis, neglects to mention this one at all.

Sulpicia's self-presentation here is seemingly incongruous with the rest of her poems. Even when she emphasizes a loss of agency, as in 3.14, she protests her condition, reasserting control of the situation through her poetic editorializing. Protest is not to be found in 3.17. Sulpicia appears to surrender authority over her own life to Cerinthus: she wouldn't even "wish" (*optarim*, 17.4) to

[7] As Roessel (1990, 248) observes, *securus* ([Tib] 3.16.1) is itself from *sine cura.*

get well unless Cerinthus "also wanted" her to (*te si quoque velle*). The next couplet reiterates this surprising stance with a parallel conditional structure and *morbos evincere* (5), an inverted echo of *evincere morbos* (3). The fatalistic declaration is more marked for its timing on the heels of the anger and restraint of 3.16. The negative subjunctives of that poem, indicating Sulpicia's restraint in love (*ne male inepta cadam,* 16.2), have been replaced in this one by conditionals that represent her surrender. Small wonder, then, that scholars who focus on the strength of Sulpicia's poetic voice prefer to pass over this apparent moment of weakness.

Sulpicia's weakness, as well as her depiction of "erotic passion as a fever," resonates with canonical elegy's depiction of the poet-lover suffering from "love as a kind of disease" (Keith 1997, 205; James 2003, 129). The vocabulary is similar. Propertius uses *calor,* "heat" or "fever," to refer to passion (*calores,* Prop 1.12.17; *caloris,* 3.8.9); Sulpicia attributes her illness to the same (3.17.2). So too do the male elegists call their condition *morbus,* a "disease" (*morbo,* Tib. 2.5.110; *morbi,* Prop 2.1.58), suggesting that Sulpicia's *morbos* (3.17.3, 5) is similarly figurative. The resonances with the canonical elegy suggest that Sulpicia casts herself as an ailing poet-lover. Her incongruous helplessness, then, might merely be an exercise in elegiac hyperbole, her illness little more than a "joke" that recalls the ironic tone of 3.16 (Milnor 2002, 278).

The lover's suffering is not the only disease of elegy, however, and Sulpicia's adoption of elegiac roles is never so straightforward. In the same couplet where she uses the language of a lover stricken with passion (*calor,* 3.17.2), she calls herself a *puella* for the third time in her poetry (1). The identification offers an alternative interpretation for Sulpicia's ailment, as the sick *puella* is also a figure from elegy. The most significant parallel is in Tibullus 1.5, where he recalls Delia "tired with sad disease" (*tristi morbo defessa,* 9). Sulpicia is *fessa* (2) and troubled by *tristes morbos* (3). Although the cause is passion (*calor*), she otherwise describes herself in terms

identical to Tibullus' sick *puella*. In referencing Delia's illness, Tibullus emphasizes that he himself "took care" (*procuravi,* 1.5.13) and "delivered" Delia from sickness with his "vows" (*votis eripuisse meis*, 1.5.10). Propertius also makes much of his efforts on Cynthia's behalf: he refers to his "vows taken up for [Cynthia's] health" (*vota tuam propter suscepta salutem,* 2.9.25), and opens a later poem with a prayer to Jupiter on behalf of his "weakened *puella*" (*affectae puellae,* 2.28.1). In canonical elegy, the recovery of the sick *puella* depends on the well-wishing of the poet, who uses his care and attention as evidence for his value as a lover.

Cerinthus is not so devoted; he lacks "devout care" (*pia cura,* 3.17.1) for his own sick *puella.* Still Sulpicia suggests that her recovery depends on his desiring it. His role is so key that twice she makes his actions the condition on which she will either "overcome disease" or not (*evincere morbos…quam te si,* 3-4; *morbos evincere, si tu,* 5). When Sulpicia is read as heartsick poet-lover, this helplessness represents her hapless devotion to Cerinthus; when she is cast as an ailing *puella,* the same evokes the canonical *puella*'s apparent dependence on her poet-lover for recovery. As she creates what Santirocco (1979, 233) calls a "calculated ambiguity between real fever and the heat of passion, between real disease and the illness that is love," she simultaneously constructs an ambiguous position for herself between *puella* and poet. The result is discomfiting, her recreation of the trope uneasy. James (2003, 129) argues that the diseased poet-lover is driven "to violate his gender and class norms by becoming the passive slave of a woman." Sulpicia's dramatic helplessness, which recalls the poet-lover's clearly, loses its absurdity in a woman's voice. Suddenly what is called a rhetorical effort in canonical elegy becomes, for scholars such as Merriam (2006, 14), a depiction of Sulpicia "quite clearly throwing herself" at Cerinthus. Her uneasy participation in elegy is clear: to adopt the tone of conventional elegy is, for a poet/*puella,* to surrender her authoritative voice.

Sulpicia's shift from named poet (*Servi filia Sulpicia,* 16.4) to *puella* marks the fluctuation of her position within the narrative, as she moves through and takes over another elegiac trope. Her identification as *puella* has evolved from the first instances: now Sulpicia is specifically *tuae puellae* (17.1). This development coincides with the most direct address to Cerinthus yet (*tibi Cerinthe,* 1). Cerinthus gains prominence in the narrative to match the authority that is being attributed to him. As Sulpicia poses as devoted *puella,* she identifies herself not by her own status but by her relationship to her lover.

She does not, however, correspondingly reduce her own prominence, as we saw when she uses *puella* for herself in 3.14 and 15. She and Cerinthus appear in a volley of pronouns: *tibi* (1), *tuae* (1), *mea* (2), *ego* (3), *te* (4), *mihi* (5), *tu* (5), *nostra* (6). This "careful patterning" indicates 3.17's greater focus on the dynamic between Sulpicia and Cerinthus; at last no third party intervenes (Lowe 1988, 200). The "you" and "I" of the poem contend for agency, a struggle represented in their opposing positions (*at mihi…si tu*, 5). It is left unclear whose suffering is referenced in the final *nostra mala.* Most obviously, *nostra* is the poetic plural and refers to Sulpicia alone. Why, then, has she abruptly switched from the thrice-used singular? Perhaps *nostra mala* includes Cerinthus, their suffering not illness specifically but whatever strife has caused Sulpicia's heartsickness. This interpretation allows for *nostra* to neatly resolve the alternating pronouns in a final, inclusive moment. Precedent offers another possibility for the ambiguous *nostra*. We saw the sudden appearance of the first-person plural first in 3.15 (*omnibus nobis,* 3). Is Sulpicia once more referencing her ever-present onlookers, that audience to the affair whose sympathies allow them to first enjoy her birthday (*omnibus ille dies nobis natalis agatur,* 3.15.3) and now to suffer on her behalf?

Another invocation of audience would not be misplaced for Sulpicia, who so often counters passive presentation with reminders of her poetic identity. Again she makes her editorializing felt in her language. Lowe (1988, 200) points out the poem's "typically contorted syntax," gesturing specifically to the odd construction of the central couplet: "The *aliter…quam* construction in which the condition is bedded is wholly characteristic of our author: instead of saying 'I would not wish to recover if I thought you did not share the wish', we have 'I would not wish to recover otherwise than if I thought you also wanted.'" In this same couplet, the use of *putem* create a layer between the text of the poem and the control which is attributed to Cerinthus: Sulpicia need only think (*putem,* 17.4) that Cerinthus wants (*velle*) her to get well. The main verb of the condition for Sulpicia's recovery belongs not to Cerinthus, as the sense would imply, but to the poet herself.

Sulpicia's position in this poem is in all ways ambiguous. She is and is not in control; she is and is not at once heartsick poet-lover and ailing *puella.* She constructs the ambiguities around her own "tired body" (*mea corpora fessa,* 17.2), applying a physical constraint to her fever-as-passion which confuses the metaphor even as it unites her disparate roles around her singular physical manifestation. Her tired body is a *puella's* body is the poet's body, brought once more into her text. The effect recalls 3.13, where "the poet's own body…becomes the site of her texts" so that "we are invited to look *at* the poet *as* the female body" (Milnor 2002, 261). Writing, as a *puella,* of her own *corpora,* Sulpicia figures herself as poet and woman, confusing convention and combining generic contradictions to reveal, once again, the limiting dichotomies of elegy.

5: 3.18

ne tibi sim, mea lux, aeque iam fervida cura,
    ac videor paucos ante fuisse dies,
si quicquam tota commisi stulta iuventa
    cuius me fatear paenituisse magis,
hesterna quam te solum quod nocte reliqui,
    ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum. (3.18)

My light, let me not now be as fiery a care for you
as I seem to have been for the past few days,
if I, foolish, have done anything in my whole youth
which I might confess to have repented more
than that I left you alone last night,
desiring to disguise my burning.

In 3.18, the final poem of the collection, Sulpicia stages one last conflict in her affair. She shifts her reproach from Cerinthus, whose previously inadequate *cura* has apparently become "fiery" (*fervida*, 3.18.1), to herself, having abandoned Cerinthus to conceal her feelings. Scholars have frequently remarked on the apt positioning of this episode, as Sulpicia returns in her final lines to the "theme of poetic truth and its consequences" with which she opened her collection (Milnor 2002, 276). The reappearance of Sulpicia's poetic concerns in the final moments of the elegiac narrative underscores their significance for a woman poet of elegy. In relaying her impulse to conceal her desire, Sulpicia articulates it. Sulpicia's re-focusing of her elegy on herself and her desire coincides with the culmination of her poetic identity as she moves away from conventional elegiac concerns and roles. When she admits to a desire to "conceal" (*dissimulare*, 6) her passion and simultaneously condemns it, she rejects also the concealment of her poetic voice within the confines of elegiac roles.

The events of 3.18 are decidedly grounded within the elegiac narrative. As Lowe (1988, 199) observes, the poem presents as "four moments of experience—the poem-present of *iam* (1), the immediate past of *hesterna…nocte* (5), the short-term past of *paucos ante…dies* (2), and the

long-term past of *tota…iuventa* (3).” This concern with timing is typical for the poems within the narrative proper (3.14-18), in which either *iam* (14.5, 15.2, 16.1, 18.1) or *nunc* (17.2) signals the present and ongoing occurrence of the reported events. In contrast, the programmatic 3.13, which occurs outside the events of the narrative, uses neither adverb or any other specific marker of time. Superficially, then, 3.18 is but the final “crisis” in the reported affair (Santirocco 1979, 233). This crisis, centered on Sulpicia’s paradoxical desire to conceal her desire (*ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum,* 18.6), nevertheless resonates with the concerns of concealment and disclosure of 3.13. Sulpicia does not so much narrate an elegiac episode as restage her opening resolution that it is better to “lay bare” (*nudasse*, 3.13.2) her love than to “cover” it (*texisse,* 1). The question of publication bleeds into Sulpicia’s affair with Cerinthus, underscoring the inevitability that such a question will occur for a *puella*-turned-poet whose literary predecessors do not reveal their own desire.

The focus in 3.13 is on Sulpicia’s commitment to exposing her love despite consequences born out of *fama*. The conviction of that poem is replaced here with some doubt, as Sulpicia admits to experiencing the impulse to conceal her feelings. Her regret (*me fatear paenituisse magis*, 3.18.4) at succumbing to that impulse is in keeping with her resolve from 3.13, but that she succumbs implies an as-yet untold dimension to her original quest for public readership. This conflict is embodied in the juxtaposition of *ardorem* and *cupiens*. Both are words of desire, but only *ardorem* refers to erotic desire; *cupiens* expresses Sulpicia’s wish to “disguise” (*dissimulare,* 6) any erotic urge suggested by *ardorem*. Milnor (2002, 278), commenting on this wordplay, argues that “the truth which the poem tells—a truth which *only* the poem *can* tell—is that Sulpicia desires…to deceive.” The assertion of her erotic feelings is but a consequence of the real

confession: Sulpicia, despite her former embrace of openness (cf. *nudasse,* 3.13.2), felt and acted upon an urge to conceal her desire.

This revelation acts as a foil to Sulpicia's opening assertion, creating ambiguity where resolution had been. Santirocco (1979, 234) proposes that 3.13 "sums up the whole experience," looking backward at the events of 3.18; in this view, the conviction of 3.13 resolves the confusion of 3.18. Santirocco's reading suits the view of 3.13 as a "preface to the reader" for the collection. If we view that poem as an introduction, looking forward to but not anticipating the events of the narrative, then the reader experiences the confusion of 3.18 as a development of the conviction in 3.13. Although Sulpicia troubles her initial resolve, she does not entirely undermine it. Flaschenriem (2005, 185) points out that "in her closing line…the narrator completes the admission that she was afraid to make before," i.e., in referencing her desire to conceal her desire she has, at last, revealed it (*meum ardorem,* 6). Her revelation is more concrete here than in 3.13, as she transitions from the ambiguous and literary *amor* (3.13.1) to the physical *ardor* (18.6), literally "burning." Milnor (2002, 278) observes that the "burning which the word designates would seem to underscore the physicality of desire," especially as the fire imagery recalls the previous poem's love/fever that plagues the poet's "tired body" (*corpora fessa,* 17.2). Sulpicia ultimately asserts her desire in clearer terms even as she reveals complications on the path to that assertion.

Her assertion is no unrestrained confession. Scholars have frequently observed the relationship between the syntactical structure of 3.18 and its theme of disclosure. Whereas Santirocco (1979, 234) suggests that the "runover" between couplets renders the poem a "breathless apology," later analyses focus on the layers of hypotaxis which obscure a straightforward reading. Lowe (1988, 198) identifies the poem's "sub-subordination of syntax"

but states that it results only in a tone of "introspective solemnity." Flaschenriem (2005, 184), similarly focusing on Sulpicia's use of "dense and rather complicated syntax," argues that the poem reads as "a statement articulated against tremendous inner resistance." In her view, Sulpicia intentionally obscures her language to "preserve a kind of privacy" even as she discloses her passion. Milnor (2002, 277) focuses on the "highly structured form" of the poem, suggesting that the "contrast between the circumlocution of the poet's voice and the clarity of the poetic form" model Sulpicia's conflicting impulses to conceal or disclose her desire.

The poem's circumlocution and clarity are not discrete qualities, as Milnor proposes, but aspects of the same linguistic feature. Both point to an intense regulation of thought. As we saw in 3.13 (and more subtly in 16 and 17), Sulpicia's layered and somewhat circuitous syntax makes it impossible to overlook the written nature of the poem and, by extension, the author who wrote it. Sulpicia regulates the consumption of her articulated desire, by Cerinthus and by her readers; her desire is revealed on terms dictated by her structured language. The effect is less for Flaschenriem's suggested preservation of privacy than for a preservation of poetic authority. Sulpicia rejects privacy from the start; to seek it in her language would be a form of the dissemblance that she here renounces. Rather than hide in her language, she filters herself and her thoughts through it. She is always once-removed from her readers. She "seems" (*videor,* 3.18.2) to have been a concern for Cerinthus; she "might confess" (*fatear,* 4) to regret something more than leaving Cerinthus; her desire is embedded as the object of a complementary infinitive (*ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum,* 6). She refuses to commit even to the apology, which is couched in a conditional; she need only be less of a care for Cerinthus *if* she has done anything more regretful than what she has already done. Her regret is apparent (*me…paenituisse,* 4), but couched inside both condition and comparison. Her reserve is embodied in the qualifying *fatear*

(4): she "might confess" to regretting a past deed, but hardly promises to lay everything from her "whole youth" (*tota…iuventa,* 3) out for consideration. Sulpicia editorializes every aspect of her revelation, highlighting her authorial ability to say or omit any detail.

Sulpicia's poetic presence achieves prominence beyond the regulation of her language. For the first time since 3.13, 3.18 avoids third-person references to Sulpicia. Instead it contains a multiplicity of first-person verbs (*sim,* 1; *videor fuisse,* 2; *commisi,* 3; *fatear,* 4; *reliqui,* 5; *cupiens dissimulare,* 6) which emphasize Sulpicia's role as speaker within her poems. Flaschenriem (2005, 185) points out that three out of the four indicative verbs of which Sulpicia is subject occur in this poem. The fourth, *relinquo* (14.8), is echoed by *reliqui* (18.5), which is in the same metrical position at the end of the final hexameter of the poem. The echo might illustrate the shift in agency; although she is unhappy with her actions, there are no longer other forces dictating her actions. While in 3.14 she was forced to abandon her "mind and senses" (*animum sensusque,* 14.8), here she is influenced only by her own personal desires (*cupiens,* 18.6). 3.18 is in fact the only poem to feature Sulpicia as the sole agent. The focus of her collection narrows, in its final moments, to "the poet alone" (Pearcy 2006, 34). Flaschenriem (2005, 184) uses the fact that the poem is "less haunted by the imagined presence of others" to suggest that Sulpicia's final assertion is a "private disclosure of her passion to her beloved." Certainly the onlookers whom Sulpicia evokes in other final couplets (*omnibus…nobis,* 14.3; *solliciti,* 15.5; even *nostra…mala,* 16.6) do not intrude here. But their absence, rather than affording privacy, only serves to sharpen the focus on Sulpicia and her desire (*ardorem…meum,* 18.6).

Cerinthus is present as well, but returned to a passive role (*tibi,* 1; *te solum,* 5). Whereas Sulpicia so recently described herself as Cerinthus' *puella* (*tuae…puellae,* 17.1), now she claims Cerinthus as her "light" (*mea lux,* 18.1). She even overtakes his *cura* with which these final three

poems have been so concerned. The *cura* is always Cerinthus' (*tibi cura,* 16.3; *tibi…cura,* 17.1; *tibi…cura,* 18.1), but now Sulpicia *is* that *cura* (*sim*, 1). As Flaschenriem (2005, 186) points out, Sulpicia holds off on acknowledging her own desire by first referencing Cerinthus' "fiery care" (*fervida cura,* 1). By identifying directly as that care, rather than as its object (cf. *tuae pia cura puellae,* 17.2), Sulpicia claims an active role even in another's desire. She underscores the effect with the qualifying *videor* (2): the poem concerns itself not with his emotions themselves but with what they seem to be, which is equivalent to how much Sulpicia seems to mean to him. And how much, really, does she mean? Here his care is "fiery," but recently it was lacking; in conjunction with the specificity of "the past few days" (*paucos ante…dies,* 2), this detail is a potential nod to Cerinthus' so recently lackluster behavior. Sulpicia's power as poet is foremost: by writing about the affair, she alone controls how Cerinthus and his actions are perceived.

As Sulpicia claims a more prominent poetic presence, she leaves behind the roles of elegy. The word *puella* makes no appearance. The omission does not obscure her gender, which is reiterated with the feminine adjective *stulta* (18.3). That adjective, as well as the reference to her "youth" (*iuventa,* 3) ensure that Sulpicia continues to stand apart from the canonical elegist. The situation itself is alien, Sulpicia's conflict stemming—in light of 3.13—from tensions of gender and concerns of *pudor* which the male elegists do not know. Sulpicia no longer purports to adopt the conventions of elegy. This is appropriate: as she rejects the dissemblance of her desire, so too she rejects dissemblance of her poetic identity. The role of *puella,* and even that of elegiac poet-lover, are disguises past their usefulness. By the end of 3.18, she does not conceal herself or her desire, using her poetry as a vehicle to claim both her passion and her unique position as a woman poet.

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