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Sulpicia's (Corpo)reality: Elegy, Authorship, and the Body in {Tibullus} 3.13

> I thought that being a Poem one's self precluded the writing Poems, but perceive the Mistake.
>
> Emily Dickinson, *Letters* 2.413

The first lines of the first poem in Sulpicia's small collection occupy a central place in the growing body of scholarship on the work of Rome's earliest, and perhaps only, extant female poet.[1] This is perhaps not surprising, since they appear to be concerned with exactly that question which has long exercised critics seeking to explain Sulpicia's anomalous position—namely that of an educated Roman woman who finds a voice in the masculine discourse of Latin poetry, speaking openly and frankly of her own erotic experiences.

> Tandem venit amor, qualem texisse pudori
> quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.
>
> At last love has come—a love of a kind such that the rumor
> that I have veiled it would be more shameful to me

than the story that I have exposed it to someone.[2]

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1. There appear to be two lines preserved by another, later, Sulpicia, who was a satirist, on whom see Merriam 1991; Parker 1992; Hallett 1992; and Richlin 1992. Interestingly, the "second" Sulpicia also makes reference to her own naked body in the extant fragment. There are a few other scattered lines from women authors during the high empire: for a comprehensive collection and discussion, see Hemelrijk 1999: 146–84.

2. These lines are difficult to render gracefully in English, and I have opted for accuracy over beauty. Many translations choose, for the sake of clarity, to leave out *fama* in line 2 and render the

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The language which the poet uses here for the difference between publication and silence is expressed in terms of dressing and undressing, *texisse* and *nudasse*; Sulpicia is either to clothe demurely her passion for Cerinthus or reveal it in its nakedness. This focus on the physical is reinforced by the invocation of *pudor* as the central force that dictates poetic behavior; the word's standard association with chastity or sexual license has been neatly redeployed to point instead to the difference between speaking and refusing to speak. In these first lines of her first poem, therefore, Sulpicia draws a close connection between the poetic display of her love and the display of her own body: to speak publicly is to appear naked before the reader, to show herself without any of the protective covering demanded by society to preserve the modesty of the good woman. Anxiety over the effects of publication are not unusual in Latin erotic poetry: from Catullus to Propertius and Ovid, poets often express concern that they personally will be judged harshly because of the content of their poetry. But Sulpicia's use of metaphoric nakedness and the social dictate of *pudor* seem especially pronounced, particularly because they raise the specter of the "loose woman" so ideologically prominent in early imperial culture. Critics have thus seen Sulpicia as expressing here a genuine, and well-founded, concern about representing in poetry the truth of her passion for her beloved Cerinthus, a concern which finds its natural expression in the bodily metaphor. 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; in body and spirit, she no longer belongs only to herself but to anyone who might pick up a book.[3]

It is perhaps the very "naturalness" of Sulpicia's opening words that should make us wary. As critical work on the male poets has pointed out, it is dangerous to assess any elegiac statement as transparently reflecting the views or emotions of its author—most especially when that statement says exactly what we would expect to hear.[4] Yet, although other aspects of Sulpicia's poetry have been amply and admirably explored in recent critical investigations, there has been little interrogation of the self-embodied poetics to which Sulpicia gestures at the beginning of 3.13.[5] I would argue, however, that Sulpicia's choice to open her collection with an invocation of female nudity is significant, not just insofar as it

infinitives dependent on it as the subjects of *sit* rather than indirect statement (e.g. Balmer 1996: 98: "At last love has come along, and now it seems my greater shame / to cover up than bare all, or so I should believe"). 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. Lowe 1988: 203–205; Keith 1997: 299–300.

4. See, e.g., Allen 1950; Clarke 1976; Glatt 1991: esp. 165–69; Kennedy 1993: esp. 64–82; Sharrock 2000.

5. Although Flaschenriem 1999: 38 writes, "[Sulpicia's] assertion of candor deftly reworks a recurrent structuring image in Roman elegy, that of the partially or provocatively clothed woman," she does not explore the ways the trope is used in the work of the male elegists. Flaschenriem takes the metaphor as a manifestation of the poet's "anxieties" about publication.

foregrounds the gender of the author, but also in how it draws on elegy's own tropes and traditions to negotiate the "problem" which its author poses to elegiac discourse. Many critics, particularly feminist critics, have drawn attention to the ways in which canonical elegy obsessively returns to constructions of a woman's body as the representative site of the poetic text, from Ovid's use of the myth of Pygmalion to Propertius' verbal "construction" of Cynthia's body in 1.2.[6] In Sulpicia, however, there is an obvious and significant twist: instead of the physical form of the female beloved serving as the object of poetic representation, it is the poet's own body that becomes the site of her texts.[7] Whereas Propertius and Ovid create an "other" physical form to be simultaneously art work and *puella*—the perfect woman who both gives life to, and is given life by, the erotic world of elegy—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. This is a dramatic literary gesture, and one which, I think, indicates that Sulpicia is not simply adopting elegy's language and forms, but rather transforming them, in order to expose and expand the masculine definition of elegiac authorship.

There has been considerable critical discussion, particularly over the past two decades, of the gendered mechanics of Roman elegy. Judith Hallett, arguably, inaugurated the debate in modern scholarship by arguing that the genre represents a form of "counter-cultural feminism," which empowers women by showing the ways in which the willful, self-possessed mistress dominates the servile male narrator.[8] Subsequently, however, other critics have disagreed, noting that whatever roles women play in elegy, they play at the pleasure of male poetic discourse, serving its needs rather than those of a liberatory politics: "elegiac eroticism ... [represents] the persistent discursive mastery of the male narrator over his female object of desire. ... The female is employed in the text only as a means of defining the male."[9] Most recently, critical work has argued that the elegiac author is engaged in an ongoing negotiation with the gendered ideals of the social world around him, as he plays with his self-representation as both weak and

6. This approach was pioneered by Maria Wyke (1987a and b; 1989a and b). Also, Gamel 1989: esp. 197–200. More recently, see Downing 1990; Elsner 1991; Sharrock 1991a and b; Gold 1993; Greene 1995; Fredrick 1997; Flaschenriem 1997.

7. Although there is no place for a discussion here, it is worth noting that Ovid gives his depiction of a female poet the name "Perilla," which is surely a joke: it is the female form of Perillus, an artist who was physically consumed by his own art (he created a hollow bronze bull for the tyrant of Syracuse, for the purpose of roasting people alive inside; the tyrant made its creator the bull's first victim). Ovid uses the story once in the *Ars Amatoria* (1.653–55) and twice in the *Tristia* (3.11.39–54 and 5.1.53–54), and in each case makes it clear that he understands it as a paradigm of poetic production: his citation of the myth in the *Ars* concludes, *infelix inbuit auctor opus* ("the unlucky author christened the work": 654). There has been no discussion of Perilla in this context, but on Perillus, see Skinner 1993a. Hallett 1990 argues for similarities between Sulpicia and the depiction of Perilla.

8. Hallett 1984.

9. Wyke 1994: 118. Similarly, Kennedy 1993: 64–82.

strong and continually struggles to "prove" his manliness within the constraints of the genre: "the elegist must be simultaneously potent and impotent, and that paradox exposes the tensions in the Roman image of masculinity. . . . Roman elegy is not so much an 'obstinately male genre,' I suggest, as a problematically male genre."[10]

Indeed, it has been argued that this struggle with gendered ideals was one of the circumstances which allowed Sulpicia to find her voice in elegy: since the masculinity of the elegiac narrating position is already compromised, the presence of a female author merely adds another twist to the mix.[11] Yet, while it is certainly true that there was never an easy or unproblematic relationship between the authorial position in elegy and Roman ideals of manhood, I think that we must be aware of the ways in which Sulpicia's poetic voice is destabilizing to social and literary norms beyond canonical elegy's usual play with gendered positionality. It has been pointed out that the masculinity of the elegiac poet is necessarily negotiated in relation to "other" identities which are represented in his poetry, over which his position as narrator gives him power: "by identifying with the slave in his role as lover, and by using the mistress to characterize his poetic voice, the author gains the 'advantages' he sees in these objectified figures, but also maintains his mastery and masculinity by asserting his control over them."[12] Thus, even if the canonical elegists must negotiate the gender-complicating factor that they are the disempowered victims of their mistresses within their poetic love affairs, nevertheless they may always fall back on their right to speak—a right which is built on the hierarchy of poet over poetic object and the "discursive mastery" always present in the position of author. If, then, the tricks, tropes, and topoi of elegiac authorship are set up to negotiate the question of what it means for a man to "take the woman's part," the appearance of Sulpicia does not simply ask what it means for a woman to take the man's part, but how a woman even goes about finding the tools to ask the question. In other words, if the act of speaking is itself coded male, claiming a feminine authorial persona is far more complicated than claiming a masculine one—even if that claim of masculinity is always already problematic.

Thus, discussions of elegiac play with the meaning of authorial power must acknowledge that the stakes in both claiming and refusing it are different for men and for women; for an elegist to speak, not in a woman's voice, but as a woman poet, is to enter into the poetic conversation at a point quite distinct from her male counterparts. If Propertius, Ovid, and Tibullus are understood to be seeking the

10. Sharrock 1995: 166. Cf. Flaschenriem 1997; McCarthy 1998; Fineberg 1999; Janan 1999; Miller and Platter 1999. Cf. Hallett 1996 for a discussion of the unstable phallic properties of certain erotic poetry. Greene 1998 nuances the question by arguing that Propertius embraces the patriarchal discourse of elegy, whereas Ovid attempts to criticize it by laying it bare for the reader. Cf. Greene 1999.

11. Wyke 1994: 114–15.

12. McCarthy 1998: 178. Cf. Gold 1993: 88–92; Greene 1998: 67–92.

means of representing themselves as both elegiac poets and "real men," Sulpicia is seeking a way to be both a poet and a "real woman"[13]—yet 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. The representational structures of elegy do not, in this sense, allow for the presence of a female poet—even if those structures are always open to critique and negotiation within the genre's canonical discourse. Sulpicia's task, therefore, is not simply to take possession of elegy's masculine speaking position, forcing her way through the gendered paradigms around which it is framed, but actually to create a new language of elegiac authorship, one which works to reconfigure the genre's own idioms around the figure of the female "ego." In order to do this, she draws on aspects of both the male and the female halves of the literary equation for her self-representation, refusing to be pinned to either side, and thus confounds categories not only of elegiac gender, but of speaker and spoken object, of author and text.[14] It is this process, I maintain, to which the first poem in Sulpicia's collection—and, in particular, its evocative opening metaphor—is an index, serving to introduce not so much the "personal" concerns of the woman who speaks publicly as the interpretive problem created by the eruption of the female author into elegiac discourse.[15] As in the quotation from Emily Dickinson's letters above, the question Sulpicia raises is whether it is possible to both "be" a poem and to write one, and what, in the end, such a paradox may tell us about the inner workings of the elegiac machine.

MATERIAL GIRLS: SULPICIA, REALISM, AND THE ELEGIAC WOMAN

The opening metaphor of [Tibullus] 3.13, which represents poetic production as bodily revelation, does not exist in isolation. Indeed, the rest of Sulpicia's first poem underscores its opening metaphor by repeatedly gesturing to the author as an embodied presence, both symbolically and actually: love is dropped into her lap (*in nostrum deposuit . . . sinum*: 4); her poetry is referred to as her pleasures (*mea gaudia*: 5); the last line is clearly a reference—though critics have been reluctant to admit it—to the sexual nature of her relationship with her lover.[16] The final couplet even makes reference to the act of self-representation as *vultus*

13. I am indebted to Nancy Worman for helping me to formulate this point.

14. Hallett 1989: 69–72 makes this point, arguing that Sulpicia seeks to portray herself as both "same" and "other" in traditional elegiac terms.

15. Tschiedel 1992: esp. 101–102 makes the point that we must find a way to understand Sulpicia's poetic voice as distinctively female without resorting to paternalistic praises of her supposedly sincere expressions of emotion.

16. As Skoie 2000: 302 and n.42 points out, the euphemism "to be with" (*esse cum*) for sexual contact is common in Latin, and is commented upon by Varro at *LL* 6.80. See Adams 1982: 177.

componere—to create an appearance, certainly, but also literally "to compose a face." The persistent corporeality of poem 13, moreover, is carried over into the later poems as a continuing thematic concern with certain everyday embodied experiences: poems 14 and 15, for instance, present themselves as written around the occasion of the poet's birthday, and lament the physical separation of herself and Cerinthus, as she is "carried off" to the country by her guardian Messalla (*hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo*: 14.7). *Abducta* is the language of rape,[17] a neatly ironic use of the word since the young woman is being carried away from sexual contact rather than into it. These poems concerning the poet's day of birth are then mirrored by 17, in which Sulpicia laments her own illness and approaching death. Sickness is a common metaphor for love in the canonical elegists, a trope here "realized" so that the fever of desire appears as an actual disease which torments the poet (*mea nunc vexat corpora fessa calor*: 17.2) and threatens to kill her.[18]

Sulpicia's apparent honesty about her physical experiences has long impressed critics, and is one of the factors which led early scholars both to praise the authentically female quality of her authorial voice and to sympathize with her anxiety about using it to describe her love affair.[19] More recent scholarship has moved away from biographical or essentialist readings of Sulpicia, choosing instead to consider her as a poet working within the constraints of a particular literary genre rather than just as a woman "really" in love.[20] Nevertheless, it is true that her poetry offers an almost unparalleled example of what has been called Roman elegy's "reality effect," namely the ways in which the genre uses aspects of everyday experience to create the illusion of authenticity.[21] In addition to their

17. Thus, Amata imagines that Aeneas is about to abscond *abducta virgine praedo* (Virgil *Aeneid* 7.362) and Juno similarly charges that he *gremiis abducere pactas* (10.79). The word is common for rape in Plautus, as at *Persa* 522 (*adduxit . . . virginem, furtivam, abductam ex Arabia penitissuma*). See Adams 1982: 174–75 and *OLD abduco* 5a for further citations.

18. Fredericks 1976: 765; Santirocco 1979: 233. Sulpicia is not, of course, the first ancient poet to represent the physical effects of love as an illness, a trope perhaps most famously employed in Sappho's fragment 31. Other examples in Latin poetry include Catullus 76, Horace *Odes* 1.13.5–6, and Propertius 1.5.21–22. Ovid's entire *Remedia Amoris* proceeds from the metaphorical equation of love and sickness. See Booth 1997: 153–60.

19. Thus, K. F. Smith's well-known 1913 commentary notes, "Sulpicia is a woman, she realizes, as only a woman can, the consequences of exposure, she dreads them, as only a woman can and should. . . . What could be more natural and more distinctively feminine . . . than that Sulpicia should measure the depth of her love in terms of her dread of the consequences if it were discovered?" (506). For an important and interesting critique of Smith's reading within its author's own historical context, see Skoie 2000. Other explicitly realist readings include Currie 1983.

20. This new trend in Sulpician scholarship is often traced back to Matthew S. Santirocco's 1979 article "Sulpicia Reconsidered." Cf. Lowe 1988, defending her on the charge of "feminine Latin"; Roessel 1990, noting the literary connections of the name of Sulpicia's beloved, which echoes the pseudonyms established by the male elegiac poets; Yardley 1990, on a parallel usage in Sulpicia and Catullus. On Sulpicia's historical, as well as literary, connections to other writers of elegy, see Davies 1973.

21. On realism in the male elegists, see Kennedy 1993: 1–23; Sharrock 2000.

focus on physicality, Sulpicia's poems are short, their discourse immediate and emotional, the events depicted readily identifiable and not in any way extraordinary. We find here seemingly true-to-life sentiments, as the poems move from exuberant joy to unhappy longing, from jealous anger to petulance to repentance; her texts also display an abiding interest in the particulars of everyday material life, such as the cold river which flows through Arretrium, the wool basket carried by Sulpicia's rival, and the "little tablets" to which she entrusts her poems. Such authenticating details are common in the work of Sulpicia's fellow elegists; yet her poetry also refuses, at least on its surface, to provide us with many of the clues on which we rely elsewhere to show how much of elegy is just a literary game. The self-conscious literariness of the work of the male poets—revealed in their mythological allusions, fantastic situations, digressions, puns, elaborately stylized or programmatic language—is not found in Sulpicia.[22] Even her complicated and occasionally impenetrable diction and syntax, which led in years past to the charge of "feminine Latin" or literary inexperience,[23] may be read as a deliberate move against the linguistic norms of elegy, as a refusal to sound like a professionally polished poet.[24] Sulpicia's use of embodied experience in her poems is thus a part of their larger realist discourse, as she fills them with material details which help them to appear emotionally genuine and unmediated by literary concerns.

This use of the body to underscore the "reality" of the poetic scenario being performed is not a literary construction found only in Sulpicia. The metaphoric equation of an author's *corpus* with his poetic *corpus*—the linguistic overlap between physical body and body of work being as common in Latin as in English—means that writers of many different genres in Latin come to be imagined as bound up materially with their books.[25] Ovid appears as an especially embodied author, from the lover's body in the *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*, to the unstable textual body of the *Metamorphoses*,[26] to the exiled body tormented by cold and barbarians in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*.[27] Indeed, in the last examples, we might compare with Sulpicia the ways in which Ovid employs the sufferings of his body to underscore the reality of his exile and its effects on his poetry. Thus, for instance, the author continuously apologizes for "inferior" poetry written under

22. Merriam 1990: 95.

23. See Probst 1992 for a recent discussion of this old question.

24. Like Ovid's well-publicized loss of Latin and literary expertise when he is banished to live among barbarians (on which see Williams 1994: 50–99), Sulpicia's "inability" to express herself may be understood as the product of choice rather than incompetence.

25. Farrell 1999: 128–33.

26. Farrell 1999 argues that the rejection of the body and the book-roll is connected in the *Metamorphoses* with the poet's quest for immortality, as he turns from material things connected with time, change, and decay in favor of the more eternal spoken word. For other discussions of the importance of embodiment to the *Met.*, see Segal 1998; Theodorakopoulos 1999; and Gildenhard and Zissos 1999.

27. Hexter 1999.

inferior physical circumstances, as at the close of the first book of *Tristia* (*non haec in nostris, ut quondam, scripsimus hortis . . . iactor in indomito brumali luce profundo . . .*: 1.11.37, 39). Building on this theme, there is a nicely Ovidian moment in *Epistulae ex Ponto* 1.2.25–40 where the poet wishes for the physical fates of various characters in the *Metamorphoses* (to be turned into stone like Niobe, or a tree like the sisters of Phaethon) in order that he should escape the "real" sufferings of exile.[28] Indeed, rather ironically, Ovid's complaints of the harsh, and apparently continuous, winter in Tomis led at least one scholar in the past to doubt the historical reality of the poet's exile, since the region is not known to have a particularly extreme climate.[29] Such a critical response, although misguided, is testimony to the power of the "corpo-realistic" gestures on which Ovid builds the reader's belief in his catalogue of personal woes—gestures which, nevertheless, should be recognized as one of the tools which may be used in elegy's sophisticated play between representation and reality. In this sense, Ovid's exile poetry and Sulpicia's collection are certainly emerging from the same elegiac tradition in the ways that they foreground the trope of the poet's embodiment as a means to guarantee the truth of his or her tale.[30]

On the other hand, however, Sulpicia's performative "revelation" of a woman's body—even if it is her own—also points toward a different tradition in Roman elegy, a genre in which the female form is one of its most powerful thematic images. In several important articles during the late 1980s, Maria Wyke argued that the physical descriptions of elegiac mistresses found in poets such as Propertius—the "information" which has led critics in the past to produce word-pictures of a tall, blonde, dark-eyed, and slim-fingered Cynthia—must be understood as a realist literary device rather than historical reality itself.[31] By offering the reader the illusion that he or she can see through the poetry to the real, flesh-and-blood woman who lies behind the text, the poet seeks to guarantee the authenticity of the experience represented. Thus, for instance, when he attempts to persuade Cynthia in 1.2 that she has no need of cosmetics, since *nudus Amor*

28. Williams 1994: esp. 3–49 makes the point that Ovid's travails in Tomis are thoroughly imbued with an epic flavor, thus foregrounding the literariness of the experience. It is, however, the play between such artistic gestures and the seriousness of the extra-textual reality represented that gives the exile poetry its complexity and power—Ovid is not simply exploring the landscape of epic but the representational tropes of suffering.

29. Fitton Brown 1985 offers as evidence the 1979 average temperatures, day and night, in Tomis as provided by the Romanian National Tourist Office. He concludes that "unlike some other parts of Romania, [Tomis] has long, hot summers and short, mild winters—its climate is not altogether dissimilar from that of Central Italy" (19).

30. Connolly 2000 argues that elegy is "enmeshed in a deeply-rooted prejudice against the body" because its "elite aesthetic . . . must erase, defer, delay, and deny the pleasures that are represented as deriving from practices that are common in every sense of the word" (95). Although I am not sure that I see such a "prejudice" manifesting itself across the board in elegiac discourse, I do agree with the suggestion that it is the very universality of embodied experience that makes it such a powerful (and difficult to recognize) trope in poets such as Ovid and Sulpicia.

31. Wyke 1987b.

formae non amat artificem ("naked Love does not love a fabricator of form": 8), Propertius concludes by assuring her that poetry is all the decoration which she needs to keep his love, *uni si qua placet, culta puella sat est; / cum tibi praesertim Phoebus sua carmina donet* (26–27). The point, and perhaps joke, of the poem is the rejection of art in favor of art, of the fake Cynthia created by cosmetology for the "really" beautiful one found in poetry. The artificiality of rouge and hair dye is stripped away to leave the naked female body at the heart of the poem, the vanishing point of poetic artifice; Cynthia is represented as being authentically present in the literary products of her lover in ways that she cannot be in the cosmetic fabrications of her own hand.[32] Similarly, when Ovid remarks at the end of *Amores* 3.12, *fecunda licentia vatum / obligat historica nec sua verba fide* ("the fertile invention of poets / does not bind its words with historical veracity": 41–42), his choice of the word *fecunda* makes the point: poetry does not owe allegiance to conventional notions of history and truth, but rather gives "birth" to its own version of the physical world, one which creates, rather than being created by, the female body.[33]

The point, therefore, is not so much that canonical elegy objectifies the female body, seeking to satisfy the reader's desire with a word-picture of a beautiful woman, but that the female body is the "material" of elegy, as representation sets itself up against the real by producing its own version of women's corporeality. As has been argued of Ovid's use of the myth of Pygmalion, the power of an artist may be measured by his ability to create—in art and in reality, in art *as* reality—the woman he desires.[34] When the opening couplet of Sulpicia's elegiac collection uses the naked female body to represent the revelation of her love affair, then, she may not be articulating her anxiety about exposure as much as drawing on one of the tropes of Latin elegy, which sees the body, particularly the female body, as the guarantor of poetic truth. Like the elegiac mistresses cited above, Sulpicia's physical form is seen as implicated in the poetry, the "real" object revealed in the process of telling the poetic tale. On the one hand, therefore, the poet's body at the beginning of 3.13 is made to stand for the authenticity of the poetic story about to be narrated, a topos seen not only here but in the poetry of the male elegists as well; on the other, the *female* body in elegy holds a different, but no less generically overdetermined, significance as the most material artistic product of elegiac discourse. If we are tempted to believe in the truth of Sulpicia's female body, we cannot forget that the tropes of elegy see the physical figure of Woman as inseparable from the literary discourse which brings it into being—the mistress is the "matter" of the text, that which represents the triumph of literary art over

32. Sharrock 2000: 272–75; cf. Zetzel 1996 who argues that Cynthia's baldness in 1.2 may represent the over-stylization of poetry. This is a different reading from mine, but still one which underscores the use of the female body as a metaphor for poetic choices.

33. Greene 1998: 112 notes the feminine overtones of *fecunda*.

34. Most notably, Sharrock 1991a and b; cf. Elsner 1991 and Downing 1990.

extra-poetic reality. If Sulpicia is only as real as the usual elegiac mistress, how real could she possibly be? The ways in which the poet locates her physical self at the heart of her texts is thus a double-edged literary gesture: it both appears as powerfully authenticating, as the poet speaks to us out of her own, true, "corporeal" experience, and simultaneously assures us that the "life" we are about to read is poetic to its core, its author so profoundly implicated in the traditions of her chosen genre that she becomes embodied as simply another elegiac woman. Sulpicia's body thus stands for both the authenticity and the constructedness of the poetic story which follows.

SULPICIA'S CORPUS

We may see, therefore, that the body metaphor which opens 3.13 is not only far more complicated than it appears on the surface, but that it has implications for reading the rest of Sulpicia's six poems. Yet I think that it is also worth considering the ways in which the first poem as a whole, and not simply its opening lines, addresses itself to the paradox represented by the female elegiac poet, and uses representations of the body to negotiate questions about authorship and the "truth" of Sulpicia's elegiac experience. It is difficult to avoid the question of gender and poetic authenticity in reading Sulpicia's poetry, not least because of the form in which her poetry was transmitted to later generations.[35] Our point of entry into her work is mediated by the five so-called *amicus Sulpiciae* poems that precede it in Tibullus Book 3, which offer a competing, or complementary, Sulpician poetic narrative, two written in the voice of the poet herself and three in that of an outside observer of the ongoing love affair with Cerinthus. As the poems are presented in the final book of the *Corpus Tibullianum*, therefore, it is necessary to read through the amicus poems to reach Sulpicia—an extremely peculiar circumstance unparalleled in the canons of Roman lyric poetry.[36] The questions raised by the amicus poems are many, but must, I think, be considered separately from those raised by the poems by Sulpicia herself—not so much because the two sets of texts are "really" of different authorship, but because that is the way that they perform themselves.[37] Given the stylistic and linguistic disparities between the

35. Hinds 1987: 39–41.

36. Luck 1969: 110–14; Fredericks 1976; Hinds 1987.

37. The difficulties of the amicus poems have led to an ongoing debate over their authorship, with most critics assuming that all five must be by the same author, who is not Sulpicia. Others, however, insist that the arguments traditionally made against Sulpician authorship of, at the very least, 3.9 and 11 are rather flimsy, and rest on highly gendered assumptions about the nature of poetry and the poetic voice (Parker 1994). Holtzberg 1999 is of the opinion that all of the poems, including both those of the amicus and those apparently by "Sulpicia" herself, are by the young Tibullus. For the reasons noted, I do not think it especially likely that all of the poems are the work of the same hand. "Proving" female authorship is a notoriously difficult and vexed question, and often gets tied up in the very biological essentialism which, I argue, [Tibullus] 3.13 both uses and critiques. I do hope that I have outlined here some of the ways in which Sulpicia's performance

work of "Sulpicia" and that of the amicus, even those which are written in the voice of the poetess herself, it seems to me clear that we as readers are meant to *think* that they were authored by two separate people.[38] While this may be a fiction—indeed, perhaps a fiction through which the reader is supposed to see—it still seems safe to say that the two groups of poems are interested in different literary issues.

On the other hand, if we may legitimately accept the amicus at the very least as a reader of Sulpicia[39]—one of the earliest and perhaps best—it is worth taking brief note of "his" perspective on the subject of her poetic embodiment. Like the later poems, the amicus poems too are concerned with particularly physical experiences, in fact echoing, to a significant extent, the exact subjects represented by Sulpicia herself: 3.10 concerns, possibly, the same sickness described by the poetess in 3.17; 3.18 and 19 are a pair of birthday poems, one for each of the lovers. Perhaps most interestingly, the first amicus poem opens, *Sulpicia est tibi culta tuis, Mars magne, kalendis*,[40] and is entirely taken up with a description and praise of the poet's appearance and dress. As Stephen Hinds has remarked, there are some striking poetic reversals in 3.8: the celebration on the kalends of Mars was the Matronalia, the Roman festival of matrons, surely not an appropriate place to locate a young woman about to begin an elegiac love affair.[41] Sulpicia is thus, in a sense, "dressed up" in this first poem as a respectable married woman, which sets up the literary transgression about to be seen in her emergence as a poet rather than the usual elegiac *puella*.

Indeed, inasmuch as it is entirely concerned with Sulpicia's clothing and bodily ornament, the first of the amicus poems stands as a counterpoint to the first of Sulpicia's own poems, which, as I have noted, opens with the invocation of the poet's nudity as a metaphor for the poetic truth about to be told. On one level, we might say that 3.9 thus neatly represents the relationship between the texts "about" Sulpicia and those "really" by her: the decorative clothing of the amicus poems gives way to the naked reality of the poetess' own voice. Yet a closer examination of [Tibullus] 3.9 seems to point to a more complex view of how ornament—physical or elegiac—works to conceal and reveal poetic identity. At 3.8.9–15, the amicus poet moves from the particular appearance of Sulpicia on

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of femininity within her poetry is distinct from the performance of femininity in, for instance, Ovid's *Heroides*, although both draw on some of the same poetic tropes. In this sense, I think that it is appropriate to assert that Sulpicia is beginning from a different point from her male counterparts in approaching elegiac womanhood and self-representation, which may have something to do with the fact of differently gendered real-world experiences.

38. We may note, for instance, that the shortest of the amicus poems (3.11 and 12) are each 20 lines long; the longest of the Sulpician group, 3.13, is 10. The poetic style of 8–11, which employs numerous elegiac tropes and mythological allusions, is quite distinct from 13–18, but both groups contain poems on Sulpicia's illness (10 and 17) and her birthday (12 and 14).

39. Fredericks 1976; Hinds 1987.

40. "Sulpicia has dressed herself up for your kalends, great Mars."

41. Hinds 1987: 32–33.

the Matronalia to a more general praise of her ability to embody beauty, no matter what she wears.

> Seu solvit crines, fusis decet esse capillis:
> seu compsit, comptis est veneranda comis.
> Urit, seu Tyria voluit procedere palla:
> urit, seu nivea candida veste venit.
> Talis in aetherio felix Vertumnus Olympo
> mille habet ornatus, mille decenter habet.
>
> If she loosens her hair, there is loveliness in hair let down;
> if she puts it up, she must be admired for her fancy hair style.
> She sets you afire, if she has thought to go out in a purple dress;
> she sets you afire, if she comes forth dressed in a snow white robe.
> Thus, on high Olympus, fortunate Vertumnus
> has a thousand forms of dress, and wears the thousand fittingly.

Vertumnus, a male god who sometimes dresses like a woman, seems at first a strange choice for comparison here—although he makes more sense if we accept the idea that 3.8 is meant to represent the "disguise" of Sulpicia as a matron rather than an elegiac poet-*puella*. Vertumnus, after all, serves exactly this purpose in Propertius 4.2, where he famously signals the gender and genre transgressions of the poet in the final book of elegies on "patriotic" themes.[42] Yet, as recent critical work has pointed out,[43] when Propertius has the god remark that he can be a girl in Coan silk as easily as a man in a toga, the point is not that Vertumnus is a man who can dress up like a woman, but that he can be either man or woman depending on what he wears.[44] Propertius is articulating the radical instability of Vertumnus' gendered identity, which does not exist except insofar as it transmits the "gender" of the artifice which clothes it. Thus, the image of Vertumnus in the first amicus poem may stand not for the idea that poets and poetry may be masked as someone or something else, but rather for the ways in which poetry actually constitutes

42. Although I am not arguing for a direct reference here between [Tibullus] 3.8 and Propertius 4.2, it is possible that the author of the amicus poems was familiar with Propertius' fourth book. Tibullus' second book was probably published close to the end of the author's life in 19/18 BCE, and it is generally agreed that the poems of Book 3 are later than his, perhaps by a great deal—Hinds 1987 thinks the amicus poems are post-Ovidian. Propertius 4, on the other hand, was probably published not long after 16 BCE, so that, even allowing a gap of only 3 or 4 years between Tibullus 2 and 3, [Tibullus] 3.8 could post-date the publication of Propertius' Vertumnus poem.

43. Shea 1988; Debrouhun 1994.

44. As Debrohun 1994: 55 remarks, "Vertumnus is never required to have two different identities at the same time. . . . Without clothing or props, he has no identity."

identity. The point is not that the elegiac *puella* Sulpicia may hide beneath the clothing of a modest and well-bred matron; rather, it is that she may be either matron or *puella*, old or young, chaste or promiscuous, depending on the whim of poet and poetry.[45]

The first of the amicus poems, therefore, offers a vision of how we should "read" Sulpicia's female body—not as something hidden beneath the decorative flourishes of elegy, through which we must read to get to the facts of her story, but as something actually produced within elegy, a poetic construct inseparable from the structures of representation. Rather than pointing to the "truth" which will come later in Sulpicia's own poetry, the first amicus poem thus foregrounds the instability of embodiment and elegiac identity in ways which will be more fully explored by the poetess herself in 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.

At last love has come—a love of a kind such that the rumor
that I have veiled it would be more shameful to me
than the story that I have exposed it to someone.
Cytherea, persuaded by my muses,
has brought and deposited him in my bosom.
Venus has paid off her promises: let that person tell my joys,
of whom it will be said that he does not have his own.
I would not wish to entrust something to sealed tablets,
so that no one reads me before the one who is mine.
But it pleases me to transgress, and to compose a face for
reputation
bores me: may I be reported to have been a worthy woman
with a worthy man.

In lines 1–2, Sulpicia begins effusively and impulsively —at last love has come!— but immediately undermines the apparent naturalness of the statement by telling us what kind of love it is: it is the kind that you publish. We must, I think, take careful note of the oddity of *qualem* here, which instantly dismantles the pose of authentic feeling set up in the poem's first three words. The "true" emotions of the "real" Sulpicia are only available as text, and love is valorized only insofar

45. See Flaschenriem 1999: 47–48 on the cross-dressing metaphor in [Tibullus] 3.16.

as it may be the substance of poetry.[46] From the very outset, the affair and its narration are inextricably entwined with one another.

As I have argued, lines 1–2 of Sulpicia's first poem may be understood to trade on traditional tropes of feminine elegiac embodiment, as she represents a female body—her own—as revealed by the poetic act: the story she is about to tell is so intimate, so true to her experience, that it is as though she has invited the reader into her bedroom and shown him all there is to see of Sulpicia. Insofar as it represents itself as trafficking in female flesh, [Tibullus] 3.12 is drawing on a well-worn trope of the male elegists—perhaps most famously worked out in Ovid's *Amores* 3.12 where the poet castigates himself for acting as a pimp (*leno*: 3.12.11) for Corinna and complains, *ingenio prostitit illa meo* ("she was prostituted by my genius": 3.12.8).[47] Unlike Ovid, however, Sulpicia occupies the position of both poet and poetic object, both seller and object to be sold. Yet, in contrast, in the second couplet of 3.13, we are offered a very different vision of literary trade:

> exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis
> attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.
> exsolvit promissa Venus.
>
> Cytherea, persuaded by my muses,
> has brought and deposited him in my bosom.
> Venus has paid off her promises.

Here, someone or something is exchanged, but whether it is a personified *amor* (as the syntax seems to imply),[48] Cerinthus (as the sense would suggest), or a book roll (normally carried in the *sinus*),[49] is difficult to tell. But the ambiguity is surely deliberate, as, in naming him merely *illum*, the second couplet neatly effaces the lover except as an object handed over to the speaker.[50] The poetic transaction, moreover, is figured as occurring between a trio of female presences—poetess, muses, and goddess. If traditional elegiac poetry is figured as an exchange of the mistress between the (male) poet and the (male) reader,[51] 3.13.3–5 is a humorous reversal, in which the male lover is circulated within a community of females. The first two couplets of 3.13, therefore, appear as a joke on poetic objectification, on what poetry is and who it is imagined to conceal or reveal. The embodied

46. Santirocco 1979: 234.

47. On this aspect of *Amores* 3.12, see Greene 1998: 108–13 and Fear 2000: 230–34. For an exploration of a slightly different form of elegiac play on the erotics of publication, see Myers 1996.

48. This interpretation was urged by Dissen 1835: 108.

49. As is suggested by Roessel 1990: 245–48.

50. See Roessel 1990 on the "materiality" of Cerinthus.

51. Indeed, it would seem that elegy presents an excellent example of the ways in which literature may enact male homosociality, on the model famously proposed by Eve Sedgwick in her book *Between Men* (1985: esp. 21–48).

textual Sulpicia gives way to a textual Cerinthus, who is handed around like the writing materials his name suggests.

In fact, this early "objectification" of Cerinthus in 3.13.3–4, as he enters into Sulpicia's poetry as a physical presence but without name or other identity, contrasts with his particular absence as a body in the rest of her texts. By this I do not mean simply that Sulpicia's work dwells on situations of abandonment, betrayal, and distance—physical and emotional—from her lover, which is certainly true; but it is also noticeable that we "see" a great deal more of the author than of her addressee. Other than his name, probably a pseudonym in the best elegiac tradition, we know nothing of his rank, his physical appearance, or his employment; the closest we get to him is perhaps in 3.16, when we hear of his *cura togae* (3), but whether this is his own toga or the one worn by prostitutes is unclear.[52] One paradigmatic moment is the opening of 3.15, which celebrates the expected reunion of the lovers after the abandonment of Sulpicia's birthday trip to the country, and which opens with the presumably rhetorical question, "do you know that the journey has been lifted from the sad spirit of your girlfriend?" (*scis iter ex animo sublatum triste puellae?* 3.15.1). This is the first poem actually addressed to Cerinthus in the collection, and he enters into the reader's view in its first word, *scis*. It is an odd semantic choice: rather than "have you heard?" or "do you see?" we are offered the much more abstract "do you know?" without any attendant details on how he might have discovered it. The young man appears as an intelligence without a body, contrasting with the materiality of the poet herself. This is the reverse of the situation in the canonical male elegists, who dwell on the details of their mistresses' bodies; Sulpicia has placed herself in the role of poetic object and all but elided Cerinthus from the text.

When Cerinthus appears in 3.13 as an object *par excellence*, therefore, the gesture is an unusual one in Sulpicia's poetry, and is meant, I would argue, to place the second couplet of the poem in relation and contrast to the first: each offers an image of the text's "body," intimately connecting the poetry to the materiality of poet and/or her beloved. Given this connection, however, as it is traced in lines 1–4 of the poem, lines 5–6 must come as something of a shock to the reader: *mea gaudia narret, / dicetur si quis non habuisse sua* ("let that person tell my joys, / of whom it will be said that he does not have his own"). Here Sulpicia generously offers her story to be repeated as "truth" by those who have no experiences of their own to be the subject of poetry, the implication being that what is about to be narrated is so universal that it may be transferred to another with no one the wiser. "Sulpicia" appears not as an individual with a personal story, but as a poetic generalization of the experience of love. The peculiarity of this idea has generally been glossed over by critics, though it has been noted that the vagueness

52. Hinds 1987: 45; Keith 1997: 304–305.

of *quis* seems to gesture to an unusually inclusive audience.[53] But what seems to me most remarkable about 3.13.5–6, the lines quoted above, is that they appear in a poem which opens with one of Sulpicia's most "personal" statements, in which she locates her text at the level of her own naked skin: the intimate truth of what she is about to tell is so powerful that she represents it as a process of stripping herself for the reader's desiring eye. The universalizing statement of lines 5–6 thus seems at odds with the embodiment of the text in lines 1–4.

If Sulpicia is the passive object of poetic representation in lines 1–2, therefore, she has become its active subject by line 4; if the poem is a female body in lines 1–2, it is male by line 4. In keeping with such competing representational gestures, the poems appear as deeply personal in the first two couplets, and absolutely ubiquitous in the third. More importantly, however, lines 5–6 stand at the exact center of Sulpicia's first poem and are the pivot point on which the text turns. As will be noted below, there is an ABCBA structure to 3.13's five couplets: we begin with the poet's body and her reputation; move to a representation of the "body" of the text itself; reach the universalizing statement of 5–6; turn back to the body of the text; and finally, in the last lines, again find a representation of the poet and her "corpo-reality." There is, I think, an internal logic to this progression and regression. Roman literary culture was fully aware of itself as a material phenomenon, something which cannot be said of—for instance—archaic Greece; this is the difference between Sulpicia and Sappho, whose use of the female body has been the subject of much debate in recent years, particularly among those interested in using the work of French feminists such as Luce Irigaray to identify a distinctively female poetic discourse.[54] Though Roman poets certainly still gave readings, the advent of publication and poetry books meant that a text might have a material form distinct from that of its author and travel far more widely.[55] When the words of a text may be seen to emanate not from the mouth of a human being, but from a roll of papyrus, they necessarily appear to have a life of their own, while at the same time remaining intimately connected to the thoughts and emotions of their author. Thus, as Diskin Clay has recently argued, the rise of the written text occasioned a whole new set of metaphors for authorial embodiment, as poets attempted to imagine the relationship between themselves, their work, and the reading public.[56] This new representational language is exemplified by [Tibullus] 3.13. As it moves from the poet's own intimate and embodied connection to her

53. Flaschenriem 1999: 40–41. Although, *pace* Flaschenreim, *quis* here is certainly masculine, it seems sufficiently indefinite to encompass a wide variety of readers.

54. For instance, duBois 1988: 26–29; Skinner 1993b; Greene 1994; Wilson 1996: esp. 85–99. See Irigaray 1985: esp. 205–18 for her argument for, and use of, female-embodied language. For a critique of the use of Irigaray to read Sappho, see Foley 1998: 64–67. See Janan 1999 for some productive intersections between Irigaray and Propertius 4.4.

55. This is the joke of *Tristia* 1.1 (Hinds 1985), and indeed one which recurs throughout Ovid's exile poetry.

56. Clay 1998: esp. 28–40.

verses, to the embodied form of the poetic text, to the anonymous reader's experience of that text, Sulpicia's first poem maps the process by which the poet may come to be consumed as a "corpus" by the reading public—a process particularly fraught with difficult implications in the case of the female author, whose privacy, bodily and otherwise, has already been compromised by her decision to speak.

When, therefore, the poem turns back on itself, and the final two couplets trace in reverse the journey laid out in the first, we may see the poet as, in a sense, reclaiming her ownership of what she has given away: the reading public dissolves into the book which in turn becomes Sulpicia and her "personal" concerns once again. In lines 7–8, therefore, we return to the poet and the material object—*tabellis*—which forges the link between her and the anonymous reader of 5–6.

> non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,
> me legat ut nemo quam meus ante, velim.
>
> I would not wish to entrust something to sealed tablets,
> so that no one reads me before the one who is mine.

The democratizing gesture of the preceding lines is, on one level, forgotten, as the poem returns to the emphatically "personal" embodiment of author-as-text. Yet the contrast between the third and fourth couplets echoes that between the second and third, in both theme and content: if it was Cerinthus who was almost synonymous with the book-roll in lines 3–4, here we have the synthesis of Sulpicia herself with the object on which the text is written.[57] The implication of Sulpicia in her verse is represented in the emphatic *non ego* in the hexameter and the contrasting *me* in a similar position at the beginning of the pentameter.[58] She insists that she wouldn't entrust anything to the scorned *tabellis*—except, as we discover at the start of the next line, herself. She is, as the morphology of the two pronouns reveals, both the subject and the object of the poetic action, both author and the thing authored, inseparable from the poetry which presents her to the reader. She *is* the poem before us, simultaneously as immediately available and as abstractly remote as the words on the page.

Finally, just as lines 7–8 echoed 3–4, lines 9–10 return us to the opening couplet with the repetition of *fama* and the "composed face" mentioned above. Since *componere*, as has been pointed out, can signify literary composition as well

57. See Fredrick 1997: 188, who argues that Sulpicia is here appropriating Roman elegy's traditional female-body-as-text trope. He does not, however, extend his analysis beyond this couplet.

58. I obviously prefer *me legat ut nemo* of Postgate's OCT to the perhaps more popular *ne legat id nemo* printed in Georg Luck's Teubner. I am frankly unconvinced that *ne . . . nemo*, a double negative in a clause of purpose, is good Latin, and while *ne legat id* is serviceable, it has a leaden quality which is unlike Sulpicia. It is better, to my mind, to render the line as a negative clause of result: rather than K. F. Smith's "if any one at all ever reads one of my letters, I am ruined"—which does not follow in sense from the previous lines, a defense of publication—the underlying thought here is "if I only write letters, no one but he will see them."

as social performance,[59] the word echoes the textual embodiment of the poem's opening lines; the physical being of the author becomes inseparable from, and created in, the act of poetic production.

> sed peccasse iuvat, vultus componere famae
> taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar.
>
> But it pleases me to transgress, and to compose a face for reputation
> bores me: may I be reported to have been a worthy woman with a worthy man.

As has been frequently noted, *digno – digna* is a nice touch, on opposite sides of the diaeresis, one neatly balancing the other in a closed circuit of virtue and value.[60] I would like, however, to call attention to the final word of the poem, *ferar*. N. J. Lowe calls it a subjunctive,[61] which is how I have translated it: "may I be reported. . . ." But it might just as easily be the pure future passive: "I will be reported. . . . " Either the issue is in suspense or it is already decided; either Sulpicia is worried about the outcome or she knows what it will be. After all, the passive verb is a bit disingenuous, since the rumors have already been started—by Sulpicia herself, in the poem just completed. Thus, 3.13's concluding line, read by generations of scholars as a young girl's wistful dream of a good reputation, encompasses two interpretations: this superficially "real" sentiment, appropriate to a virtuous Roman woman—"oh, I hope that I will be said to have been worthy!"—and an ironic, self-referential observation, in the best literary tradition of Roman elegy—"I certainly will be called worthy (since I have just said it myself)." This erasure, or confusion, of the difference between the real-world experience of Sulpicia and her existence as the author of the text is parallel to the point made in the poem's first couplet, which uses the body both as a guarantee of the poet's real identity and as a signal of her role as a literary construct. She is both Sulpicia and "Sulpicia"; her voice, her body, her social position, her story, are all real and not real, true and false, authentic and deceptive, experientially female and discursively male.

Poem 3.13, therefore, functions as an introduction, not simply to the story of Sulpicia, but to the very concept of the female poetic self, whose relationship to her written text is inescapably different from that of her male counterparts. It is not, perhaps, surprising to discover that the poet returns to the theme of poetic truth and its consequences in the final poem of the collection (3.18).[62]

> Ne tibi sim, mea lux, aeque iam fervida cura

59. As in English, "to compose oneself": Flaschenriem 1999: 44 and n.31.

60. Probst 1992: 29; Flaschenriem 1999: 45.

61. Lowe 1988: 198.

62. Scholars have long recognized 3.13 and 3.18 as a pair: e.g. Merriam 1990: 96–97, who notes that they represent the "emotional extremes" of the "connecting theme of knowledge."

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.

May I not, my darling, be such a burning concern to you
as I seem to have been these last few days,
if I—such a fool—have ever done something in my whole young life
for which I would say that I am more sorry
than that I left you alone last night
because I desired to conceal my passion.

Critics have often pointed to 3.18 as a prime example of Sulpicia's "feminine Latin," that is, her complicated and sometimes impenetrable diction and syntax. It has also been argued, however, that the structure of 3.18—three couplets composed of a single sentence and a bewildering series of embedded clauses depending on a subjunctive verb—must be understood as deliberate. The mode of expression suits the subject matter, as Sulpicia apologizes to Cerinthus for abruptly deserting him the night before, an act committed, as we learn in the poem's last line, because she was *ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum* ("desiring to conceal my passion"). As many have noted, the poem is about concealment and the language is indeed concealing.[63]

But is the poem in fact about concealment? Actually, no: it is about revelation, since Sulpicia is writing it to tell Cerinthus the thing which she was not able to tell him in person the night before. The poem speaks the "truth" about Sulpicia's love for Cerinthus with a clarity denied to her when present in body.[64] Indeed, the confused syntax of the poem is belied by its highly structured form, as *tibi* (the second word in line 1) moves to *meum* (the last word in line 6), Cerinthus' *fervida cura* at the end of line 1 are matched by Sulpicia's *ardorem* at the beginning of line 6, *hesterna . . . nocte* in 5 mirrors *paucos . . . dies* in 2, and *videor . . . fuisse* (2) finds its counterpart in *fatear . . . paenituisse* (4). On one level, therefore, Sulpicia's breathless apology is as disguised as her love—cloaked in layers of dependent clauses and hidden under subjunctive verbs. Yet on another level, there is a sophisticated organization to this poem which lies not only in the rhythmic meter of its three elegiac couplets, but in the ways that it uses the architecture of poetry to give form to its message. Thus, the poem may be neatly mapped into two contrasting halves: Cerinthus and his desire stand against Sulpicia and hers in

63. Lowe 1988: 202; Flaschenriem 1999: 50–52.

64. Flaschenriem 1999: 52 sees this poem as representing Sulpicia's final triumph in claiming a poetic voice for herself. As will be seen, I agree that Sulpicia here declares full ownership of her poetic persona; I would argue, however, that that claim of poetic ownership is as compromised and complex as her earlier discursive "reticence."

the first and last lines, day (*dies*: 2) turns to night (*nocte*: 5), and seeming (*videor*: 2) is opposed to saying (*fatear*: 4). Metrically, moreover, the poem is anything but breathless: the heavily spondaic nature of the middle two hexameters (lines 3 and 5) gives the text a rather slow and somber rhythm which belies the girlish giddiness traditionally seen here. Thus, the contrast between the "truth" which the poem communicates and Sulpicia's inability to speak it in person the previous night is echoed by the contrast between the circumlocution of the poet's voice and the clarity of the poetic form.

In addition, 3.18's final line—the last, as we have it, in Sulpicia's collection—stands as an ironic endpoint to the game of embodied disguise and revelation inaugurated in 3.13. In addition to being the last, line 6 holds a special significance within 3.18 because it contains the essential message around which the poem's proliferation of words is built: it is here that Sulpicia finally gets around to confessing *ardorem . . . meum*, although these words of "truth" rather ironically bracket a word of deception (*dissimulare*). As the ostensible subject of this poem—and indeed the whole collection—it is not surprising that *ardorem* is strongly emphasized, not simply by means of its position in the line but by its three long syllables, contrasting with the dactylic beginnings of the poem's other two pentameters. The burning which the word designates would seem to underscore the physicality of desire in true Sulpician fashion, particularly noticeable here given that 3.18 immediately follows the poem in which Sulpicia "realizes" the trope of love as a fever: in 3.17.2, she complains, *mea nunc vexat corpora fessa calor* ("heat now torments my exhausted body"). The literal warmth of the illness is echoed in the metaphorical fire of passion in 3.18.6—but as with the collection's opening citation of female nudity, the movement between "real" experience and elegiac topos serves to underscore the contingency of one upon the other. If the reality of the fever in 3.17 is a joke, what are we to make of the supposed reality of the passion revealed in 3.18? Moreover, the juxtaposition of *ardorem* with *cupiens* would seem to underscore the latter word's erotic connotations; it makes sense that someone suffering from "passion" should also describe herself as "desiring." But governing as it does the infinitive "to disguise," *cupiens* is itself a deception, an erotic word, in an erotic poem, used in a non-erotic sense. The truth which the poem tells—a truth which *only* the poem *can* tell—is that Sulpicia desires . . . to deceive.

Poem 3.18 mirrors 3.13, therefore, in the sense that both deal with the question of what it means to try to distinguish the "real" poet and her emotions from her poetic act. Like the first poem in the Sulpician corpus, the last also exposes and calls into question the ways in which elegy uses the distinction between poet and poetic object, between the real world and the process of representing it. On one level, 3.18 works as a poetic answer to 3.13. Whereas the first poem represents poetic truth as inextricable from the corporeal, the last adopts the opposite view: face-to-face, the poet dissembles; it is only in poetry that she is able to speak the truth. In the end, however, even that poetic truth is exposed as a fiction—the reality expressed by *ardorem* and *cupiens* lasts only until *dissimulare*. Authenticity lies

neither in the embodied experience of love, nor in the twists and turns of its poetic expression, but in the complex interaction of the two. Such complications, indeed, are an aspect of all elegy, which continuously plays with the constructed nature of both experience and representation. But by locating questions of real experience at the level of the body, her own female body, Sulpicia adds another layer to the already difficult negotiation of authorship which elegy entails; by deploying the generically overdetermined trope of female corpo-reality, Sulpicia reveals the extent to which she recognizes her inability to exist comfortably on either side of the line separating poet and embodied textual creation. In this way, she embraces the ironic and unresolved position of the female poet.

My epigraph for this paper comes from Emily Dickinson, who also wrote, in another context:

> I dwell in Possibility -
> A fairer House than Prose -
> More numerous of Windows -
> Superior - for Doors -[65]

Poetry here is not simply the opposing term to prose, but a living space for the author who is at once its maker and its inhabitant. Indeed, the poem goes on to pun on the word "occupation," which defines both the speaker's activity (her pre-occupation, poetry) and her relationship to the dwelling-place/poem produced.[66] Yet it is important that, as a space, poetry is defined not so much by its ability to enclose, but by its windows and doors, the places where walls give way to open air. Far from confining the female poet to a properly domestic interior, as the norms of Victorian society would insist, poetry-as-Possibility is imagined to enable as much as it restricts; the written word may inevitably structure the author and her experience for consumption by the reader, but poetry's gaps and silences—represented metaphorically by the windows and doors and concretely by Dickinson's famous dashes—reveal the ways in which the poetess can never be completely contained within her text. Thus, almost two thousand years later, Dickinson puts forward the same questions articulated by Sulpicia:[67] how does a woman use the lyric voice without being used by it? Is there a speaking position available to the poetess which both exploits and confronts the rules governing the poetic production of sexual identity? For both authors, the answer—insofar as there is an answer—lies not in refusing gendered generic constraints, but in accepting and strategically deploying the disruptive possibilities of the female poetic voice.

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65. Poem 466 (Franklin 1998: 483–84).
66. For this point see Prins and Shreiber 1997: 9–10.
67. See Skoie 2000: 307 for a comparison of Sulpicia and Dickinson.

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