

## SULPICIA AND THE RHETORIC OF DISCLOSURE

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**A**N ANECDOTE ABOUT the Greek painter Zeuxis, as Cicero adapts it, shows how certain kinds of narrative decorum may efface the “presence” of women in a text. In his youthful handbook on rhetoric, *De Inventione*, Cicero relates how the citizens of Croton once engaged Zeuxis, the most illustrious painter of his time, to decorate their temple of Hera (“Juno”).<sup>1</sup> The artist decided to include a portrait of Helen among these commissioned works, and when he asked the townspeople if there were any young women in the city who could serve as his models, the citizens “immediately” conducted him to the *palaestra*, where the boys of the town were exercising nude. The painter was struck by the physical beauty of the youths (*puerorum . . . formas et corpora*), and the townsmen assured him that the boys’ sisters were equally comely: “You can guess at the girls’ merit from these boys” (“qua sint illae dignitate, potes ex his suspicari,” *Inv. Rhet.* 2.1.2). Here, by directing our gazes toward the unclothed youths, Cicero temporarily suppresses a slightly indecorous feature of the story—namely, that these respectable young girls (*sorores . . . virgines*) will also be exposed to the artist’s gaze as he paints his “Helen.” Like Zeuxis at the wrestling school, Cicero’s readers first “see” the girls of Croton only as they are reflected in and through male proxies, their brothers.

The decorum that attempts to shield the girls of Croton from our view in Cicero’s text may serve elsewhere to mute the female voice, to render its particular timbres and concerns inaudible. In Roman works that treat women’s conduct in the public sphere, propriety of speech is often equated with propriety of dress. Valerius Maximus’ discussion of women orators (8.3.1–3), which has been perceptively analyzed by Judith Hallett, illustrates this tendency very neatly.<sup>2</sup> The discussion begins, in fact, with a sartorial metaphor: the three women speakers whom Valerius proposes to treat were, as he puts it, inhibited neither by their sex nor by the “modesty of the

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1. *Inv. Rhet.* 2.1.1–2.2.5. The Latin text of Cicero is that of Achard 1994. Unless otherwise noted, citations of Sulpicia and Propertius follow Tränkle 1990 and Fedeli 1994, respectively; those of Valerius Maximus follow Faranda 1971. All other quotations from the Latin or Greek are taken from the Oxford Series of Classical Texts.

2. Hallett 1989.

stola" (*verecundia stolae*) from pleading their cases *in foro et iudiciis*. But though Valerius is highly ambivalent about such incursions by women into the public sphere, as Hallett points out, and though he has particularly harsh things to say about Gaia Afrania, he nonetheless reserves high praise for a speech given by Hortensia, the daughter of the jurist Quintus Hortensius.<sup>3</sup> Hortensia's speech, he asserts, not only displayed her father's gift with language (*patris facundia*, 8.3.3); it also brought him figuratively back to life: "Quintus Hortensius lived again . . . in his female offspring and inspired his daughter's words" ("Revixit . . . muliebri stirpe Q. Hortensius verbisque filiae aspiravit," 8.3.3). Hallett observes that Valerius' respect for Hortensia's oratorical skill "was inseparable from his esteem for that of her late father," and that their close familial bond helped to "legitimate" her potentially transgressive participation in an activity normally reserved for men.<sup>4</sup> If we are obliged to see women "through" male proxies in Cicero's handbook, Valerius Maximus strongly encourages us to view Hortensia as an extension—or a female likeness—of Hortensius, to see her "as" her famous parent.<sup>5</sup> Or, to invoke Valerius' sartorial metaphor, we might say that he makes Hortensia's public speaking more respectable by clothing her in the discourse, the *verba* and *facundia*, of her father.

As a norm of conduct, then, Valerius' *verecundia stolae* signifies a socially approved aversion to public display, whether of the body or through the act of asserting oneself in speech. For a Roman woman, to be reticent in the public realm was to be decently attired, whereas to speak freely was to risk being exposed to ridicule or censure. Hence when the elegiac poet Sulpicia uses an image of disrobing to describe the act of writing her love poetry ([*amorem*] *nudasse*, 3.13.2), the verbal gesture is both daring and rich in implication (*Corpus Tibull.* 3.13):<sup>6</sup>

Tandem venit amor, qualem texisse pudori  
quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.  
exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis  
attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.

5    exsolvit promissa Venus: mea gaudia narret,

3. *Ibid.*, 66.

4. *Ibid.*, 66, 67.

5. Or, to use Hallett's terminology, this passage represents woman as being the "Same" as her male kin. It is interesting, too, that Valerius Maximus alludes only in passing to the occasion and content of Hortensia's speech; he is less interested in what she purportedly said than in the phenomenon of the woman orator.

6. Hinds 1987, 44; Keith 1997, 301. See also Tschiedel 1992, 92, who contrasts Sulpicia's desire to celebrate her love openly with the tendency of the male elegists to characterize their liaisons as stolen or clandestine. On the attribution of the poems collected in the *Corpus Tibullianum*, and for the history of scholarship on the corpus, see Lowe's concise and extremely useful discussion (1988, 193–97), as well as Tränkle 1990, 9–12. Scholars and editors now generally concur in attributing poems 3.13–18 of the Tibullan corpus to Sulpicia and elegies 3.8–12 to the so-called *auctor de Sulpicia*, though opinions on the authorship and ascription of the poems are not unanimous. (See, e.g., Parker 1994 for a dissenting voice on the attribution of poems 3.9 and 3.11.) In an influential paper published in 1871, and collected in his *Opuscula*, Haupt ([1876] 1967, 502–3) argued that Sulpicia was the daughter of Valeria, a sister of Messalla, and Servius Sulpicius, son of the celebrated jurist and consul of 51 B.C., Servius Sulpicius Rufus. On the younger Servius Sulpicius, the elegist's father, see Syme 1981.

dicetur si quis non habuisse sua.  
 non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,  
 ne legat id nemo quam meus ante, velim,  
 sed peccasse iuvat, vultus componere famae  
 10 taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar.<sup>7</sup>

At last love has come, and the rumor that I've concealed it  
 would shame me more than to have laid it bare.  
 Persuaded by my Muses, the goddess of Cythera  
 has brought him and placed him in my embrace.  
 5 Venus has fulfilled her promises; let anyone recount my joys  
 who is said to have lacked his own.  
 I wouldn't want to consign anything to sealed tablets,  
 so that no one could read it before my lover.  
 No, my lapse delights me, and I'm tired of playing a role for rumor:  
 10 let it be said that I, a worthy woman, have been with a man worthy of me.<sup>8</sup>

When she states at 1–2 that it would be more shameful to hide a love like hers than to “lay it bare,” the narrator insists on being “seen” and heard, on making visible the passion that she presents as her own. Significantly, however, her choice of metaphor is also at least partially determined by the conventions of genre. Her assertion of candor deftly reworks a recurrent structuring image in Roman elegy, that of the partially or provocatively clothed woman. In the work of Ovid and Propertius, for instance, as recent scholarship has shown, the beloved's features and attire may serve as metaphors for the poet's literary allegiances and “writing practices.”<sup>9</sup> The ideal mistress and the exemplary elegiac poem share similar attributes, and attract the same vocabulary of praise: both are refined, tender, seductive. The fictions of erotic elegy—including its programmatic fictions—are organized around a carefully regulated display of the female body. Sulpicia alludes to this convention in the opening couplet of 3.13, but subverts its procedures, translating the image of the unclothed *puella* into a figure of speech. What will be revealed here is not a woman's body, but the story of her love.

In her opening declaration, then, the speaker proposes to strip away disguises, and to reveal what modesty or discretion might well counsel her to hide; she emphatically refuses to dissimulate. But despite her daring posture, the metaphor of disrobing suggests a certain unease about exposing herself to the commentary of others, and about how the apparent disclosures of her poetry will be received. Moreover, this unease makes itself felt in the rhetorical disposition of the poem, as well as in its governing metaphor.<sup>10</sup> Although she openly celebrates her love, the narrator does not altogether eschew the protection of certain kinds of linguistic reserve. The gnarled dic-

7. At line 1, I read *pudori* with Postgate 1915, Lenz-Galinsky 1971, and Luck 1988.

8. The translations of Sulpicia are adapted, often freely, from Goold and Postgate 1988 and Snyder 1989. On the translation and interpretation of Sulpicia's sometimes challenging text, I have benefited from the commentaries of Smith 1913, Tränkle 1990, and Yardley 1992, and the discussion of Bréguet 1946.

9. See, e.g., Wyke 1987a, 1989a, and 1989b; cf. DeBrohun 1994. See also Richlin 1992, 57–80 on Roman invective and satire in general and Hallett 1996 on Catullus, Martial, and the *Carmina Priapea*, where the body in question is that of the aggressively phallic male.

10. On the narrator's acute sensitivity to *fama* and to the effects of discourse, see esp. Santirocco 1979, 234–35; cf. Hinds 1987, 43–44, and Hallett 1989, 71.

tion that we encounter in lines 1–2 may comprise another, and more subtle, form of reticence.<sup>11</sup> In that couplet, the speaker appears only in a subordinate clause, entering the text in the *mihi* of line 2, a pronoun which is both rhetorically unmarked and metrically unemphatic, providing the two short syllables of a dactyl. Here, it is as if the narrator is attempting to claim a public voice, and yet remain partially hidden, preserving a kind of privacy. The impulse to assert herself is checked by an opposing impulse, a need to devise rhetorical and prosodic strategies of self-protection.

Critics of Sulpicia have pointed to the double sense of *fama* in 3.13, where it signifies both the “rumor” of idle talk and gossip, and the “fame” of literary reputation. Even as she aspires to poetic *fama*, the speaker must find means of controlling the potentially harmful effects of ungoverned talk.<sup>12</sup> Yet for the female narrator, the project of controlling *fama* entails more than subverting the “vocabulary of Roman propriety,” or choosing, however boldly, to commemorate her love affair “on her own terms in her own poem.”<sup>13</sup> For, as I have tried to suggest, Sulpicia is also obliged to modify elegiac idiom, to find ways of mastering the anxieties occasioned by her literary role, when she adopts the self-revelatory postures of the elegiac lover.

Indeed poem 3.13 opens with what might be called an enabling fiction, one which justifies the narrator’s provocative breach of *pudor*, her need to let others know about her love affair. The speaker exultantly welcomes love (*Tandem venit amor*, 1), and the very phrasing of her declaration testifies rhetorically to the force of this new emotion: *amor*, and not a human agent, is the subject of the first couplet, and presides over its verbal action. Love impels the narrator to speak, much as *Amor* subdues the Propertian lover and forces his complaint in the first poem of the *Monobiblos*.<sup>14</sup> While it is not surprising that two elegiac poets should indicate *amor* as a source of discourse, the topos of speech inspired or constrained by love does not serve the same ends in Sulpicia’s text as it does in that of her male counterpart. For in Propertius’ elegy, love is invoked in order to “explain” the speaker’s subservience to a woman, and his persistence in an unmanly and scandalously idle way of life. Sulpicia, in contrast, proclaims the object of her passion—and hence the passion itself—worthy of herself and her poetry (*digno*, 10), but uses *amor* to justify an act of speech which could be deemed immodest if not transgressive for a woman. The same trope accounts for distinct (and gender specific) sorts of impropriety, and provides their fictive rationale.

Like the Propertian elegy, however, 3.13 is a text which demonstrates an acute sensitivity to its possible reception: each of its five couplets responds in a perceptibly different way to the imagined presence of a listener or

11. Kammer 1979 identifies similar forms of verbal “camouflage” in the work of Emily Dickinson and of the modernist poets H. D., and Marianne Moore.

12. See esp. Santirocco 1979, 234–35 on the tension between the two kinds of *fama*; cf. Lowe 1988, 203–5 on the speaker’s attempts to make *fama* “subject to refinement and to control.”

13. Lowe 1988, 205; 204.

14. “tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus/ et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus./ donec me docuit castas odisse puellas/ improbus, et nullo vivere consilio” (Prop. 1.1.3–6). Cf. Ovid’s parody of the trope in *Amores* 1.1.

reader. The daring avowal of the first couplet yields to the literary fantasy of the two following lines, where Sulpicia mythologizes an exchange in which poetic utterance proves wholly efficacious, and achieves its intended effect on the addressee. Whereas the first couplet informs us about the occasion of the poem, providing a context for its enunciation, the second depicts, in an almost allegorical fashion, the auspicious beginning of the poet's love affair and the speech act that inaugurated it. Moved by her eloquence, Venus has conveyed Sulpicia's beloved to her embrace, like a welcome gift. Sulpicia's tone is playful here, and the motif of seduction through song is conventional in elegiac poetry,<sup>15</sup> but in the context of her poem, the implications of the motif are more complex than one might expect. When she suggests that she won her beloved through the power of her verse, Sulpicia presents herself explicitly as a love poet, the protégée of Venus (*Cytherea*) and the Muses.<sup>16</sup> Significantly, however, this familiar motif also calls attention to the fictionality—the “constructedness”—of Sulpicia's literary posture. Through it, she implies that her poetic persona need not be too rigidly identified with its author, and thus she mitigates the impropriety of celebrating ostensibly personal joys and pleasures in verse. Finally, in pairing Venus with the Camenae (3), Sulpicia completes an elegant programmatic maneuver. She gives Venus a Greek cult title, *Cytherea*, which occurs in erotic poetry as early as that of Sappho, but aligns the goddess with Roman deities of song, the Camenae, as if to impute to herself the authority of two poetic traditions.<sup>17</sup> Frank as they may appear, the assertions of the first two couplets also direct the reader, and point to ways of responding to her poem.

As lines 1–4 clearly demonstrate, Sulpicia's attempts to anticipate and guide the reader can be extremely artful. In the following couplet, however, she seems deliberately to relinquish a measure of her authorial control, and to allow other speakers to participate in her story: “*mea gaudia narret, / dicetur si quis non habuisse sua*” (5–6). By so pointedly defying what other people might say, Sulpicia reveals her awareness of a power that confronts her in the realm of genre, as well as in the sphere of social relations. In the governing fictions of elegy, the female lover is constituted, for the most part, not as a subject of discourse in her own right, but as its eroticized (or reviled) object. She is “spoken” by others, and we generally apprehend her through the discourse of a male narrator.<sup>18</sup> Yet Sulpicia also alludes here, I

15. See, for example, Prop. 1.8.39–40 (“*hanc ego non auro, non Indis flectere conchis, / sed potui blandi carminis obsequio*.”); Prop. 2.13a.3–7; Ov. *Am.* 2.1.33–34 (“*at facie tenerae laudata saepe puellae / ad vatem, pretium carminis, ipsa venit*.”).

16. Cf., e.g., Santirocco 1979, 234; Snyder 1989, 130. Here Sulpicia claims authority as a writer of *amores*, and creates a scenario of fulfillment and control: control over the desire personified in Venus, over her beloved, and over the persuasive powers of language.

17. For *Cytherea* as an epithet of Aphrodite-Venus, see, e.g., Sappho Fr. 86, 90 Lobel and Page; cf. the fragment of Sappho's lament for the dying Adonis (140a L-P); Prop. 2.14. 25; Hor. *Carm.* 1.4.5, 3.12.4; Verg. *Aen.* 1.257; Ov. *Am.* 1.3.4, *Her.* 17.241, *Met.* 10.717. *Cytherea* is also an epithet of Aphrodite in Greek epic (*Od.* 8.288; 18.193). For additional citations, see Bréguet 1946, 46. In Roman texts, the Camenae appear, for example, at Verg. *Ecl.* 3.59; Hor. *Carm.* 3.4.21, *Epist.* 1.19.5; and Prop. 3.10.1. See also Keith 1997, 301 on Virgilian echoes in the second couplet of poem 3.13.

18. In recent years, critics have been particularly attentive to this feature of elegiac discourse; see, e.g., Hinds 1987, 40, 43–44 (on Sulpicia); and Wyke 1987a, 1989a, and Gold 1993 (on Propertian elegy). Wyke 1995, 115 cogently observes that the “female speaker of the Sulpician corpus both controls and struggles

think, to the pleasures of responding to a text, for the indefinite pronoun *quis* of line 6 is not limited to the purveyor of gossip; it encompasses the listener or reader as well. “Anyone” who lacks *gaudia* of his (or her) own is welcome to recount those of the elegiac poet, or to participate in them vicariously.<sup>19</sup> Here, in addition to giving her “private” joys a literary form, Sulpicia also affirms their representative power. In her deft way, she reverses the decorum that governs elegiac writing, and that encourages us, like Cicero’s anecdote about Zeuxis, to “see” women through men. By means of the inclusive *quis*, the narrator of 3.13 claims implicitly to speak for men as well as women, sketching the outlines of a plot in which both sexes may find their experience represented.<sup>20</sup>

As if to emphasize the inclusive nature of her poetic *amores*, Sulpicia declares in the next couplet (7–8) that she would rather not be obliged to seal her “letters,” and thereby keep her exchanges with her lover strictly private. She imagines a setting in which her text might circulate freely, and in which her lover is not necessarily her first or her only reader. In lines 7–8, then, the language of disclosure takes a more sophisticated form: the imagery of being seen and talked about modulates into that of being read, and the unclothed body is replaced by the open tablets. Furthermore, when she describes her poetry as communication that the author may choose to seal, she borrows from the vocabulary of the *sphragis*, though in a curiously refracted way. For Sulpicia does not employ the *sphragis* in order to assert a proprietary claim upon her text, as Theognis does, for example, in his famous manifesto (19–23), nor does she attempt at this point to endow the poem with a definitive authorial “signature” or stamp.<sup>21</sup> Indeed elegy 3.13 gives us very little in the way of specific information about the two lovers: neither is even mentioned by name.<sup>22</sup>

Sulpicia’s “open” *tabellae* invite comparison with the unsealed tablets of Propertius, whose loss (or “death”) the narrator mourns in elegy 3.23.<sup>23</sup> Like Sulpicia, Propertius uses the motif as a means of imagining the fate of his poetry and its treatment by future readers (Prop. 3.23.1–6):

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not to be controlled by the strategies of elegy’s erotics and poetics.” Ultimately, of course, every speaker or writer must grapple with language, with modes of discourse and representation that pre-exist him or her. The struggle is, however, especially difficult for the female author working in a male tradition, since its literary idioms and generic conventions may not readily accommodate her particular interests and concerns.

19. Cf. Hallett 1990, 192. As Hinds 1987, 42 wittily observes, at least one poet, the *auctor de Sulpicia*, might appear to have taken Sulpicia’s assertion as a programmatic “cue.”

20. G. W. Most 1981, 16 discerns a similar poetic gesture in Sappho 16 L-P. He points out that, when the speaker of Sappho’s lyric describes Helen as surpassing all mortals (ἀνθρώπων) in loveliness rather than all women (γυναικῶν), she expands her “sphere of reference beyond women alone to . . . human beings” as a totality.

21. The passage from Theognis runs as follows: Κύρνε, σοφισομένην μὲν ἐμοὶ σφρηγὶς ἐπικεῖσθω / τοῖσδ’ ἔπεισιν—λήσει δ’ οὐποτε κλεπτόμενα, / οὐδὲ τις ἀλλάξει κάκιον τοῦσθλοῦ παρεόντος, / ὧδε δὲ πᾶς τις ἐρεῖ· “Θεὺ γνιδὸς ἔστιν ἔπη / τοῦ Μεγαρέως” (*Theognidea* 19–23).

22. Snyder 1989, 130–31. We might compare Sulpicia’s poem to the first elegy in the short “Lygdamus” cycle (*Corpus Tibull.* 3.1–6), which introduces the poet’s beloved, Neaera, by name. Tibullus similarly identifies Delia in the opening elegy of Book 1, while the name of Propertius’ mistress, Cynthia, is the first word of his entire oeuvre.

23. See Hubbard 1975, 90–91 and Putnam 1982, 217 on the double sense of *periere*, and on the echoes of funeral lament in the poem. Both Hubbard and Putnam observe that the poet-lover speaks of the *tabellae* as if they were faithful go-betweens or slaves.

- Ergo tam doctae nobis periire tabellae,  
 scripta quibus pariter tot periire bona!  
 has quondam nostris manibus detriverat usus,  
 qui non signatas iussit habere fidem.  
 5 illae iam sine me norant placare puellas  
 et quaedam sine me verba diserta loqui.

- So my skilled tablets are lost,  
 and all the fine things written on them are lost as well!  
 My hands had previously worn them down through use,  
 which made them recognizable when they were left unsealed.  
 5 They knew how to appease women now without me,  
 and without me how to utter eloquent words.

Even without the imprint of his signet ring, the narrator claims, his *doctae tabellae* have proved their authenticity. In his correspondence with various *puellae*, they remained faithful to his intentions, “speaking” eloquently for him in his place (*sine me*, 5, 6). Nor did they belie their origins: worn and smoothed by his hands, the tablets retained the impress of the poet, the signs of his aesthetic labors. To the discerning reader, the author’s stamp was always visible even in his “unsigned” texts:<sup>24</sup> his tablets kept their sealing power.

But despite the speaker’s insistence on the fidelity of his *tabellae*, the fact that he composes a fiction about their loss suggests, of course, a fear that they are somehow “vulnerable,” just as the allusion to sealing implies a desire to protect their content from tampering or alteration.<sup>25</sup> The fictions of Propertius’ poem, like those of Sulpicia’s, are in some measure compensatory. In each poem, the speaker confronts—and partially allays—anxieties induced by the prospect of the text’s entering the public realm and circulating more widely. Thus, at the same time as it acknowledges the hazards of transmission, Propertius 3.23 also develops (beginning at line 11) a fantasy about the poet’s continuing control over his text, his ability to recover what has been alienated or lost. Although he has lost his means of communication with his mistress and the letter that she wrote in reply to his, the poet-lover manages to reconstruct the message that she inscribed on the lost tablets. He attributes two alternative responses to his beloved, both of which are extremely flattering to himself. The missing letter either expressed her anger, chiding him for his disloyalty and indifference, or else it summoned him to a night of love (3.23.11–18). In either case, its alleged content betrays her desire for him, and testifies to his undiminished power in their erotic and epistolary exchanges.

This fantasy of control extends, moreover, to spheres of communication beyond the purely erotic. In the passage which follows the one to which I have just referred, the speaker imagines that his writing-tablets have fallen into the hands of a supremely incompetent reader of amatory texts, an *ava-*

24. Putnam 1982, 217; cf. Fedeli 1985, 663.

25. The vulnerability of the poet’s text extends, of course, to the physical materials on which it is preserved and transmitted, as Putnam 1982, 217 has observed.

rus, who has effaced the lovers' tender correspondence, and pressed the *tabellae* into service as account books (Prop. 3.23.19–20):

me miserum, his aliquis rationem scribit avarus<s>  
et ponit duras inter ephemeridas!

Poor me! Some stingy businessman is writing his gains and losses on them,  
and placing them among his callous account books.

Here the erotic rivalry that is so characteristic of elegiac fiction has been replaced by a clash of idioms. As a hoarder, the *avarus* has disrupted the cycle of amatory exchange, obscuring the words of the two lovers with the banal and tedious language of *negotium*. Threatened by this rival discourse, the poet-lover responds by expressing its sentiments in elegiac terms, and judging it according to elegiac systems of value.<sup>26</sup> Thus at line 20, he gives an exotic coloring to the stolid account books of the *avarus*, referring to them with the Greek synonym *epheMERIDAS*, while marking their distance from his own tender verses by deeming their content “harsh” and “unfeeling” (*duras*, 20).<sup>27</sup> In addition, he subjects the account books to a strikingly Alexandrian refinement, and one which we encounter frequently in Propertius' first book of elegies, for in their new, elegiac guise, the businessman's *epheMERIDES* make up the five concluding syllables of a “long pentameter.”<sup>28</sup> When he employs this Alexandrian metrical device and describes the businessman's records in language favored by elegiac poets, the narrator suggests, by contrast, how far removed the language and the values of his rival are from those of the elegiac world. Here, moreover, elegiac idiom expands to accommodate a less refined mode of discourse: the narrator incorporates the records of the *avarus* into a new poem, and in so doing regains possession, as it were, of the writings which seemed to be permanently lost to him. In the wish-fulfillment scenario of 3.23, the elegiac text can never be wholly estranged from its authorial source: it can always be at least partially reclaimed or reconstructed.

To summarize the point I am making about Propertius 3.23, then, both this poem and Sulpicia's imagine the encounter between the text and its future audience, and reflect a need to anticipate and control this encounter through the vehicle of fiction. But though both poets use the motif of unsealed or “open” tablets, they respond in different ways to the prospect of

26. I would like to thank the anonymous referee of *CP* for suggestions that helped me refine the argument of this paragraph.

27. Given the highly programmatic character of Prop. 3.23, which has been well examined by Cairns 1972, 78–79, I favor reading *duras* at line 20 rather than the alternative *diras*.

28. With the term “long pentameter,” I am referring to a pentameter that ends in a word of more than two syllables. Pentameters concluding with words of three or more syllables are common in the *Monobiblos*, but rare in Book 3, where Propertius' use of the device calls attention to itself. See, e.g., Wilkinson 1963, 123, and the statistics which Goold 1989, p. 118 n. 30 supplies. More than a third (36.3 percent) of the pentameters in the *Monobiblos* end with words of three or more syllables, but the percentage of such endings drops precipitously in Book 3 (2.4 percent). Fedeli 1977, 80; 1994, 286 notes that, while there are nine five-syllable pentameters in Book 1 and seven in Book 2, Books 3 and 4 contain only one each (at 3.23.20 and 4.5.28).



entering the public domain. Their fictions arise, I think, from related but not identical sorts of tension, and the motif serves different purposes in their texts. While Propertius' "lost" or "perished" tablets reflect uncertainty about the survival of his poetry, and about the forces that might impede or curtail its transmission, Sulpicia appears to be more concerned with the immediate circumstances of her text's reception.<sup>29</sup> The narrator of 3.13 both courts visibility, and expresses unease about its consequences. In the metaphor of disrobing, she alludes to her own exposed and vulnerable self, but then directs attention away from it, to the tablets that she longs to leave open for anyone who might care to see them. Just as the lover yearns to share her secret, so the poet yearns to make her writings public. Thus, while Propertius tries to assure himself that even his "unsigned" texts retain a kind of sealing power, and can be made to refer back again to their authorial source, for the narrator of Sulpicia's poem, sealing her tablets is ultimately less attractive than leaving them unclosed. The motif signifies her intention to abandon reticence and to claim a literary identity.<sup>30</sup>

In her final couplet, Sulpicia restates her desire to assume a literary identity when she declares: "*vultus componere famae / taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar*" (9–10). Here, of course, the speaker also rejects the attention to reputation expected of a woman, and the pretense that such deference to *fama* would now require of her. Yet her choice of words is suggestive, since in elegiac poetry, the verb *componere* is frequently used to describe the act of literary composition or creation.<sup>31</sup> Her rejection of one literary role, one way of defining or "composing" a public persona, implies the creation of another. As I have tried to suggest, Sulpicia's poetic confession is mediated by various literary strategies. Her refusal to dissimulate—what we might call her rhetoric of disclosure—entails a new and more artful presentation of the self.

After a series of partial disclosures, Sulpicia concludes her poem by announcing the consummation of her love. In Roman erotic idiom, of course, the expression "to be with" (*esse cum*) is a euphemism for "to make love,"<sup>32</sup> and in 3.13 the statement "*cum digno digna fuisse ferar*" amplifies and glosses the poet's earlier declaration, *sed peccasse iuvat* (9). The narrator's so-called "lapse" delights her, because she has found a man who is worthy of her trust and love. Yet the exultant and challenging tone of the statement "*cum digno digna fuisse ferar*" is not its most remarkable feature; the assertion is striking too for its epitaphic quality, and for the way in which it appeals covertly to the reader. Like an epitaph, which summarizes the meaning of a life and endows it with significance, this closing declaration

29. For a more detailed discussion of literary anxiety in Propertius, see Flaschenriem 1997, 259–67.

30. Cf. Hinds 1987, 42 on 3.13 as a statement of Sulpicia's "intent to publish her love."

31. Both Propertius and Ovid use *componere* to denote the writing of elegiac or erotic verse; see, e.g., Prop. 1.7.19; Ov. Am. 2.1.1, Tr. 5.12.60. In his elegy 1.11, Propertius punningly describes Cynthia, reclining on the beach at Baiae, as *molliter . . . compositam* (14): she is both "comfortably settled" and "composed in a tender (elegiac) manner." The latter passage is briefly but insightfully treated by Commager 1974, 11–12.

32. On *esse cum*, see, for example, Pierrugues [1826] 1965, 197; Smith 1913, 508; Adams 1982, 177.

presents the nascent love affair in a retrospective light. It attempts to give an official and memorable form to what people say, pronouncing favorable judgment on the relationship in advance.

Indeed the pointed diction of the line calls to mind the literary epitaphs that are so prominent a feature of elegiac discourse. In its syntactic structure, it is particularly close to the epitaph that Cornelia envisions for herself in Propertius 4.11: “in lapide hoc uni nupta fuisse legar” (4.11.36). Like many surviving epitaphs of Roman women, Cornelia’s sepulchral verse announces her status as *univira*, commemorating her lifelong devotion to a single husband.<sup>33</sup> Cornelia’s *fides*, her publicly acknowledged reputation for chastity, becomes the defining feature of her life, while the private emotions that her husband feels for her are left unrecorded. Sulpicia’s “epitaph,” in contrast, is far less reticent and one-sided, for it gives almost equal weight and prominence to the responses of the man. Sulpicia’s declaration celebrates the virtually equivalent stature of lover and beloved, at least within the charmed circle of the erotic relationship.<sup>34</sup> The adjective *dignus* is applied to each of the two lovers in succession, while *digno* and *digna* mirror one another in the pentameter, balanced on either side of the diaeresis. Metrically and rhetorically, the collocation *digno digna* underscores the mutuality of the love relationship.<sup>35</sup> The speaker’s beloved is “worthy” because his passion equals her own.

In a sense, then, poem 3.13 attempts to imagine the love affair in its entirety, from its inception (*Tandem venit amor*), to the retrospective view implicit in the final line. In poem 3.16, by contrast, the erotic narrative takes a very different course from the one intimated in 3.13. There, instead of celebrating the rapport which she and her beloved share, Sulpicia bitterly rebukes him for his apparent breach of faith (*Corpus Tibull.* 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:  
5 solliciti sunt pro nobis, quibus illa dolori est,  
ne cedam ignoto, maxima causa, toro.

- I’m grateful that you in your assurance now presume so much where I’m concerned,  
so that I don’t without warning foolishly take a fall.  
Let your passion for a toga-clad whore, burdened by her spinning,  
be preferred to Servius’ daughter Sulpicia!  
5 There are others who worry about me, to whom this is the greatest source of distress—  
that I may yield to a low-born mistress.

33. On Roman women’s epitaphs, see Williams 1958, 23–25, and the examples that Lattimore 1962, 295–99 collects.

34. Cf. Tschiedel 1992, 95.

35. Smith 1913, 508. Tränkle 1990, 306 points out that Sulpicia’s *cum digno digna* evokes the proverbial expression *digna dignis*; Tränkle cites Plautus *Poen.* 1270 and an inscription (recorded by the elder Pliny, *HN* 35.115) that honored Marcus Plautius, the artist who painted the temple of Juno at Ardea. Along with Tränkle, S. and V. Probst 1992, 29 observe that in Sulpicia’s text, the phrase *cum digno digna* implies that “Sulpicia’s beloved has earned her devotion.”

Here the estrangement of Sulpicia and her beloved punctuates the love story, delineating one of its phases or chapters, the movement from the glow of infatuation to the suspicion or disillusionment of betrayal. It marks a turning point in the elegiac narrative, a juncture at which the love story might well conclude. Although a quarrel can be followed by reconciliation, it always raises the possibility of a lasting rift. Furthermore, in elegiac fiction, being in love is a precondition for the writing of amatory verse: love inspires the poet-lover's *amores*, while the end of a love affair also implies the cessation of the erotic discourse that it had inspired. On generic grounds, then, it makes sense that Sulpicia should "seal" this elegy with her proper name. The poem bears some of the rhetorical hallmarks of the *renuntiatio amoris*,<sup>36</sup> and it could easily be the final text in an amatory cycle.

In addition to formal pressures, however, emotional forces also seem to underlie the speaker's need to inscribe her signature in her poem. For the narrator of 3.16, as I shall argue more fully below, the act of signing her text counters—or "heals"—the kinds of division within the self precipitated both by her love and by the act of writing. The problem of the divided self haunts Sulpicia's poetry, as it does the love poetry of Catullus, and even in the small corpus of her work that still remains for us, she returns to it again and again. We have seen already how in poem 3.13, the narrator is torn between the impulse to celebrate her love openly and the need to devise a self-protective rhetoric. And in the next poem of the corpus, 3.14, she dramatizes the division of the self in spatial terms. Obligated to accompany her kinsman Messalla to Arretium, and to spend her birthday there without her beloved, Sulpicia declares that her mind and emotions remain at Rome, although she is "taken away" to the countryside against her will: "hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo" (3.14.7). In 3.16, however, this division of the self is not induced by social constraints, which forbade even an aristocratic woman like Sulpicia to manage her affairs, as she puts it, in the way that she sees fit (*arbitrio . . . meo*, 3.14.8). Here rather, as I have already suggested, it is Sulpicia's own desire that divides her against herself.

Yet poem 3.16 communicates more than a straightforward *odi et amo*, despite its epigrammatic brevity: the range of emotional tones in the elegy is surprisingly rich. In the scant six lines of Sulpicia's poem, rage at being taken for granted by her lover and pain at his betrayal vie with her own lingering passion. In a perceptive study, moreover, S. Hinds has suggested that the tonal richness of the poem is matched by the complexity of its play with elegiac modes of representation.<sup>37</sup> Sulpicia's presentation of herself here both as poet and as lover is intriguingly fluid, embracing contradictions instead of fully resolving them, and as we shall see, even her depiction of her rival is charged with considerable ambiguity. Not surprisingly, Sulpicia directs the full force of her anger and outrage at her beloved's new *amica* along with Cerinthus himself. She calls attention to the wide social gulf

36. On the characteristics of the *renuntiatio amoris*, see Cairns 1972, 79–82. In elegy, the rejected or disenchanted lover may have recourse to the procedures of satire, as the Propertian *amator* does, for example, in poems 3.24–25.

37. Hinds 1987.

that separates her, the daughter of Servius Sulpicius, from the prostitute (*scortum*, 4; *ignoto . . . toro*, 6) who has now apparently become Cerinthus' mistress, emphasizing the disparity in their rank through her biting terse allusions to the other woman's toga and wool-basket.<sup>38</sup> As an indicator of female status, the prostitute's toga inevitably brings to mind its sartorial opposite, the *stola* which Sulpicia will be privileged to wear as a free-born matron. The garment makes the sexual availability of Sulpicia's rival all too evident, while the phrase *pressum . . . quasillo* (3) points, with devastating economy, to her humble social position.<sup>39</sup> A mere *quasillaria*, she is oppressed by day-to-day toil, the monotonous and "unremunerative" task of spinning wool.<sup>40</sup>

But though Sulpicia draws attention to her own impeccable pedigree as Servius' daughter, the gulf between her and her rival is not as absolute as it might at first appear, and in fact the text of 3.16 establishes a kind of kinship, an area of rapprochement, between the two female figures, where social and generic distinctions cease to hold so rigidly. In the erotic sphere, of course, Sulpicia and the *quasillaria* are linked by their involvement with the same man. As Girard reminds us, the conditions of rivalry may themselves produce a heightened awareness of, or even a fascination with, one's rival, fostering a bond which can be as powerful and compelling, in its way, as that which ties lover and beloved.<sup>41</sup> Although the poet's beloved is the addressee of the elegy, the *scortum* is essential to its strategies of representation. She serves as the "other" in contrast to whom Sulpicia attempts to characterize herself, yet she is also a kind of shadow self, as the rival often is in fictions which center upon erotic competition.

The fluid identity which marks the speaker in the erotic scenario of 3.16 is also evident in the realm of genre. If the prostitute's male garment makes her marginal social position immediately visible, Sulpicia's own position, at least in literary terms, is no less insecure. Sulpicia may likewise be said (figuratively) to wear male garb, since she has claimed the role of speaker in a genre in which woman is a privileged, though generally silent, object of men's desire,<sup>42</sup> and in a genre whose erotic fictions frequently address topics to which a female speaker had relatively limited access, including "warfare, politics, patronage," and "the rejection of public life."<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, her sexual experience—the fact that she has made herself available to Cerinthus—is not simply a condition that Sulpicia shares with her rival; it is also generically significant. In erotic elegy, the ideal woman interlocutor or reader is generally imagined as being both cultured (*docta*) and of

38. Cf. Santirocco 1979, 233, who comments on the way these "concrete representations" of her rival's low social status "forcefully" convey "class consciousness."

39. Cf. Snyder 1989, 133–34 on the phrase *pressum . . . quasillo*.

40. Smith 1913, 514; Currie 1983, 1763–64; Tränkle 1990, 316–17. Both Smith and Tränkle cite Petronius *Sat.* 132.3, which associates the *quasillaria* with the most lowly members of the household: "convocat omnes quasillarias familiaeque sordidissimam partem." For the legal and social status of the prostitute in Rome, see Gardner 1986, 132–34, 250–53.

41. Girard 1966.

42. As Hinds 1987, 45 has suggested.

43. Wyke 1995, 114.

an amorous disposition. She is a responsive addressee, fully able to appreciate the amatory verse that she inspires, and she may be celebrated as a skillful composer of love poetry in her own right.<sup>44</sup> We might say that the speaker of poem 3.16 is simultaneously disguised in male garb, and clothed in the provocative attire of the elegiac *puella*. Her literary persona combines features which serve, in the texts of her fellow elegists, to distinguish or individuate the male and female protagonists, or which receive special emphasis in the case of one sex.<sup>45</sup> The very act of writing, of modifying the codes of elegiac representation and speaking “through” them, engenders a division—or fragmentation—of the narrator’s poetic self.

Despite the generic constraints with which she grapples, however, and despite her own tumultuous emotions, the speaker finds a kind of equilibrium both in the act of “signing” her text and in the act of representation in general. As I suggested previously, the sphragis of 3.16 effaces divisions in the speaker’s self, subsuming the disparate and sometimes contradictory aspects of her persona under a single name: *Servi filia Sulpicia*. When she signs her text, the narrator aspires to a kind of discursive wholeness: her signature provides the illusion of coherence, of a unified authorial persona. Like epitaphic discourse, moreover, the sphragis attempts to resist the pressures of change and loss, and to impose a stable identity on an oeuvre or on the self that the poet has “chose[n] to perpetuate.”<sup>46</sup> It is significant, however, that Sulpicia commemorates herself here not in her elegiac role as the lover of Cerinthus, but in her public guise as the daughter of Servius Sulpicius. It is as if she retreats, if only for the moment, from the love affair: her fluid identity, and her ability to adopt different positions as a speaker, prove to be a strength as well as a source of tension in the poem. Instead of being wholly vulnerable to the whims or changing feelings of her beloved, she adopts the position of an outside observer, aligning herself with her unnamed well-wishers, and reminding Cerinthus of her formidable connections in the public world: unlike her rival, she is not the sort of woman who might be obliged to endure an insult meekly. Her authority as a speaker and observer is sustained by a social milieu, by the network of friends, admirers, and relatives who share her values and modes of engaging with the world. At the poem’s close, the private grief and chagrin of the elegiac lover are replaced by the collective *dolor* of those who have her best interests at heart.<sup>47</sup>

44. Propertius makes the connection between sexual experience (or an amorous disposition) and the appreciation of elegiac verse explicit in poem 3.2, when he refers to the female reader of his poetry (3.2.2): “gaudeat in solito tacta puella sono.” Cf. also Ovid’s programmatic *Amores* 2.1, where the responsive temperament of the woman reader is stressed: “me legat in sponsi facie non frigida virgo” (5). The Propertian narrator alludes to his mistress’ gifts as a poet at 1.2.30, 2.1.9–10, and 2.3.19–22. For a blurring of different women’s roles and identities similar to that of Sulpicia’s poem, see Lange 1979 and Wyke 1987b, 173 on Book 4 of Propertius, where the demimondaine, Cynthia (4.7), and the aristocratic matron, Cornelia (4.11), are made to share traits in common. I borrow the notion of the responsive addressee or reader from Hallett 1996.

45. Hinds 1987, 45; Hallett 1989, 70–71; Wyke 1995, 114–15.

46. To use a phrase that Brooks 1993, 182 employs in another context.

47. Santirocco 1979, 233.

In 3.16, then, representation, both of the self and of others, becomes a means of self-mastery, as Sulpicia the ungardedly passionate (*male inepta*, 2) lover finds refuge in her familial identity, and in the official and public designation of a name. Moreover, the specificity with which she identifies herself in this text contrasts sharply with her treatment of her lover. Refusing to see herself as the slighted object of a man's waning desire, the speaker now takes the initiative, requiting her lover's affront by denying him a concrete presence in the text. While she gives her signature a prominent place in the poem, rhetorically "framing" it by embedding it in the central couplet, she pointedly refuses to address her beloved by name (as she does in 3.14 and 17), even in a context of dismissal. Likewise, while she claims the "invisible" authority which inheres in the narratorial voice, she objectifies her rival, reducing her to a metonymic series of objects: toga, wool-basket, and, most witheringly of all, a "lowly" bed (*ignoto . . . toro*, 6).<sup>48</sup> Here, the expression *ignoto . . . toro* is more than a final, unkind jibe at the other woman; the phrase is also self-reflexive, and helps the speaker to define her own emotional posture. It simultaneously justifies her fury, and serves as a kind of consolation. Through the adjective *ignoto*, Sulpicia points, once again, to the disparity in status between herself and her rival, and hence to the personal insult implicit in Cerinthus' choice of a mistress, but she closes her verse-letter with the vivid yet dismissive *toro*, as if to emphasize the purely sexual nature of the new relationship, its limited and partial character. If, as I suggested at the beginning of this paragraph, the poet's self-presentation can offer a rhetorical means of self-mastery, this construction of a poetic self is always governed by certain imaginary scenarios: it is linked to the representation of others.

In his analysis of love as it is represented in Greek and Roman literature, D. Konstan has described what he calls the "master plot" of Roman elegy as one which ultimately finds its "denouement" in the rejection of the beloved "on grounds of inconstancy."<sup>49</sup> Although Konstan's model fits the course of the erotic narratives implicit in the oeuvres of the male elegists, particularly those of Ovid's *Amores* and Books 1–3 of Propertius, the elegiac "cycle" of Sulpicia—at least as the manuscripts have transmitted it to us—follows a different trajectory. Whereas the amatory narratives of the male elegists tend to close with the *amator* deploring his beloved's infidelity, or proclaiming his release from the abasement and self-deception imposed by his desire, the narrative implicit in Sulpicia's poems 3.13–18 ends with the woman lover fully claiming a voice. To a large extent, I think, Sulpicia's cycle assumes a distinct and individual shape because she does not ask the same questions in her fictions as her male colleagues do: her erotic narratives and theirs issue from different kinds of imaginative inquiry. If, in the erotic narratives of Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid, the poet-lover repeatedly, indeed almost obsessively, seems to pose the question, "How do I assuage my desire?", Sulpicia's most searching poems imply a

48. Here the word *torus* is a metonym for "sexual partner" or "mistress"; see Smith 1913 ad loc.

49. Konstan 1994, 159.

question of a different sort.<sup>50</sup> In texts such as 3.13 and 3.18, she seems rather to ask, "How do I fully articulate my desire?"

Critics of Sulpicia are fond of observing that her six elegies, as they are arranged in the manuscripts, begin with a declaration of her love to a general public (3.13), and conclude with the narrator's private disclosure of her passion to her beloved (*Corpus Tibull.* 3.18):

- Ne tibi sim, mea lux, aequae iam fervida cura  
 ac videor paucos ante fuisse dies,  
 si quicquam tota commisi stulta iuventa,  
 cuius me fatear paenituisse magis,  
 5 hesterna quam te solum quod nocte reliqui,  
 ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum.
- Let me no longer be, my light, as fiery a passion to you  
 as I seem to have been a few days ago,  
 if I've foolishly done anything my whole youth long  
 which I would admit that I've regretted more,  
 5 than the fact that I left you alone last night,  
 because I longed to hide my own fervent desire.

With its dense and rather complicated syntax, poem 3.18 gives the impression, like 3.13 and 3.16, of being a statement articulated against tremendous inner resistance, though it is less haunted by the imagined presence of others than are its companion texts. The world encompassed by the author's poetry contracts from one which contains the many observers implied in the previous two elegies, to a world in which only the lover and her beloved seem to matter: the scandal mongers and gossips of 3.13 have vanished, along with the concerned watchers of the love affair whom the narrator invokes in 3.16. But whereas 3.13 ends with a glance towards the future ("cum digno digna fuisse ferar," 10), in 3.18 the speaker turns to the recent past (*paucos ante . . . dies*, 2; *hesterna . . . nocte*, 5), in an attempt to reconcile "then" and "now," "last night" and the moment of the poem's enunciation.<sup>51</sup>

Despite its brevity, this final poem in the sequence completes a surprising number of verbal gestures at once. Structured by the formal rhetoric of the oath ("let x occur, if y is not the case"), the elegy is simultaneously avowal, apology, and confession, as well as a dramatically enacted revision of the past. When Sulpicia apologizes to Cerinthus for leaving him alone the night before—an act occasioned, she suggests, by her inexperience and youth<sup>52</sup>—she describes her action in such a way as to rectify her previous failure of nerve. The line which recounts her departure now attempts, at least rhetorically, to undo it. As the one, protracted sentence which comprises the poem

50. Cf. Conte 1994, 41, who states that "the elegiac poet's characteristic gesture is his (vain) attempt to free himself from . . . [his] painful slavery" to love. Following this line of argumentation, one might say that erotic elegy repeatedly stages the question, "How do I free myself from the compulsion of *amor*?" This way of formulating the question, however, does not fully account for the variety of elegiac scenarios which turn upon the problematics of desire.

51. On the complex schemes of time in poem 3.18, see Lowe 1988, 199.

52. Smith 1913, 516.

unfolds,<sup>53</sup> it embraces Cerinthus syntactically, placing him (*te solum*) at the center of its measured and heavily spondaic final hexameter: “hesterna quam te solum quod nocte reliqui” (5). In her closing line, moreover, the narrator completes the admission that she was afraid to make before, when she was alone with her beloved. Sulpicia openly avows her love, which is a passionate one (*ardorem*, 6), yet this avowal is not articulated in its entirety until the final word of the elegy. Here, it is almost as if she restages, in the rhetorical organization of the poem, her former hesitation—her impulse to hide her ardor—but then firmly renounces such concealment and evasion. With the possessive adjective *meum*, emphatically positioned as the final word both in its line and in the poem as a whole, the speaker’s interior and public selves—what she feels and what she aspires to communicate—finally seem to coalesce, as she lays claim explicitly to her own desire (*ardorem . . . meum*, 6).

Poem 3.18 thus brings the narrative implicit in the sequence 3.13–3.18 “full circle,”<sup>54</sup> closing the cycle like the clasp on a necklace. With its celebration of mutuality, 3.18 looks back to the quasi-epitaphic conclusion of poem 3.13; like that text, this final poem in the sequence insists on the commensurability of the lovers’ feelings. The “burning love” (*fervida cura*, 3.18.1) of the male addressee finds its response in the narrator’s own equally fiery passion. Like the two previous elegies that we have examined, moreover, 3.18 thematizes the narrator’s struggle to attain full discursive and erotic selfhood, and to define her own position as a subject of speech, desire, and writing. Here, however, the narrator seems to enter the realm of concrete verbal action with increasing assurance. N. J. Lowe has observed that, “of the 27 verbs” in her oeuvre “of which Sulpicia herself is the subject,” a mere four are in the indicative, “while no fewer than 24 verbs are used impersonally or with abstract or hypothetical subjects.”<sup>55</sup> Intriguingly, three of those four indicatives occur in elegy 3.18: *videor* (2), *commisi* (3), *reliqui* (5). Sulpicia’s reluctance elsewhere to present herself as the subject of an indicative may well be another strategy for veiling herself rhetorically, but it is a strategy that the imaginative scenario of 3.18 enables her to forgo. The poem presents itself as intensely private communication, which involves only the poet and her beloved. Within this fictive setting, the poet-lover can fully acknowledge her agency because she reveals it to her beloved alone, and not to the potentially censorious public world: an imagined context of “privacy” allows her to make this literary confession.

53. As Santirocco 1979, 234 points out, poem 3.18 is the only elegy of the Sulpician cycle which is structured as one sentence. Unlike that final poem in the cycle, poems 3.13–3.17 are organized in self-contained units of a couplet.

54. As Keith 1997, 307 points out, though her discussion of the relationship between 3.18 and 3.13 differs in emphasis from my own.

55. Lowe 1988, p. 202, n. 36. Lowe speculates that this may be “[o]ne ‘feminine’ effect in the poems’ cumulative texture,” but he does not take this suggestive observation further. The other indicative of which Sulpicia is the subject is *relinquo* at 3.14.7; Lowe seems to lean toward construing *ferar* at 3.13.10 as a subjunctive, though he concedes that it might be a future indicative (205). In any case, the narrator’s claim to agency is less fully enacted here than in poem 3.18, with its indicatives in the active voice.



Even the order in which the indicatives appear in poem 3.18 is suggestive, since as a series they mark the speaker's shift from self-contemplation (*videor*) to the action implied by the active voice (*commisi, reliqui*), and from a "specular" mode to one of narration.<sup>56</sup> Thus at 3.18.1–2, Sulpicia regards herself, as it were, from an external vantage, assuming what she imagines was her lover's prior point of view, and picturing herself as the object of his desire: "fervida cura/ . . . videor paucos ante fuisse dies." Yet this passage, where the narrator apprehends herself indirectly, and through a perspective ascribed to another person, yields to one in which she becomes an active participant in the story she creates: she moves, in short, from being "seen" to claiming agency and voice.

In this respect, 3.18 follows a trajectory similar to that of 3.13, although the admissions that the poet-lover makes here are more intimate even than those of its companion elegy. To be sure, in 3.13 the narrator celebrates the *gaudia* of an avowedly sexual relationship, yet she is as concerned in that text with how others will respond to the affair as she is with exploring her private experience of love. In 3.18, the intensity of the speaker's ardor makes her uneasy, and she seems to struggle with the temptation to hide it not only from her lover, but even in some ways from herself. In fact she begins this poetic confession of her love not by speaking about her own emotions, but by alluding to the "fiery passion" of her beloved. Yet the endearment with which she opens the poem (*mea lux*, 1), and the accumulation of expressions that denote passionate desire (*fervida cura; ardorem . . . meum; cupiens*), all hint at the depth of her feelings, even before she acknowledges them explicitly. Sulpicia's highly-charged diction works in counterpoint to her syntax, which attempts to postpone full disclosure until the final, unequivocal *meum*. Here, it is as if the speaker protects herself from the intensity of her own desire through her delaying tactics, through the gradual unfolding of the poem's one sentence; the elegy betrays her contradictory impulses. In this, the most forthright "confession" of her oeuvre, the poet-lover claims her passion frankly, but does so by means of syntax that seems, paradoxically, to retain a trace of the reserve that she now rejects.

In 3.18 as elsewhere in her poetry, then, Sulpicia grapples with the unease occasioned by her literary stance, in which she adopts the self-dramatizing and highly "visible" postures of the elegiac lover. At key points in the oeuvre, she takes pains to distinguish her authorial self from her poetic persona. In all three of the texts that we have examined, moreover, she modifies the generic materials of elegy—its topoi, idioms, and amatory *mis-en-scène*—creating fictions that explain and justify her literary revelations, and thus mitigate the impropriety of writing verse that claims to be based on her own erotic life. In Sulpicia's poetry, anxieties that arise from the prospect of being observed and talked about yield to the exigencies of being read. She develops an authoritative elegiac rhetoric, yet one that allows

56. The expression is that of Brooks 1993, 254.

her to preserve a kind of privacy, and even propriety, within her scenarios of disclosure.

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