Sulpicia Reconsidered

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SULPICIA RECONSIDERED

I.

Women certainly have their place on the pages of Roman history and literature.[1] But the page is rarely the title page and their place on it is rarely that of author. Moses Finley has called them "the silent women of Rome" since we know of them for the most part only through the archaeological and literary remains their husbands have left behind.[2] The most compelling females of Roman antiquity were not, after all, the authors of books but the characters in them.

Of course, we know of published letters by Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi (Cicero *Brut.* 58.211), of memoirs by the younger Agrippina (Tacitus *Ann.* 4.53.3; Pliny *NH* 7.46), and even of a few orations delivered by women like Hortensia (Val. Max. 8.3.3; Quintilian 1.1.4-8). Other women composed verse or at least dabbled in it. Catullus, for example, addressed his beloved Clodia as Lesbia to compare her with Sappho; *puella docta,* "learned girl," became a common tag for the elegists' cultivated mistresses who were also gifted with song; and later, under Domitian, a Sulpicia wrote about her husband, Calenus, and earned Martial's praise (*Epigr.* 10.35, 38). None of this literary production, however, has survived.[3]

It is only from the reign of Augustus that the writings of a Roman woman have come down to us. Six short love poems totalling a mere forty lines, they are the work of another Sulpicia and are preserved, together with the works of several of Messalla's literary clients, in the manuscripts of Tibullus (as *Corpus Tibullianum* 4.7-12).[4] Haupt identified the author as Messalla's niece,[5] and Gruppe recognized that several other elegies (*Corp. Tib.* 4.2-6) which are also about Sulpicia's love affair are, in fact, the work of another poet, not Sulpicia

[1]I should like to thank the Ludwig Vogelstein Foundation for generous suport. I am also grateful to Professors Helen H. Bacon, Steele Commager, Mae Smethurst, and L. P. Wilkinson for valuable suggestions.

[2]M. I. Finley, "The Silent Women of Rome," *Horizon* 7 (1965) 57-64, reprinted in his *Aspects of Antiquity* (New York, 1968) 129-42.

[3]The seventy Bobbio hexameters (Baehrens, *Poetae Latini Minores* V, 93 ff.) which purport to be by this Sulpicia are of dubious authenticity, as are the fragments of Cornelia quoted in the Nepos manuscripts (Peter, *Historicorum Romanorum Reliquiae* II, 39 ff.). Finally, the verse graffiti composed by Julia Balbilla as she toured Egypt with Hadrian (*CIG* III, 4725-30; Kaibel, *Epigr. Graec.* 988-92) are not relevant to this discussion for they are not in Latin but in Aeolic Greek.

[4]For the life of Messalla see R. Hanslik, *RE* VIII A 1, 131-57; J. Hammer, *Prolegomena to an Edition of the Panegyricus Messallae* (New York, 1925); J. Carcopino, "Notes biographiques sur M. Valerius Messala Corvinus" *RPh* 72 (1946) 96-117. For the poetry of his circle see R. Hanslik, "Der Dichterkreis des Messalla," *Anz. Akad. Wiss. Wien* 89 (1952) 22-38; C. Davies, "Poetry in the 'Circle' of Messalla," *G&R* 20 (1973) 25-35.

[5]M. Haupt, "Varia," *Hermes* 5 (1871) 32-4, reprinted in his *Opuscula,* (Leipzig, 1875; repr. Hildesheim, 1967) III, 502-3.

but the so-called *auctor de Sulpicia*.[6] Since these two factual discoveries in the nineteenth century, there have been few significant contributions, particularly of an interpretive sort.[7] Although her poetry is virtually the only extant Latin penned by a woman in the classical period, Sulpicia is almost unknown except to classical scholars, and (as it is the purpose of this essay to suggest) even by these she is often misunderstood.

The standard commentary in English by Kirby Flower Smith is representative of the traditional view:

> She certainly does not rank among the great poets of the world, even her mastery of technique occasionally suggests an amateur. . . . But, like Catullus and a few of the chosen, this slip of a girl has that rarest of all gifts, the gift of straightforward simplicity. . . . She shows no traces of self-consciousness and no signs of affectation. Moreover, her personality is marked, and she writes from a full heart.[8]

Although appreciative, this appraisal is also somewhat patronizing, for it gives the impression that Sulpicia's merits are less artistic than temperamental. Her simplicity and lack of calculation are emphasized also in more recent discussions in which the words "sincere," "spontaneous," "emotional," and "amateur" recur.[9] In short, there is scholarly consensus on two points: first, that Sulpicia is a gifted amateur, and second, that her poems are to be read more as social documents than as works of art.

It is interesting, however, that this judgement is not shared by other poets. It is probably Sulpicia whom the pseudo-Vergilian *Catalepton* 9 compliments—

[6]O. Gruppe, *Die römische Elegie* (Leipzig, 1838) I, 25-64. Gruppe, however, places 4.7 together with 4.2-6 as the work of the *auctor de Sulpicia,* whereas modern editors assign it to Sulpicia herself. For further basic discussion of Sulpicia see W. Kroll, *RE* IV A 1, 879-80 (no. 114); M. von Schanz and C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur,* 4 vols. (Munich, 1927-59), II (4th ed., 1935) 189-91.

[7]For a valuable survey of the sort of questions to which scholars have addressed themselves—e.g. the identity of Sulpicia's beloved, or the authorship of 4.7—see G. Provasi, "Il ciclo Tibulliano Sulpicia-Cerintho e le sue principali interpretazioni," *RFIC* 15 (1937) 343-54; a full listing of scholarly literature is H. Harrauer, *A Bibliography to the Corpus Tibullianum* (Hildesheim, 1971) 59-60.

[8]K. F. Smith, *The Elegies of Albius Tibullus* (New York, 1913; repr. Darmstadt, 1971) 79-80. It is unfortunate that Sulpicia and the other authors of the *Corpus* could not be included in the new, more literary, edition with notes by M. C. J. Putnam, *Tibullus: A Commentary* (Norman, 1973).

[9]A random sample: M. Ponchont, *Tibulle et les auteurs du Corpus Tibullianum* (Paris, 1924) 162: "Ses petites pièces sont d'un art imparfait, mais pleines de force et de passion;" E. Bréguet, *Le roman de Sulpicia* (Geneva, 1946) 27: "Document humain et social; comme tel, il vaut précisément par l'absence de caractère littéraire, par la spontanéité, la sincerité d'une auteur dilettante;" E. M. Michael, in C. Carrier (tr.), *The Poems of Tibullus* (Bloomington, 1968) 28: "Although the poetess . . . shows traces of amateurishness . . . she is successful in communicating her emotions to the reader;" G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy,* 2d. ed. (London, 1969) 107: "Written spontaneously by a woman with no literary pretensions, [these poems] are a unique document in the history of Latin literature;" H. Creekmore (tr.), *The Erotic Elegies of Albius Tibullus* (New York, 1968) 105-6: "Sulpicia's poems were not meant to be artistic creations. . . . One may well ask why she bothered with meter at all;" S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 1975) 173: "She was not a brilliant artist; her work is of interest *only* because the author is female" (my italics).

"Emulously the goddesses graced her with their several gifts" (22, Loeb. tr.)—and the *auctor de Sulpicia* was directly inspired by her. The most extraordinary tribute, however, comes not from an ancient but a modern poet. In an essay on Horace, Ezra Pound casually observed that "It would be worth ten years of a man's life to translate Catullus, or Ovid or perhaps Sulpicia."[10] Ten years for forty lines is absurd, and Pound, characteristically, did not bother to explain himself. Yet we may be sure that so shrewd (if not always accurate) a reader of the classics must have had something in mind.[11] His outrageous declaration, then, challenges us to reexamine Sulpicia. A brief critical reading of the poems (section II below) with an emphasis on their technique and traditional features (section III) should help us decide whether the conventional view of Sulpicia is just, and, if not, what reasons extraneous to the poems themselves might account for it (section IV).

II.

After the opening poem, consideration of which may be postponed, two *genethliaca* or birthday poems are placed side by side. The first is to Sulpicia's uncle whose plans to celebrate her birthday with a picnic upset her own plans to spend the day with her lover, Cerinthus:

> Invisus natalis adest, qui rure molesto
> et sine Cerintho tristis agendus erit.
> dulcius urbe quid est? an villa sit apta puellae
> atque Arretino frigidus amnis agro?
> iam, nimium Messalla mei studiose, quiescas;
> non tempestivae saepe, propinque, viae.
> hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo,
> arbitrio quamvis non sinis esse meo. (4.8)

Messalla must have changed his mind if we are to judge from what follows:

> Scis iter ex animo sublatum triste puellae?
> natali Romae iam licet esse meo.
> omnibus ille dies nobis natalis agatur,
> qui nec opinanti nunc tibi forte venit. (4.9)

In line 2 of the second poem the manuscripts read *tuo,* which would mean that the birthday in question is now a different one, that of Certinthus. Yet *tuo* is likely to be a corruption arising either from a misunderstanding of *tibi* in line 4 or from confusion with the situation of poem 4.5 by the *auctor de Sulpicia.* Thus, Huschke's *meo* or the Aldine's more correct, though also more prosaic, *suo,* surely give better sense. Both poems must be about the same birthday, namely Sulpicia's, since the contrast between them would otherwise have no point.

[10]Ezra Pound, "Horace," *The Criterion* 9 (1929-30), reprinted in *Arion* 9 (1970) 187.

[11]For the different responses Pound's "creative translations" have evoked from scholars, contrast G. Highet, "Beer-bottle on the Pediment," *Horizon* 3 (1961), reprinted in his *Explorations* (New York, 1971) 244-56, with J. P. Sullivan, *Ezra Pound and Sextus Propertius* (Austin, 1964).

And the contrast is sharply drawn. Apart from purely verbal echoes—key words such as *natalis, tristis,* and *animum* are repeated, and the phrase *non sinis esse meo,* in the first poem is controverted by the identically placed *iam licet esse meo* in the second—there are pointed contrasts in address, situation, and tone. The first poem is addressed to Sulpicia's uncle, the second to her lover and perhaps some friends (*omnibus . . . nobis,* 3). The first presents a crisis, the second its satisfactory resolution. Finally, the first purports to be an exercise in juvenile rhetoric: note the pathetic fallacy, the stock contrast of city and country, the facile generalizing about the timeliness of travel, and the rather overdone ending; even the size of the poem, twice that of its pendant, reflects its more rhetorical cast. In the second poem, on the other hand, the rhetoric yields to a burst of joy. On one level, the connection between the two poems is simply chronological, a "before and after" relationship in which the implied lapse of time accommodates Messalla's change of mind. But there is also the question of "cause and effect" in that the attempt at persuasion in the first poem may be presented as itself responsible for the happy ending celebrated in the second.[12] These poems are short and direct, and yet, in their calculated contrast, deceptively simple. In this regard it is instructive to remember also that the *genethliacon* is a literary form,[13] that the interfering uncle is familiar from Horace's Neobule ode (*O.* 3.12), and that a parallel for this pair of poems exists in Propertius 1.8a and 8b, also about a trip and its happy cancellation. In other words, while there is no reason to doubt the facts Sulpicia gives us—that there was a birthday and that a trip was planned—her interest in these events is not just autobiographical but "literary."

Crisis is the theme that unites Sulpicia's (and indeed almost all) love poetry, and crisis cannot always be so happily averted. In the next poem Sulpicia rebukes her wayward lover:

> Gratum est, securus multum quod iam tibi de me
> permittis, subito ne male inepta cadam.
> sit tibi cura togae potior pressumque quasillo
> scortum quam Servi filia Sulpicia:
> solliciti sunt pro nobis, quibus illa dolori est
> ne cedam ignoto maxima causa toro. (4.10)

A slight "audiovisual" frame in the Latin sets the situation: the poem moves from *cadam* at the beginning ("Your indifference to me keeps me from *falling*") to *cedam* at the end ("I may *yield* place to another"), from falling in love to falling from favor. Each couplet turns on a different sort of caring: if Cerinthus no longer cares for Sulpicia (*securus*), and if he prefers a slave girl (*cura*), there are others who do care (*solliciti*). This last jab, meant to provoke Cerinthus' jealousy (if the others are his rivals) or to insult his pride (if the others are his detractors), belies the posture of Sulpicia's own lack of concern

[12]This is consistent with what we can divine of Sulpicia's view of poetry, namely that poetry is effective: she uses it to communicate with her lover and in her prefatory poem she actually says that it is her verses which have brought Cerinthus to her arms (4.7.4 f.).

[13]See E. Cesareo, *Il carme natalizio nella poesia latina* (Palermo, 1929) and, for the Messalla group's predilection for this form, Davies (above n. 4).

assumed a few lines earlier. In fact, this poem is a psychologically convincing study in shifting posture: the first couplet is bitterly ironic, the second protests her indifference, and the third vaunts her pride in family and friends. Indeed, class consciousness is forcefully conveyed throughout by the contrast between Sulpicia's allusion to her aristocratic lineage and the concrete representations of her rival's lowly status: *togae, pressum quasillo, scortum,* and *ignoto toro.* In the bold signature, *Servi filia Sulpicia,* we sense the pain, but we also sense her effort to cope by transforming it into as much a social as a personal affront.

The next poem tries a different approach to a similar situation:

> Estne tibi, Cerinthe, tuae pia cura puellae,
> quod mea nunc vexat corpora fessa calor?
> a ego non aliter tristes evincere morbos
> optarim, quam te si quoque velle putem.
> at mihi quid prosit morbos evincere, si tu
> nostra potes lento pectore ferre mala? (4.11)

"The fever is apparently malarial," diagnoses one translator.[14] But the sustained medical imagery on which the lines turn is standard in Latin love poetry, the calculated ambiguity between real fever and the heat of passion, between real disease and the illness that is love. These ambiguities suit the general tone of doubt: the poem opens and closes with a question. Like the preceding poem, this one too represents the relation under strain. But now the tone is uniform, not shifting, and the mood has softened from invective to a request for reassurance. Significantly, the expression for love here is not just *cura* as before but *pia cura.* We recall the *pietas* Catullus proclaimed in his affair with Lesbia (e.g. Cat. 76.2, 5) and perhaps also *pius Aeneas* and all that *pietas* meant to the Augustan age, and then we realize that Sulpicia is now concerned not so much with the mere fact of Cerinthus' affection as with its quality.

This leads into the next poem which is even softer and more introspective. The crisis here is Sulpicia's fault, not her lover's, and it results not from something she has done but from something she has failed to do. The poet apologizes for her coyness the night before:

> Ne tibi sim, mea lux, aeque iam fervida cura
> ac videor paucos ante fuisse dies
> si quicquam tota commisi stulta iuventa
> cuius me fatear paenituisse magis
> hesterna quam te solum quod nocte reliqui
> ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum. (4.12)

Though the fire and light imagery is pleasantly conceived (*lux, fervida, ardorem*), there is also a nice metrical effect. When allowance is made for the difference between the Latin quantitative metric and the German and English

[14]Creekmore (above n. 9) 107.

stress systems, Schiller's famous paradigm and Coleridge's translation of it give a fair idea of the elegiac couplet's rhythm:

> Im Hexameter steight des Springquells flüssige Säule,
> Im Pentameter drauf fällt sie melodisch herab.
>
> In the hexameter rises the fountain's silvery column:
> In the pentameter aye falling in melody back.

As it developed in Greece and Rome, the couplet gradually became a closed syntactic unit. Its upward and then downward movement invited such treatment. Sulpicia always respects the couplet's closure except in this poem which is one long sentence without punctuation. The six line runover suits a breathless apology and is both deliberate and effective.

If crisis could not be averted, it could at least be survived. Thus, the first poem in the manuscript order sums up the whole experience in happy, even rapturous, terms:

> Tandem venit amor, qualem texisse pudori
> quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.
> exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis
> attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.
> exoluit 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 pecasse iuvat, vultus componere famae
> taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar. (4.7)

Scholars have been quick to find their happy ending here: *cum digno digna fuisse ferar*. Be that as it may, *tandem* ("at last") implies a background to the affair, and the mention of successful prayers by Sulpicia's Muse (*meis . . . Camenis*) to Venus Cytherea implies that this past is not just emotional but literary. In other words, the background is the other poems (although a literal reading might also suggest that Sulpicia wrote poems to Venus which are now lost). Whereas the other poems purport to be letters to Messalla or Cerinthus, this first poem is without an addressee. For this reason it has sometimes been compared to a diary entry.[15] But this obscures its function since it is, in effect, a preface to the reader.

As such it refers as much to Sulpicia's poetry as to her love. The second line from the beginning and the second line from the end both contain the word *fama,* that "gossip" earned by her lifestyle but also, since she broadcasts it, that "fame" earned by her poetry. Even the linguistic contours express the theme of reputation. A literal translation would begin like this: "Love has come at last of such a sort that *to be said* to have hidden it would shame me more than *to be said* to have disclosed it." Similarly, the third couplet runs: "Let my

[15]See Smith (above n. 8) 79. The poem's point is often obscured in another way as well: although Sulpicia's pieces may have been published after she died, the common belief in posthumous publication *solely* on the basis of their personal content neglects what the poet says here, that she does not care about gossip (*vultus componere famae/taedet,* 4.7.9-10).

joys be told by the man who *is said* to have had no joys of his own." Finally the last line: "May I *be said* to have been a worthy woman with a worthy man." The translator must remove all the indirect discourse to avoid sounding flat and fussy. But the Latin, though awkward, is not without a point. The poem is not just about love but also about reputation. Indeed, its key word, *fama*, is related to the verb *fari*, "to speak." Thus, the gratuitous indirect discourse with its emphasis on what *is spoken* resonates with the theme. The language is not an aberration, for the syntax mirrors the theme as the words state it.

III.

From this brief survey much of Sulpicia's technique has already become apparent: the framing devices, the psychologically convincing tonal shifts when she rebukes Cerinthus, the play on images in the illness poem, and the metrical effect of composing her apology as one long sentence. There are several other features of arrangement, meter, and syntax worth exploring.

It is commonly assumed that the arrangement of the poems is neither chronologically nor psychologically significant and that the only principle of organization (if it can be called that) is *variatio*. Thus, as happened to the Lesbia poems of Catullus, Sulpicia's verses have been rearranged by scholars to form a chronological sequence.[16] However, there is a certain literary logic to their order as it stands (regardless of who did the ordering, the author or an editor). The collection opens with a preface. The poems which follow quite consciously explore a relationship in many different crises, beginning with the birthday poems where there is a solution and continuing with those in which no solution is indicated. Also, there seems to be a movement in terms of responsibility and response: crises are precipitated first by an outsider, Messalla, then by Cerinthus, and finally by Sulpicia herself, and the poet's response to them moves from persuasion, to invective, to doubt and apology.

In meter too, as in internal structure and outer arrangement, technical ability manifests itself. A common view has it that "If they are judged by the high standards Catullus and the *poetae novi* had established, [Sulpicia's poems] suggest a regression in technique."[17] It is true that she is occasionally harsh, but with regard to at least one metrical feature it is not possible to concur in this judgement. As the elegiac couplet was refined in Rome it was gradually discovered that the pentameter could be most neatly concluded with a word of two syllables having an iambic value. Catullus so ends about thirty-eight per cent of his pentameters, and among the Augustans the figure rises sharply, with about eighty-five per cent for Tibullus, ninety-nine for Propertius IV, and one hundred per cent for Ovid.[18] Even when allowance is made for the small size of

[16]Smith (above n. 8) 81-2 rearranges the poems in the sequences: 4.8, 9, and 11 (or 11 and 9); 4.12, 10, and 7. The elaborate plan by L. Herrmann, "Reconstruction du livret de Sulpicia," *Latomus* 9 (1950) 35-47 is scarcely credible owing to its basic assumptions and its wholesale transpositions and lacunae.

[17]Luck (above n. 9) 107.

[18]For statistics and discussion of the phenomenon, see L. P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artisty* (Cambridge, 1963) 118 ff., with literature there cited; also M. Platnauer, *Latin Elegiac Verse* (Cambridge, 1951), and, on Sulpicia specifically, W. Cartault, *Le distique élégiaque chez Tibulle, Sulpicia, Lygdamus* (Paris, 1911), and Bréguet (above n. 9) passim.

her sample which would make a strict percentage calculation meaningless, that Sulpicia ends all but one of her pentameters with an iambic disyllable is remarkable. And the one exception proves the rule since it is her name, placed at the end of the line for emphasis (4.10.4). Whether she is compared with Catullus on whom she improves in this respect or with Ovid whom she anticipates, Sulpicia displays concern for the fine points of versification.

Finally, as with meter so with syntax. Much of what has been called "Feminine Latinity" or "Ladies' Latin" is really also effective, if irregular, use of language. If we allow that gender conditioning can affect speech patterns,[19] the hypothesis that the language of Roman women differed from that of men is not *a priori* preposterous. But it does disregard two sorts of linguistic evidence. First, we have from this period no other Latin written by a woman with which to compare these poems. And second, it is true that some ancients (e.g. Cicero, *De Orat.* 3.45) claimed that women spoke differently from men; but even if such claims are reliable, Cicero had archaisms in mind and Sulpicia is free of them. Instead, it is her neologisms and colloquialisms that are odd,[20] and they are there for a reason: to create the impression (and by now it should be clear that it is *only* an impression) of spontaneity.

The technique, then, is at all levels accomplished. It is also a conscious part of a literary tradition. The clearest evidence for this is the name of the man Sulpicia loves. That the name "Cerinthus" looks Greek reflects not a racial but a literary genealogy since it is a pseudonym. Latin love poets all hid their mistresses under such thin Greek covers. Apuleius (*Apol.* 10) identified some of these and rules for their formation were noted by ps.-Acro in antiquity and by Bentley in the eighteenth century:[21] the original and assumed names must have the same number of syllables and must also be metrically equivalent. They seem also at times to be chosen to make some literary point: Catullus calls his mistress Lesbia to recall Sappho of Lesbos; the name of Tibullus' beloved, Delia, is the Greek translation of her real name, Plania (*delos* = *planus*); and both she and Propertius' Cynthia are named after an epithet of Diana.[22] Similarly, the name "Cerinthus" was thought by Renaissance humanists to derive from the equivalence of the Greek *keras* and the Latin *cornu,* both meaning "horn." Thus he could be identified with a certain Cornutus whom Tibullus twice mentions (Tib. 2.2, 3). This is not certain,[23] however, and the

[19]For recent work in language and social structure see the bibliographical essay by several hands in *Signs* 1 (1975) 153-6.

[20]See Bréguet (above n. 9) 43-9.

[21]Ps.-Acro on Horace *S.* 1.2.64 (F. Hauthal, *Acronis et Porphyrionis Commentarii in Q. Horatium Flaccum,* 2 vols. [Berlin, 1866; repr. Amsterdam, 1966] II, 31); R. Bentley, *Q. Horatius Flaccus,* 3d ed., 2 vols. (Berlin, 1869) I, 107.

[22]It is significant that Catullus employs the Sapphic strophe on only two occasions, to mark the beginning of his love affair (poem 51, the translation from Sappho fr. 31 L.-P.) and its bitter end (poem 11). As for Tibullus, he may once pun on Delia's real name Plania, when he states that his love for her has driven him like a top whirling "over the plain," *per plana* (1.5.3 f.). Finally, the analogy between Propertius' Cynthia and the moon was explored by E. O'Neill, "Cynthia and the Moon," *CP* 53 (1958) 1-8.

[23]In connecting the name Cerinthus, which is the Greek *kērinthos* ("bee-bread"), with *keras,* the Renaissance humanists were linguistically wrong. But while the long *e* in Latin cannot represent the Greek short *e*, perhaps the Roman reader was not so acutely conscious of the difference in quantity. On the vegetative associations of the name see now J. P. Boucher, "A

true advantage of the Cornutus-Cerinthus identification, one suspects, was that it enabled the reader to supply a happy ending to the love affair. The Cornutus of whom Tibullus speaks had a wife (*uxoris*, Tib. 2.2.11), which would mean that Sulpicia finally married and became a Roman *matrona*. Even if the identification were less tentative, poetry is not prosopography. It has become axiomatic that we are best equipped to infer from poems not facts of biography but facts of the imagination. And so, the real point behind the name "Cerinthus" is not the man's identity but rather Sulpicia's determination to observe the conventions of love poetry at all costs. In all other cases the lover-poet is a man and, in most cases, the pseudonymous beloved is a woman. That a woman, Sulpicia, should now be the poet turns the situation around. She could have underplayed this by not using a Greek name for her beloved. That she chose otherwise is eloquent of her desire to conform with the literary practice of Roman love poetry with its postures and pseudonyms even if that meant reversing traditional sexual roles.

Where role reversals occur elsewhere in Roman literature, the point is different. Catullus, for instance, comparing his affection for Lesbia to a flower crushed beneath the plough (Cat. 11.21-4) uses an image he elsewhere applies not to men betrayed in love but to girls deflowered on their wedding night (Cat. 62.39-47).[24] And when Vergil describes the death of Nisus and Euryalus he borrows the same flower comparison with its feminine associations (*Aen.* 9.435 f.). In both Catullus and Vergil this suggests an androgynous vision. In Sulpicia, on the other hand, it results simply from the circumstance that the poet is a woman and is unwilling to forego because of her gender the advantages of a literary tradition.

Sulpicia's debt is twofold. First, to the elegists. Her amatory vocabulary (e.g. *cura* and the sexual euphemism, *fuisse cum*, at 4.7.10), her themes (separation, illness, infidelity), and even her socially defiant posture (4.7) are elegiac conventions.[25] And yet, her poems—unallusive, short, without mythological adornment—are very unlike those of the elegists. If, then, Sulpicia drew her themes, certain technical features, and several conventions from elegy, her form and much of her style place her in another related tradition, elegiac epigram. The genre is a Greek invention, but Sulpicia often reminds us of such Roman epigrams as Catullus 85:

> Odi et amo. quare id faciam, fortasse requiris?
> nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

The difference between full-scale elegy and the elegiac epigram can best be

propos de Cérinthus et de quelques autres pseudonymes dans la poésie augustéene," *Latomus* 35 (1976) 504-19.

[24]Sappho fr. 105c L.-P. employed the image of the hyacinth trampled by shepherds, presumably applying it to a girl's loss of virginity. Catullus 62.39-48 adopts this, while Catullus 11.24-4 inverts the image by applying it to a man, himself: see G. Duclos, "Catullus 11: *Atque in perpetuum, Lesbia, ave atque vale*," *Arethusa* 9 (1976) 77-89 esp. 86-7; and, for inversions elsewhere, see for example, M. C. J. Putnam, "The Art of Catullus 64," *HSCP* 65 (1961) 168, 172, and M. Daniels, "Personal Revelation in Catullus 64," *CJ* 62 (1967) 353-6.

[25]For *fuisse cum* see Ovid *Am.* 2.8.27 f. (*tecum fuerim*); for the motifs and conventions Sulpicia shares with elegy see Bréguet (above n. 9) 40-43, and on the *genethliacon* specifically see n. 13 above.

appreciated by comparing this Catullan poem with Ovid's adaptation of it, *Amores* 3.11b. That goes far to justify Quintilian's complaint (*Inst.* 10.1.88) that Ovid was too much a lover of his own ingenuity. By posing and reposing the antithesis, hate versus love, Ovid drew out the two-line epigram into a twenty-line elegy—clever, to be sure, but without the freshness and force of Catullus. The same thing happened to Sulpicia. As noted earlier, the anonymous *auctor de Sulpicia* took her love affair as his subject. His five elegies are pleasingly competent but that no one has admitted preferring them to their model may be the best and final objection to any view of Sulpicia which would deny her her proper standing.

IV.

And what should that standing be? Certainly not that of an amateur whose poems are social documents rather than works of art. A careful reading of Sulpicia tends to suggest that factors extraneous to the poems themselves must have contributed to this inadequate view.

In the writings of earlier scholars stereotypes of femininity surely play a part. These can be detected at all levels, from the individual word—the preference for "poetess" over "poet", for instance—to whole paragraphs:

> A genuine woman reacts so to speak to a given emotional stimulus in a way more or less characteristic of every genuine woman in the same situation. In this respect nothing in all literature could be more characteristically feminine than these elegies.[26]

The extreme position was represented by the philologists who explained Sulpicia's difficult syntax by appealing to "Feminine Latinity." Even the praises bestowed on Sulpicia were patronizing and one cannot help detecting in them an attitude similar to Dr. Johnson's when he compared the preaching of women to a dog walking on its hind legs: "It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."

And yet, though tempting, it would be ungracious and untrue to claim that male bias is responsible for the perpetuation of the traditional view. In fact, many of the scholars have been women and it is a female (and feminist) classicist who most recently denied any literary value to Sulpicia: "She was not a brilliant artist; her work is of interest only because the author is female."[27] The situation here is complicated by more than sexism since sociological interest has displaced literary criticism. Finally, the standard view depends in no small measure on older romantic notions of creativity, of the incompatibility of artistry and feeling, of love poetry as a sincere, spontaneous, unreflective emotional purge. Such notions used to handicap Catullan criticism and they may still influence our appreciation of Sulpicia.[28] Certainly Sulpicia, like Catullus, continues to charm us by her outspokenness and self-expression, but that does not preclude genuine artistry.

[26]Smith (above n. 8) 81.

[27]Pomeroy (above n. 9) 173.

[28]There is also a more matter-of-fact reason: the small size of the corpus offers little scope for intensive analysis.

Sexual stereotyping, sociological interest, and outmoded romanticism—but there is one more factor to be considered, the confusion of sociological observation, however valid, with literary judgement.

Rome was very much a man's world.[29] After she married, a woman emerged from her father's absolute control, *patria potestas,* only to find herself under her husband's authority which the legalistic Roman, with admirable precision, termed his "hand," *manus*. Of course the old-fashioned, male-dominated types of marriage gave way in time and there was gradual economic and social emancipation. Yet there is no need to take at face value the elder Cato's complaint that "All nations rule their wives, we rule all nations, but our wives rule us" (Plutarch *Cato Maior* 28). A compelling syllogism, but hardly accurate. Politically, for instance, women were denied any official participation in government and those with such talents had to rely on influence and intrigue to make up for the lack of a vote. Inevitably, public affairs took second place to erotic and cultural ones as outlets for creativity. Cicero's contemporary, Sempronia, managed to combine all these interests, though her politics—she conspired with Catiline—seem to have prejudiced Sallust's account of her artistic endeavors (*Catiline* 25; Loeb tr.):

> Well read in the literature of Greece and Rome, able to play the lyre and dance more skilfully than an honest woman need, and having many other accomplishments which minister to voluptuousness. . . . Nevertheless, she was a woman of no mean endowments; she could write verses. . . .

By the time of Augustus these words could be applied to many women. As one of their number, Sulpicia held up a mirror to the private world inhabited by the women of her class. A birthday, a picnic, an uncle, a lover—to acknowledge in this way the insulated nature of her achievement is to recognize the impositions an androcentric society makes upon women. But this valid sociological observation must not be confused with a literary judgement. The limitatons imposed on Sulpicia's poetry from without are handsomely compensated from within by the poet's technique and awareness of literary tradition, features which demonstrate professionalism and creativity within the admittedly restricted sphere.

It is quite true that Sulpicia is no Roman Sappho. But neither is she an amateur. This must be what Ezra Pound had in mind, that Sulpicia did not compose unpremeditated and technically regressive verse with surprisingly good results, but that she was a poet in every sense of the word. If it is not worth exactly ten years of one's life to translate her, as Pound maintained, Sulpicia has at least some small claim on our attention as the one woman whose poetry has come down to us from classical Rome.

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[29]For studies of women in antiquity see Pomeroy (above n. 9), Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen Fant, *Women in Greece and Rome* (Toronto, 1977); J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women* (London, 1962); also the two issues of *Arethusa* devoted to the subject: vol. 6 no. 1 (1973) and vol. 11 no. 1 (1978).