

## An Epistolary Sulpicia: Publicized, not Published

“If Sulpicia published poems, she presumably published more than six,” claims Lyne.<sup>1</sup> Indeed. But rather than conclude from this, as Lyne does, that Sulpicia therefore published a number of poems, of which those that appear in the *corpus Tibullianum* are only a selection; it may be profitable to instead question the antecedent, that is, to test the idea that Sulpicia published any poems at all. This is not to take the line of scholars such as Holzberg and Hubbard, who hold that Sulpicia did not actually write the poems; it is merely to suggest that their being published was an accident. This view takes its start from the private and epistolary nature of the poems, their unadorned simplicity, and the attitude towards publication evident in 3.13. It will be argued that 3.14–18 are real specimens of letters in verse, not intended for publication but entrusted by Sulpicia (by means of 3.13, a kind of “cover letter”) to the author of 3.8–12 (“Sulpicia’s Garland”), who used them for inspiration. In the course of considering the epistolary nature of the poems a different picture of the Sulpicia’s love affair will emerge. It will then be suggested that the inclusion of both Sulpicia and her ‘Garland’ in the manuscript tradition is the result of an editor throwing in the source material together with the work it inspired. Finally it is noted that “unadorned simplicity” is a virtue and not a criticism, and that in the case of the two Sulpician mini-collections, it is the inspiration which outshines the inspired, perhaps indicating that the latter was an abandoned experiment, preserved alongside the former by a conscientious literary executor.

Skoie traces an historical tendency for interpreters of 3.13–18 to displace 3.13 to the end of the collection, a move which she attributes to a chivalrous desire to have the seeming consummation of the affair come at the end, presumably attended by a marriage celebration.<sup>2</sup> The main reason for setting 3.13 to one side in the present study is slightly different. Of all the poems in which Sulpicia is the *ego*, 3.13 is the only one without an addressee. It is this which has made the poem seem to many “more like an extract as it were from her own diary”,<sup>3</sup> while the five poems which follow all seem more like correspondence. It may also be noted here that all the poems of the ‘Garland’ too have addressees: those in Sulpicia’s voice (3.9, 3.11), like most of the epistolary poems, address Cerinthus, and those in the voice of another (3.8, 3.10, 3.12), while not having as direct an addressee, do address various deities (Mars, Apollo, Juno, etc.) in due course. But because the view ascribed to here is that 3.8–12 and 3.13–18 had different authors, we postpone also a discussion of the ‘Garland’.

To turn then to the first of what shall be called here the epistolary poems, 3.14:

1. Lyne (2007) 343.

2. Skoie (2008) 243 ff.

3. Smith (1913) *ad loc.* [Smith numbers the Sulpicia poems 4.2–4.12; here they are 3.8–3.18]

*inuisus natalis adest, qui rure molesto  
 et sine Cerintho tristis agendus erit.  
 dulcius urbe quid est? an uilla sit apta puellae  
 atque Arretino frigidus amnis agro?  
 iam, nimium Messalla mei studiose, quiescas;  
 non tempestiuae saepe, propinque, uiae.  
 hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo  
 arbitrio, quamuis non sinis esse, meo.*

Smith takes the addressee of this poem to be the same as that of the remaining epistolary poems, ie. Cerinthus.<sup>4</sup> He backs up his assertion that *sine Cerintho*=*sine te* (v. 2) by referring to several Greek and Roman poets, especially Catullus, and also to seemingly similar constructions in the three following Sulpician poems. But it should be noted that *puellae* (3.15.1) and *Servi filia Sulpicia* (3.16.4) both refer to the speaker and not a second or third person, while *Cerinte* (3.17.1) is vocative and so unambiguously refers to the second person. None of these examples parallels the use of a non-vocative proper noun in place of a second-person pronoun or other form of address. Further, in discussing the vocatives referring to Messalla (*nimium Messalla mei studiose*, v. 5, and *propinque*, v. 6), Smith does not call them apostrophe or otherwise indicate why we should not take them as direct addresses. Smith reads the poem as addressed to Cerinthus, in spite of its reference to him in the third person, and not to Messalla, in spite of its reference to him in the second. It seems simpler and more profitable to agree with Lyne: “to imagine the poem as addressed *in toto* to Messalla.”<sup>5</sup> Understanding the poem as a letter of complaint from Sulpicia to her uncle does away with devices of indirection and makes the cause-and-effect nature of the paired poems more sensible, if more obvious.

A patron of literature such as Messalla would have been impressed by a letter in such polished and sincere verse, perhaps even to the point of allowing it to persuade him to relent and allow his niece to spend her birthday in Rome. If this is the case, *sine Cerintho* (v. 2) then implies Messalla’s knowledge of Cerinthus, and of his young ward’s interest in the boy. This is not inconceivable, and explains Sulpicia’s haste to emphasize the *rus molestum* (v.1), the *urbs dulcis* (v. 3), and the *frigidus amnis* (v. 4) as other reasons to stay in Rome. The neat arrangement of *Arretino frigidus amnis agro* (v. 4), where the words for the stream run through the middle of the words for the field, appears to have had such an effect on Messalla’s poetic sensibilities that his niece’s real motive—to be *non sine Cerintho*—went straight out of his head: Sulpicia writes to Cerinthus at once (3.15):

*scis iter ex animo sublatum triste puellae?  
 natali Romae iam licet esse suo.  
 omnibus ille dies nobis natalis agatur,  
 qui nec opinanti nunc tibi forte uenit.*

It may even be that Messalla mandated she compose such a note, to make her appreciate his beneficence in changing his mind, and to encourage her skill in

4. Smith (1913) *ad loc.*

5. Lyne (2007) 354.

poetry. But Sulpicia is too excited to compose as careful a poem as the previous one: she blurts out the news in a short four lines.

It is interesting to note that if 3.14 was indeed addressed to Messalla then Cerinthus may not have been aware of the *iter ... triste* (v. 1); hence the interrogative first word, *scis*. Of course, *scis* could refer only to the *ex animo sublatum ... puellae* part, and Sulpicia could have told Cerinthus of the prospective journey in person or in another letter, but it does admit the possibility that at this stage in their acquaintance it is only Sulpicia who has an amorous intent. She may have admitted her “crush” to Messalla while as yet being too shy to admit her feelings to Cerinthus himself. This would account for the brevity and impersonal feel of 3.15. *puellae* (v. 1) does not necessarily =“your girl”, and *omnibus* (v. 3) refers to a party of celebrants. The first three lines could easily be a common invitation sent to all Sulpicia’s friends at Rome, along the lines of: “Did you know a girl was going to the countryside? Well I’m not anymore! Now we can all celebrate my birthday together, in Rome.” Of course, the reader and Messalla both know the meaning behind *triste* (v.1), but the recipient of such an invitation would see it as nothing more than displeasure at being separated from her friends.

It is not until the final line that Sulpicia hints at her affection for Cerinthus: “perhaps you were not hoping I would be around...”. Such an air of hesitance is explained perfectly if Sulpicia and Cerinthus are not as yet in courtship. The scenario is this: Sulpicia is to spend her birthday in the country with her uncle (perhaps as has been their custom), but lately a boy called Cerinthus has caught her eye and she would rather throw a party at Rome and invite him along; she persuades her uncle and sends out the invitations, with a cautious “you don’t have to come if you don’t want to” tagged on the end of Cerinthus’.

If Sulpicia then “made her move” on Cerinthus at or after her birthday party, he may have got the wrong idea, for in 3.16 she rebukes him:

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

All commentators take this as evidence that Cerinthus has misbehaved by courting another, but in view of the situation constructed above this need not be the case. The usual interpretation of vv. 3–4 is along the following lines: “So a prostitute, a wool-laden whore, is now more important to you than Sulpicia, daughter of Servius?” It is natural to conjure up a rival for Sulpicia, since such is a common theme of love elegy. But we must remember that Sulpicia is not necessarily a love elegist: her short, allusion-free couplets remind us more of the elegiac epigrams of Catullus, and, if we are testing that her poems may be poetic letters rather than published elegies, we ought to hesitate from automatically imputing elegiac motives and scenarios. While Hinds sees the toga of v. 3 as that of Cerinthus,<sup>6</sup> most consider it a reference to the toga-wearing practice of the female prostitute. Agreed. But need

6. Hinds (1987) 45.

we then make the leap to say that this *prostituta* and *scortum* is therefore a third party, an erotic rival of Sulpicia? Why not the mistaken view of Cerinthus, he having been “led on” by Sulpicia? If, having arranged to spend some time with Cerinthus at her birthday, Cerinthus then took his lead with Sulpicia, 3.16 may be a rebuke for his moving too fast. In this case vv. 3–4 run something like: “So you’d rather I were a prostitute, a wool-laden whore, than that I am Sulpicia, daughter of Servius?” Here (the only place Sulpicia mentions her own name) the proud pronouncement of name and lineage acts as a reminder to Cerinthus that though she is interested in him she is not an easy goal.

*solliciti sunt* (v. 5) “refers surely to the *boni* in Sulpicia’s family,” opines Lyne; “though it has been an orthodoxy (says Tränkle) that rivals of Cerinthus are referred to.”<sup>7</sup> It may be noted in regard to this difficult final couplet that neither interpretation excludes construing the *scortum* as either a) a third party or b) Cerinthus’ wrong impression of Sulpicia. If rival suitors are the referent of *solliciti*, then Sulpicia is saying either a) that she has other suitors to match Cerinthus’ *scortum*<sup>8</sup> or b) that she has other suitors who will treat her better than a *scortum*. If Sulpicia’s benefactors are meant, then Sulpicia is saying she has people to protect her from a relationship with someone who is either a) unfaithful or b) unmannered. Although any of these combinations makes sense, it seems that Cerinthus’ unfaithfulness goes better with the idea of rivals, and that Cerinthus’ mistakenness as to Sulpicia’s character goes better with the appeal to benefactors. It is quite possible that *solliciti* refers only to Messalla, especially after his protectiveness has been so forcefully brought out in the two preceding poems. But if theirs is truly an uncle-niece relationship then Messalla would be concerned to protect the name of both Sulpicia’s family and his own, which explains the plural and must be the point of her appeal to lineage. If it is then more plausible that the *solliciti* are benefactors and not rivals, it seems therefore also more plausible that Cerinthus should have got the wrong idea than have been unfaithful. It is only because this poem has been read as if it were a conventional elegy that the conventionally elegiac theme of rival lovers has been so far preferred.

If the arguments above are accepted and we adopt the view that, at least in the beginning, Cerinthus was only interested in Sulpicia for sex, then the desperate tone of 3.17 becomes pointed:

*estne tibi, Cerinthe, tuae pia cura puellae,  
quod mea nunc uexat corpora fessa calor?  
a ego non aliter tristes euincere morbos  
optarim, quam te si quoque uelle putem.  
at mihi quid prosit morbos euincere, si tu  
nostra potes lento pectore ferre mala?*

Sulpicia presents (to use an appropriately medical term) as a distressed and anxious character in both body and mind. Again, the sick lover is a commonplace in

7. Lyne (2007) 361.

8. Note also the implied comparison between the standing of Sulpicia’s suitors and that of Cerinthus’, mirrored in the comparison between the good name of *Serui filia Sulpicia* and that of lowly, cheating Cerinthus, if the rumors be true.

elegy, as is the equation of the physical malady (especially a fever) with the poet-lover's affection, and again, we ought to be on guard against immediately reading conventional elegiac scenarios into our understanding of the poem. It is not implausible that Sulpicia really did fall ill and write Cerinthus another letter in verse from her sick-bed. It could even be (although this *is* a stretch) that her trip to the countryside had been intended as an aid to convalescence which she ignored out of a desire to be close to her beloved. The hiatus of *a ego* (v. 3) is certainly groan-like, and in her feverish state Sulpicia seems especially prone to repetition: not only does *euincere morbos*<sup>9</sup> occur at both vv. 3 and 5; the whole sentiment of the middle couplet repeats in the final.

It is here that it is most tempting to agree with Keith in comparing Sulpicia to Vergil's Dido character.<sup>10</sup> Vergil makes much use of passion/fever imagery, and Sulpicia's opening question reminds especially of *Aeneid* 4.317 ff.: *si bene quid de te merui, fuit aut tibi quicquam / dulce meum*.... But even Keith admits the chronology is very tight for Sulpicia to have alluded to the *Aeneid*, and Sulpicia in her situation does not need Vergil to bring across her emotions. *pia cura* (v. 1) seems like it could clinch the case for a Vergilian influence,<sup>11</sup> but, besides being an emendation, it has been demonstrated to describe the neglect of a "dutiful concern" here rather than the violation of an Augusto-Vergilian *pietas*.<sup>12</sup> Better to expel preconceptions about epic and elegy and approach the poem with a clear head. It is interesting to note that in this poem Sulpicia is now explicitly *tuae ... puellae* (v. 1), that is, "your girl" rather than only "a girl" (cf. 3.15.1 above). We may take from this that she is now in a relationship with Cerinthus. It is in this context that she appeals to his *cura pia*: now that there is a bond between them, Cerinthus owes it to Sulpicia to be with her when she is ill.

While much has been said above about the impassioned nature of this poem, there is also artistry. The arrangement of *tuae pia cura puella* (v. 1) sees the words for the obligation placed between the words for the girl—doing one's duty lies at the heart, as it were, of a relationship with Sulpicia. The repetition, while symptomatic of her condition, is also patterned and varied. *lento pectore* in the final line is a particularly poignant and cutting phrase summing up Cerinthus' uncaring sluggishness as if it is not in his being to honour his responsibilities.

Finally we come to 3.18, the last of the poems in the voice of Sulpicia:

*ne tibi sim, mea lux, aequae iam feruida cura  
ac uideor paucos ante fuisse dies,  
si quicquam tota commisi stulta iuuenta  
cuius me fatear paenituisse magis,  
hesterna quam te solum quod nocte reliqui,  
ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum.*

The imagery of fever and duty is again present at *feruida cura* (v. 1), and *si quicquam*... (v. 3) again echoes Dido's plea for forgiveness. But here, rather than

9. "A technical-medical/everyday phrase?" Lyne (2007) 363.

10. Keith (1997) *passim*; more on her argument below.

11. So Keith (1997) 306, Lowe (1988) 200, and Santirocco (1979) 233.

12. Yardley (1990) 569.

complaining of Cerinthus' neglect, Sulpicia is apologizing for having fled from his company. If we look back over the preceding poems and construe each as a letter to Cerinthus we see that the young couple's courtship has certainly had its ups and downs. In 3.15 Sulpicia tries to attract Cerinthus by inviting him to her birthday, in 3.16 she rebukes him for being too forward, in 3.17 she yearns for him in her illness, and here in 3.18 she has pushed him away again, only now she regrets it. This reads very like the beginnings of a courtship. The alternation between attraction and suspicion reflects the natural hesitance before committing to a new relationship. Sulpicia and Cerinthus have been growing closer, though, as subtle shifts in the letters' vocabulary make clear. In 3.15 Sulpicia refers to her addressee with the simple second person pronoun (*tibi*, 3.15.4) and to herself as simply "a girl" (*puellae*, 3.15.1); in 3.16 Cerinthus is still simply "you" (*tibi*, 3.16.1,3) but Sulpicia boldly states her name (*Serui filia Sulpicia*, 3.16.4); in 3.17 Cerinthus is called by name (*Cerinte*, 3.17.1) and Sulpicia now calls herself his (*tuae ... puellae*, 3.17.1); so that when now in 3.18 she calls Cerinthus hers (*mea lux*, 3.18.1), their bond may be said to have been made complete.

It will be noted that such a progression spans a relatively short period—from introduction (3.14–15), through friendship (3.16–17), to perhaps the cusp of consummation (3.18)—whereas other commentators have considered these poems to span a relationship of reasonable length and already in full swing from the first poem. Again this is due, it seems, to a too ready willingness to attribute the characteristics of elegy in the manner of Tibullus and Propertius to the poems of Sulpicia. There is no need to suppose that these five poems are only a selection from a larger collection of similar poems, all on elegiac themes. The courtship of Sulpicia and Cerinthus is amply laid out in these few poems: no leaps are taken, no gaps need filling; they have taken us from mere acquaintance to the point of marriage with no significant stage lacking.

It may seem regressive to revive the argument that 3.13 refers to the consummation of Sulpicia's relationship with Cerinthus, but we have been led to this conclusion by a different way. Previous commentators make the imputation out of a desire to maintain Sulpicia's honour;<sup>13</sup> but we have kept Sulpicia intact unintentionally, by reading her poems as if they were private letters rather than published elegies. Recall that 3.13, the first of the poems usually attributed to Sulpicia was set aside because it did not look like the rest of the poems: it is now time to consider its function. In view of the other five epistolary poems, it is suggested that 3.13 now reads as a kind of "cover letter" to a collection of correspondence:

*tandem uenit amor, qualem texisse pudori  
 quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.  
 exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis  
 attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.  
 exsoluit promissa Venus: mea gaudia narret,  
 dicetur si quis non habuisse sua.  
 non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,  
 ne legat id nemo quam meus ante, uelim,*

13. Three detailed examples of this phenomenon are the subject of Skoie (2008).

*sed peccasse iuuat, uultus componere famae  
taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar.*

Besides the already noted lack of, or otherwise general, addressee, it can be seen that, at five couplets, or ten lines, this is Sulpicia's longest poem; it is also a very balanced and structured piece. The poem begins and ends with a concern for reputation. In both the second and second-last line *fama* is mentioned, and disregarded. As for the sex of the author, Keith notes that *pudori* in the first line suggests a female, since *pudor* is usually a womanly concern,<sup>14</sup> while it is not until the final line that the polyptoton of *digno digna* (v. 10) unambiguously signals a female first person. Sulpicia's gender and its attendant expectations therefore flank the poem, a couplet in the beginning and a couplet at the end.

The next interior couplets, that is vv. 3-4 and 7-8, tell in brief how Sulpicia's affair with Cerinthus began. The reference to *signatis ... tabellis* (v. 7) confirms what was perceived as the epistolary nature of 3.14-18. The sense of *non ... uelim* (v. 7-8) is not that Sulpicia should prefer not to send letters at all, but that she should prefer her letters not to be sealed, so that we may reasonably assume that she did write letters to Cerinthus, and, since she is happy for them to be read by others, that the five poems which follow are examples of such letters. Moreover, Venus has delivered Cerinthus to Sulpicia *exorata meis ... Camenis* (v. 3). When 3.13 is read as the first poem, this line seems to indicate that Sulpicia had written, and presumably published, poems already. When 3.13 is read as a "cover letter", though, *exorata meis ... Camenis* refers to the five poems which it introduces. That is to say, Sulpicia explains in the second couplet of this poem that the poems which follow are exactly those which ensured Cerinthus fell into her lap. This is not to rob Sulpicia of having published any poems, but it fits perfectly the scenarios which arise from an epistolary view of her poetry: 3.14 was an invitation to Cerinthus, 3.15-7 stipulated her rules of engagement, and 3.18 is a plea which looks forward to their being happily together. Understood this way, it really was Sulpicia's poetry, in the form of verse epistles, that got her her *amor*.

But the main point of the poem, expressed in its central couplet, is that Sulpicia wishes these letters to be made public. Lyne sees this as therefore a "publishing poem",<sup>15</sup> but this depends on his contention, stated at the beginning, that Sulpicia published more than six poems. If we are to resolve the willingness to publicize her love letters with the limited amount of material Sulpicia provides, we must either accept that other material did exist and was lost or else account for a motive to publish so few lines. The answer may come thanks to the five poems preceding the six so far discussed, the so-called 'Garland of Sulpicia' (13.8-12). These poems are longer than the epistolary poems and more like the traditional elegy, moreover they seem to cover the same material as Sulpicia's poems. There is not space here to discuss the identity of the author of the 'Garland', who is known as the *auctor de Sulpicia*. It has been suggested that he (usually he) was an anonymous, Tibullus, "Tibullus" or Pseudo-Tibullus, Lygdamus or another of the "Messalla Circle", even Sulpicia herself. The view that Tibullus could have been the *auctor* is perhaps most appealing, since it seems to correspond with the "amatory epistles" mentioned in

14. Keith (1997) 300.

15. Lyne (2007) 348 ff.

the *Vita Tibulli*.<sup>16</sup>

Whoever the *auctor de Sulpicia* was, his ‘Garland of Sulpicia’ seems like a reworking of Sulpicia’s poems into a form more recognizably elegiac. The first of the ‘Garland’, 3.8, is a descriptive praise of Sulpicia on the date of the Matronalia, perhaps a frontispiece to a gift on that holiday; in 3.9 Sulpicia laments her separation from Cerinthus in much the same way that she laments their prospective separation in 3.14, except that this time rather than she going away to the country, Cerinthus is away hunting in the woods; 3.10 is a prayer for Sulpicia’s recovery from illness, an answer to 3.17; 3.11 and 3.12 are birthday poems (γενεθλιακκα), much like 3.14–15, only first Cerinthus’ birthday is celebrated, then Sulpicia’s. That much of the subject matter is duplicated seems good reason for seeing Sulpicia’s poems as the raw material which formed the basis for the ‘Garland’. In view of our conclusions on the nature of Sulpicia’s poems, then, it may be that Sulpicia put her original letters at the disposal of some other poet, the *auctor de Sulpicia*, who converted them into the elegies of 3.8–12.

Such a possibility seems to solve further problems. If Sulpicia were supplying another poet with material, it would make sense that she would also provide a “cover letter” like 3.13, which introduces, explains, and supplements the letters themselves. This accounts for the slight difference in tone between 3.13 and 3.14–18. It also explains the alternating narrator of poems 3.8–3.12: the *auctor de Sulpicia* was expanding the story and filling in the gaps, telling Cerinthus’ side as well as Sulpicia’s. So in the ‘Garland’ we get, for example, not only Sulpicia’s birthday but Cerinthus’ as well. The very name ‘Cerinthus’ may have been the invention of the *auctor* rather than that of Sulpicia herself. It is often assumed that ‘Cerinthus’ is a pseudonym (possibly for the Cornutus of 2.2–3) and that Sulpicia is on the one hand inverting the elegiac norm by using the girl’s real name and a pseudonym for the boy’s, and on the other hand keeping the tradition by using the poet-lover’s real name and a pseudonym for the beloved’s. But if 3.14–18 are Sulpicia’s original letters to her beloved they would surely have used his real name. However, the *auctor de Sulpicia*, in turning her letters into elegy, could have taken it upon himself to employ the usual practice and so substitute ‘Cerinthus’ for the real name throughout. Sulpicia could have done this herself on handing over the letters, of course, but perhaps saw no need, since their recipient would likely have known already the identity of ‘Cerinthus’.

What might the motive be for the *auctor de Sulpicia* to rework Sulpicia’s originals? Hubbard suggests they are “an anniversary tribute to the now married couple,” especially since the first poem refers to the Matronalia, when gifts were given to wives.<sup>17</sup> This would fit well with our theory if it were not for the following line from the “cover letter” poem: *sed peccasse iuuat* (3.13.9). The word *peccasse* does not refer to marital sex; we may account for it in one of two ways: either Sulpicia and Cerinthus were to be married soon and the letters were provided to the *auctor* for the purpose of producing an epithalamium, or else Sulpicia and Cerinthus persisted in a non-marital relationship and some other reason prompted the *auctor* to rework Sulpicia’s letters.

16. Hubbard (2004–5) 186 uses this to support his argument that Tibullus composed the poems usually attributed to Sulpicia, as well as the ‘Garland’.

17. Hubbard (2004–5) 187.

Finally there is the question of how the 'Garland' came to be printed along with its "source material" in the third book of Tibullus. One possibility is that the 'Garland' is an incomplete or abandoned project and that it has been preserved by an editor of Tibullus 3 who threw in the original letters as well. If the 'Cerinthus' pseudonym was really an invention of the *auctor de Sulpicia* then this editor could have been the one to normalize the name in the letters before including them. An incomplete 'Garland' would explain why not every epistolary poem has a corresponding expanded elegy, and also could account for the paucity of original letters: Sulpicia could have provided many letters, and the *auctor* could either have made a selection of those which were best suited to elegy (thus explaining why so many of the preserved letters have elegiac themes) or else have abandoned his work after expanding only a few letters into full-blown elegies.

A final thought. At least to the modern sensibility, the poems by Sulpicia seem quite superior to those by the *auctor de Sulpicia* (this could even account for an abandoned 'Garland'). The argument above is that 3.13-18 are not published elegies but publicized letters. This is not to detract from the poetry itself, which is pure, vivid, and strong. It would be nice to have an ancient female poet who had a substantial body of published work, but that is not the reading adopted here. More to the point, commentators such as Keith and Merriam, who try to make Sulpicia "just another Roman poet" do her a grave disservice. Sulpicia stands out for her intriguing phrasing and structure, for the raw emotion and Catullan joy she exudes, not for supposed parallels to Vergil, Sappho, and Homer. Sulpicia ought to be appreciated for her striking individuality, not assimilated to the practice of others.

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