

## Filial Anxiety in the Poems of Sulpicia

This paper examines Sulpicia's use of Catullan intertext to challenge the traditional portrayal of the elegiac *puella* in her final poem, [Tib] 3.18. The elegiac poets, Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus et al., rarely concern themselves with authentic representations of women's voices and psyches, instead using the female body as a literary device, an epicenter of metapoetics. Sulpicia, as the sole surviving female love elegist of the Augustan Age, constitutes an exception to this pattern. Her treatment of the romantic relationship (and the tensions therein) underpinning her poetry has been analyzed by Milnor 2002, Skoie 2013, Keith 2008, as it relates to Sulpicia's construction of her own poetic persona within the "male world" of Latin elegy. Primarily, such work has focused on Sulpicia's usage and transformation of the pre-existing elegiac tropes found in the work of male elegists such as Propertius, Tibullus, and Catullus. Other scholarship (Hallet 2009, Batstone 2018) has examined familial and social tensions in the Sulpician poetic corpus. These tensions, I argue, also play a role in shaping Sulpicia's dissection of Latin elegy, and metaphorize the agonistic use of intertext in her poetry. Sulpicia's writings convey an awareness of the social limitations engendered by her womanhood, as well as her conflicting identities as poet, lover, and daughter.

This anxiety of influence (Gale, 2015) is thematically prominent in her poetry, wherein she notes that she has been sent to the countryside by "*nimum Messalla mei studiose*" (Mesalla, far too attentive of me) (3.14.6). Sulpicia's concern with Mesalla metaphorizes her concern with another *vir studiosus*— Catullus himself (Hallet, 2002a). In c. 116, a poem which itself deals with literary forefathers, Catullus relates that, "*Saepe tibi studioso animo venante requirens / carmina uti possem mittere Battiadae,*" (I am often seeking with a solicitous and questing mind / for how

I might send to you the songs of Callimachus). She, linking her literal and literary relatives through the word *studiosus*, continuously references, and contests the work of Catullus. I argue that Sulpicia's reappropriation of Catullan themes is not parasitic, but competitive. If she cannot, in her real voice, challenge the men who control her, perhaps she can argue with the men who have misrepresented *puellae* in previous works.

Sulpicia's final poem, [Tib] 3.18, plays with the elegiac trope of *paraclausithyron*. Here, the speaking role has been shifted from the *amator* (lover) to the *puella* (*mistress*), if one imagines that Sulpicia has abandoned the lovesick Cerinthus in a sudden bout of self-consciousness. In giving herself, and by extension the elegiac *puella*, an authentic voice, Sulpicia creates a locus for her program of correction. The poem contains ample Catullan intertext, with language recalling in particular both the lament of Ariadne in *c.*64 and the writing contest between Catullus and Licinius in *c.*50. By mirroring Catullus' languages while altering the sentiments expressed, Sulpicia provides a more nuanced portrait of the *puella*, recontextualizing scenes of flightiness and cruelty with her own concerns over reconciling her own desires (love, expression) with cultural expectations (modesty, concealment). By reclaiming the voice of the *puella*, Sulpicia uses her own subjectivity to shatter previous poets' misrepresentations of Roman women.

#### Works Cited

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