

## Scenarios of Sulpicia: moral discourses and immoral verses

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### ***Revisiting Sulpicia the Augustan elegist: “new historicist” approaches to intertextualities***

By expanding upon earlier research about Sulpicia’s “resistant intertextuality”, contributed first to a 2006 conference and then to a 2009 volume on *Jeux de Voix*, my discussion celebrates the Francophone and Anglophone “grande alliance” in classical gender studies represented by the founding of *Revue EuGeStA*. As the title *Jeux de Voix* indicates, the conference was held at, and the volume published by, an esteemed Francophone seat of classical learning: the University of Lausanne<sup>1</sup>. To be sure, the conference and the volume also included scholars voicing their ideas in German and Italian on intertextuality, intentionality and modes of expression in classical literature. But both, like the *Revue EuGeStA*, were conceptually sophisticated, interdisciplinary French-language projects that accorded serious respect to work in English.

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1 — Hallett 2009a. Participants in the conference and contributors to the volume also included Jacqueline Fabre-Serris, Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer, and others instrumental in the establishment of *EuGeStA*.

Like the earlier essay, this discussion adopts an investigative and analytical approach associated with “new historicism”, as it applies the lens of gender to explicating and contextualizing the writing, and especially the moral stance and moral assessments, of the female Augustan love elegist Sulpicia. That is, it defines “history” as a capacious and inclusive realm of inquiry that embraces social, intellectual and cultural as well as political, economic and military ideas and actions. It also uses and juxtaposes a variety of ancient Roman literary sources to explicate and contextualize Sulpicia and her writing<sup>2</sup>. What is more, it employs intertextuality as an historical analytical tool in seeking to explain the connections between these different sources<sup>3</sup>. I adopt this approach in exploring the relationships between women, both “written” women and writing women, and the genre of Latin love elegy, because I deem it especially important to look beyond the confines of Latin elegiac texts themselves. Narrowly limiting research on this complex genre to its constituent texts, a practice common in scholarship on elegy today, does much to account for the assumption that Latin love elegy is all about poetry itself and not much more<sup>4</sup>.

As both this discussion and my earlier work testify, I maintain that love elegy was a mode of subversive literary self-expression which carried a broader cultural, social and ideological significance, not only to Roman authors of a moralistic bent, but also to those who prided themselves on morally subversive posturing<sup>5</sup>. In this paper I will examine some Roman historical prose texts, and one poetic text, that the earlier essay did not discuss, focusing on their portrayals of other women named Sulpicia, and on the moralizing agenda of their response to Sulpicia’s elegies, and to Latin love elegy in general. By attempting to offer a more nuanced sense of what Sulpicia’s poetry achieved, and how it was received, in Augustan and early imperial Rome, my discussion also testifies to the recognition of

2 — See the discussion of “New Historicism” and its application to classical materials by Fowler and Fowler 1996: 874. Their definition stresses the diversity of evidence explored by New Historicist critics, noting that it “finds its traces not only in the major official texts of a society but also in more marginal texts, and in English studies it has been responsible for a considerable broadening of the range of material that comes under the critic’s eye”. “This”, they add, “has been less important for classical studies, which have always been characterized by the breadth only recently becoming common in ‘cultural studies’ in other fields”.

3 — For intertextuality as a historical analytical tool in Latin literary studies, see Hallett 2009a: 142 ff.

4 — For the current scholarly tendency to de-emphasize the historical and cultural contexts of Latin elegy in favor of focusing on allusions in the texts themselves to the practice of poetry-writing itself, see, for example, Gibson 2007. As Gibson notes, the phrase “written women”, applied to the females that the elegists portray as their erotic interests, was coined by Wyke 1987.

5 — For arguments that Latin love elegy is “subversive”, see, for example, Hallett 1973, 1992 and 2003.

her work, as representative of her genre, in a Roman cultural milieu that does not directly bear witness to her existence other than her poetry itself.

### *Sulpicia the Augustan elegist and the other Sulpiciae*

Among the few Roman female writers known to us today are three women with the name Sulpicia. The earliest of the three is the focus of this discussion: the poet-speaker of eleven love elegies found in the third book of verses ascribed to the Augustan elegist Tibullus, and therefore referred to as an Augustan elegist herself<sup>6</sup>. Outside of these eleven poems, as has been observed, she is never mentioned by name in any extant Roman source. The second Sulpicia is, however, hailed and praised for her connubial erotic poetry in two epigrams by a contemporary, the late first century CE Martial, as well as referred to by several other later Roman sources. Words sent to the third – Sulpicia Lepidina – are evidently contemporary with those of the second. These words are shared in correspondence written by a woman named Claudia Severa, who was also married to a Roman military officer; this correspondence has been unearthed at the outpost of Vindolanda in northern England<sup>7</sup>.

Thomas Hubbard has adduced the coincidence of this shared feminine *nomen gentilicium* in support of his and Niklas Holzberg's efforts to deny that the first of these Sulpiciae wrote any of the eleven elegies in which she appears<sup>8</sup>. To be sure, other features of this Sulpicia's work have sown the initial seeds of doubts about her authorship, of some if not all of the eleven elegies. One is the illicit nature of the passion she celebrates, for a young man she calls by the pseudonym Cerinthus: asserting that "it is fun to have misbehaved" (*pecasse iuvat*) at 3.13.9; never raising the possibility of marriage to him<sup>9</sup>. This Sulpicia, moreover, represents herself in

6 — Recent discussions of Sulpicia in her larger literary and historical context include Hemelrijk (1999: 151-160), Skoie (2002), Hallett (2002: 45-65 and 2006a), Stevenson (2005: 36-44) and Keith (2006).

7 — For Martial's Sulpicia, see Hallett (1991 and 2002: 85-91), Parker (1991), Richlin (1991), Hemelrijk (1999: 160-164) and Stevenson (2005: 44-48). For the letters of Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina, see Hemelrijk (1999: 191-192 and 201-202) and Hallett (2002: 93-99). While four letters, all written by women, are found in Sulpicia Lepidina's "archives", none of these letters are by Sulpicia Lepidina herself; hence it can be only assumed, but not proven, that she wrote to these other women herself, and thereby qualifies as a "woman writer". Her literary status as recipient rather than author would undermine the argument made by, e.g. Hubbard: that because her name (and that of Martial's Sulpicia) is the same as that of the Augustan elegist, "Sulpicia" was an all-purpose term for Roman women writers whether they actually wrote the works ascribed to them or not.

8 — Hubbard (2004-2005); Holzberg (1999) also argues that the eleven Sulpicia-elegies were written by a male impersonator. See Keith (2006) and Parker (2006) for a critique of their arguments.

9 — That Sulpicia never mentions marriage has not discouraged scholars such as Treggiari (1991: 121-123), Holzberg (1999), Hubbard (2004-2005) and Stevenson (2005: 37-38) from postulating a marital connection between Sulpicia and the man she refers to as Cerinthus; in fact they identify him with the Cornutus whom Tibullus celebrates in 2.2, and describes at lines 11 as praying

these poems as the privileged daughter of a Servius Sulpicius, living under the legal guardianship of her maternal uncle, the illustrious military leader and literary patron Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, consul in 31 BCE. Indeed, the poet-speaker refers to herself by name at elegy 3.8.1 and 3.16.4; identifies herself as *Servi filia* in the latter passage; and addresses Messalla at 3.14.5, when protesting his insistence that she spend her birthday away from her beloved in the country. Such scholars therefore have difficulty believing that a respectable young woman of such a prominent, aristocratic family would have, or could have, publicly depicted herself as behaving and feeling in such an immoral way<sup>10</sup>.

The literary quality of the eleven Sulpicia elegies themselves – marked by learned allusions to earlier Greek and Latin poems, as well as witty word play – has also led some to questions whether she, or any Roman woman, could have written them<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, it is the current scholarly consensus that a woman named Sulpicia wrote at most the final six of the eleven elegies, but that a male “friend” (*amicus*) known as the “author” (*auctor*) or the “garland poet” wrote the longer, more ostensibly complex first five: in order to show her readers, and Sulpicia herself, how to accord appropriate literary treatment to the topics that the six shorter poems explore<sup>12</sup>.

There are scholars, too, who claim that a Sulpicia did not write some or all of the eleven Sulpicia-elegies because they also assume that the female poet/speaker is a girl in her early teens, who had not yet been married. They acknowledge that Messalla’s niece would have had ample opportunity to interact with her uncle’s talented young male poetic protégés, Tibullus and Ovid among them. Yet they are certain that at her age, and stage of education, she could not have acquired sufficient literary training to compose eleven elegies of this caliber<sup>13</sup>.

Nevertheless, while a scholar such as Hubbard would cite these two later female authors called Sulpicia as further evidence that some or all of the eleven Sulpicia-elegies in Tibullus Book Three are not the work of an Augustan aristocratic woman of that name, these female authors are by no

for the “faithful passions of a wife” (*uxoris fidos... amores*). See Skoie (2002: 13, 197, 202-203, 249-251 and 253) for the scholarly tradition of “marrying” Sulpicia and Cerinthus.

10 — See, for example, Holzberg (1999), Hubbard (2004-2005) and Treggiari (1991: 121-123 and 302-303).

11 — For an appreciation of Sulpicia’s artistry in elegies 3.13-18, see Lowe (1988: 205), who ascribes her with “an agile and distinctive poetic imagination” and Stevenson (2005: 33-34).

12 — For the long and complex history leading up to this consensus, see Skoie (2002); for challenges to the current consensus, see, for example, Hallett (2002: 45-65) and Parker (2006).

13 — And there have been many in the past who have disparaged the quality of Sulpicia’s poems; Hemelrijk (1999: 156) dismisses these critics by noting “Instead of an artless amateur, she is now generally regarded as an accomplished poet who was well aware of the literary tradition of the genre she worked in; however, she handled its conventional themes in a novel way...”.

means the only Sulpiciae meriting mention in Latin texts or by Roman authors. My discussion will examine some depictions of three other Roman women bearing the name Sulpicia, paying special attention to the literary scenarios in which they figure: by Livy in 39.8-10, his account of the Bacchanalian conspiracy in 186 BCE; by Valerius Maximus at 6.7.3, in an episode dated to 43/42 BCE that is also related by Appian at *B.C.* 4.39; and by Valerius Maximus again at 8.15.12, in an episode dated to the third century BCE that also related in part by the elder Pliny at *Natural History* 7.120, and treated by Ovid at *Fasti* 4.157-160.

I will not, however, be citing these portrayals of these other Sulpiciae to question whether the daughter of Servius Sulpicius and the niece of Messalla wrote some or any of the eleven Sulpicia-elegies. Rather, I will consider how these scenarios featuring these other Sulpiciae, mostly by authors with a moralizing message, help to contextualize these eleven elegies and their later Roman reception. I will also consider why Ovid, who presumably knew both the poetry-writing niece of his patron Messalla, and appears to allude to her poetry on multiple occasions, never mentions the name Sulpicia, or even refers to a contemporary love elegist of this name.

### *Dating the eleven Sulpicia elegies*

First, though, we need to establish, to the extent that it is possible, when the elegist who was Messalla's niece would have written the eleven Sulpicia poems, and what her personal circumstances were when she wrote them. These elegies share their literary locale in the third book of Tibullus' poems with several other elegies and a panegyric to Messalla. Although most if not all the poems in Tibullus Book Three appear to be the works of individuals other than Tibullus, presumably all of the poets who contributed to this book, like Tibullus, benefited from Messalla's support. Since Tibullus is known to have died in 19 BCE, the same year as Vergil, it seems likely that the poems in Tibullus Book Three were composed, or at least compiled into a volume, around that date, even if formally published later. They would thus be contemporary with Ovid's *Amores* 3.9, which laments Tibullus' death and portrays it as a recent event<sup>14</sup>.

14 — For the date of Tibullus' death, lamented by Ovid in *Amores* 3.9, see lines 1-2 of the epigram at the beginning of the *Vita Tibulli*, which notes that "unfair Death" sent Tibullus to the Elysian fields as a companion to Vergil. Although it is likely that all the poems in Tibullus Book Three can be dated to around 19 BCE, it is by no means certain that this is the case: the panegyric to Messalla may well have been written closer to the time of Messalla's triumph in 27 BCE, and some of the Sulpicia-elegies and Lygdamus-elegies could have been written at an earlier date as well.

That Tibullus and Vergil are both reported to have died in 19 BCE is significant for another reason as well. As Alison Keith and I have argued, the eleven Sulpicia elegies also echo and respond to Vergil's portrayal of Dido in the *Aeneid*. Vergil also employs the rare word *indago*, "hunting party with nets" at 3.9.7 in the hunting scene of *Aeneid*, Book 4; the foregrounding and spurning of *fama*, rumor and reputation, in 3.13.2 and 9 recall Dido's tragic insistence on taking *fama* to heart. These echoes add to the likelihood that Sulpicia wrote these eleven elegies around, or shortly after, the time that Tibullus and Vergil died<sup>15</sup>.

Scholars have argued that Sulpicia, who addresses Messalla at 3.14.5-6 as a kinsman (*propinque*) overly concerned with her (*nimum... mei studiose*) is his ward and niece on the basis of a statement by the younger Seneca, as quoted by Jerome: that Messalla's sister Valeria refused to marry after the death of her husband Servius. Once widowed, Valeria would have then become her brother's legal ward; Valeria's fatherless female offspring would have been in the same situation at times when they were also husbandless. Strikingly, at 3.12.16 Sulpicia refers to her mother as *studiosa*, concerned with her love affairs, the same adjective she uses for Messalla<sup>16</sup>.

If Sulpicia was in fact the daughter of this Valeria, then Messalla would have been her maternal uncle. Her father would, therefore, have been the distinguished jurist Servius Sulpicius Rufus, consul in 51 BCE, who died in 43 BCE. In further support of this identification, we should note that Sulpicia, who proudly declares herself in 3.16.4 to be the daughter of a Servius, makes playful use of legal language, perhaps in homage to her father's realm of expertise, in such elegies as 3.14 and 15<sup>17</sup>.

And if Sulpicia's father died in 43 BCE, she would have been at least 24 in 19 BCE, the year of Tibullus' death. Although the eleven elegies por-

15 — For these Vergilian allusions, see Keith (1997) and Hallett (2002: 45-65). For Vergil's reading of *Aeneid* Books 2, 4 and 6, where Dido figures prominently, in the late twenties BCE, an occasion on which Sulpicia could have been present, see Suetonius, *Vita Vergili* 32. I would argue that Sulpicia writes prior to the Augustan moral and marriage legislation of 18-17 BCE because it is difficult to see how she could have represented herself as in flagrant violation of these laws after that date, and because the authors I would regard as obliquely criticizing her moral conduct, Livy and Valerius Maximus, indeed wrote after that date.

But many do not share my views. Holzberg (1999) would assign the Sulpicia elegies to a considerably later date; Maltby (2010: 319-320) regards 13-18 as written "in the last decade or so of the first century BC" although he would judge 8-12, which he judges to be the work of a male *amicus*, to have been written somewhat later.

16 — Jerome, *Ad Iovinianum* 1.46, quoting Seneca, *De Matrimonio*: "Valeria, sister of the Messallae, after her husband Servius had died, wanted to marry no one. Having been asked why she did this, she said that as far as she was concerned her husband Servius lived forever".

17 — For Sulpicia's figurative use of legal language, see Hallett (2009b: 186); for the view that Sulpicia was the granddaughter and not the daughter of the eminent jurist Servius Sulpicius Rufus, consul in 51 BCE, see Syme (1981).

tray Sulpicia as unwed, and utterly uninterested in marrying her young male lover, the high value of her family lineage and wealth on the marital market would suggest that she had been married at least once and subsequently widowed or divorced by that time<sup>18</sup>. She would also have been at least the same age as Ovid – born in 43 BCE – or perhaps even older, and capable of writing poetry of a quality comparable to that of his *Amores* 3.9. As Ovid’s poetry from exile also attests to the support that Messalla proffered him as a young man, he and Sulpicia were likely to have been closely acquainted<sup>19</sup>. The high probability of their mutual acquaintance renders his failure to mention her by name extremely puzzling.

### *The Sulpiciae scenarios in Livy, Valerius Maximus, Appian and Pliny the Elder*

It deserves emphasis, then, that both Livy and Valerius Maximus, our two major sources for these three scenarios featuring aristocratic women named Sulpicia, were writing after 19 BCE, when the Augustan elegist Sulpicia is likely to have composed her poems and shared them with a wider public. Furthermore, Livy and Valerius also wrote after the passage of Augustus’ moral and marital legislation in 18 BCE, which outlawed the sexual conduct in which Sulpicia depicts herself as engaging<sup>20</sup>. Appian, the elder Pliny and Ovid, who relate – at least in part – the two scenarios narrated by Valerius, each featuring a Sulpicia, wrote after 19 BCE as well<sup>21</sup>.

Yet all three women featured in these scenarios are supposed to have lived in far earlier times: in one instance the third century BCE, in another the second century BCE; in the third during the proscriptions of 43/42 BCE issued by the second triumvirate. Significantly, each of the accounts in which these Sulpiciae appear convey moral and at times

18 — *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 3013, cited by Syme (1981) 425 n. 27, is a dedication by a Sulpicia, daughter of Servius, to Juno Lucina, goddess of childbirth, on behalf of her daughter Paulla Cassia: *Iunoni Lucina(ae)/Sulpicia Ser(vi) fil(ia)/pro Paulla Cassiaff(ilia) sua/d(onum) d(edit) l(ibenter) m(ereto)*, “Sulpicia, the daughter of Servius, gladly and as was deserved gave a gift to Juno Lucina on behalf of her daughter Paulla Cassia”. While Syme posits a sister of the Augustan elegist as the dedicator, it could easily be the elegist herself, and provide evidence for her, marriage to a Cassius (and the birth of a daughter) in the late 30’s or 20’s BCE. See also Skoie (2002: 294-296): “An unmarried or even virginal Sulpicia of more than 20 years in highly problematic Augustan Rome. One would expect her to be either married, divorced or widowed”.

19 — For the date of Ovid’s birth, see *Tristia* 4.10.6; for the support he received from Messalla as a young man, see *Epistulae Ex Ponto* 1.7. 27-30 and 2.2.97-102.

20 — For the date of Livy Book 39, conjectured on the basis of a statement at Livy 28.12.12, see the discussion of Hallett (2009a: 151); for the date of Valerius Maximus, see Whittick and Levick (1996); for Augustus’ marriage and moral legislation, see Treggiari (1991: 60-80 and 277-298); for the dating of Sulpicia’s poems relative to this legislation, see Skoie (2002: 294-297).

21 — For the date of Appian, see Brodersen (1996); for that of the elder Pliny, see Purcell (1996); for that of Ovid’s *Fasti*, see Hinds (1996:1085-1086).

explicitly moralizing messages. Two portray their Sulpiciae as embodying the high standards of behavior regularly displayed by respectable women of high birth in Republican Rome. The third depicts its Sulpicia as exhibiting loyalty to her husband during the triumviral proscriptions, in the face of both danger and maternal opposition. In this regard this late republican Sulpicia differs from other women in her situation by continuing to embody the high standards of behavior formerly expected from females of her social station.

### ***A Sulpicia in Livy's account of the Bacchanalian conspiracy in 186 BCE***

As I have argued earlier, Livy's account, at 39.8-19, of the Bacchanalian conspiracy of 186 BCE can be dated to the mid-teens BCE, shortly after Augustus' marriage and moral legislation. Its narrative centers on a woman he calls a *scortum nobile*, "well-known sex worker", named Faecinia Hispala. Livy's scenario has clear affinities with those of the comedies staged by Plautus at the very time the conspiracy took place. Yet Livy's theme and language also evoke Latin love elegy, especially the eleven elegies by Sulpicia. First and foremost, merely by referring to Hispala as a *scortum* at 39.9.5, Livy calls to mind Sulpicia 3.16.4, where she contrasts herself, the daughter of Servius, with her lover's *scortum*, paid sexual partner<sup>22</sup>.

So, too, at 39.8.6 and 10.4, Livy's narrative notes the pervasive loss of all concern for *pudor*, respectability, in Rome owing to the Bacchanalian scandal, as well as the threat to the *pudicitia*, *fama*, *spes* and *vita* of Aebutius, Hispala's well-born young male lover. Sulpicia also uses the words *pudor* at 3.13.1 and *fama* at 13.2 and 9. With the word *concupitus* for sexual coupling at 39.11.2 Livy recalls *concubuisse* in the same sense at Sulpicia 3.9.16; by employing *nudare* for public revelation at 39.15.4 he recalls Sulpicia's *nudasse* at 3.13.2. Livy's phrase *cum amatore sermonem* at 39.13.2, which describes the intimate conversation between Hispala and her lover, also characterizes Sulpicia's elegies 10, 11 and 17, in which she speaks intimately to Cerinthus.

22 — What follows in the text is a recapitulation of the argument advanced by Hallett (2009a: 151-152).

Suetonius, *Claudius* 41.1-2 describes how Livy encouraged the adolescent Claudius to write a Roman history, how Claudius met with difficulties when he gave his first public reading of the work, and how Claudius' grandmother and mother – Livia and Antonia – criticized him for trying to present a frank and accurate account of the period between Julius Caesar's assassination and the end of the civil wars. Suetonius' statement allows the inference that women of Augustus' family, and perhaps others of elite background, regularly attended readings of Roman historical works, by Livy among others (much as his *Vita Vergilii* 32-33 testifies that Augustus' sister Octavia, and presumably other females connected with his household, listened to Vergil read from Books 2, 4 and 6 of the *Aeneid*).



But the prominent presence in Livy's narrative of a noblewoman named Sulpicia ranks as the strongest evidence that his scenario alludes to, and offers a critique of, the elegist Sulpicia and her poems. Although Livy's Sulpicia is presumably a historical figure rather than a wholly invented character, the leeway Livy can exercise in delineating her character allows him to render her both similar to and different from her Augustan elegy-writing kinswoman. And, as has been argued in an earlier essay, Livy may well have foregrounded these similarities and differences because he was hoping to have the female Augustan elegist among his readers, and to suggest to her that there were less offensive and more morally responsible ways to represent herself in her poetry.

Like the Augustan elegist, niece and ward of an influential general and statesman, Livy's Sulpicia is an independent-minded woman with a politically powerful male relative, in her case her son-in-law, the consul Postumius. She, too, occupies the same scenario as a *scortum*, and gives careful thought to *fama*, public reputation, as well as to amatory conversation and its consequences. She also achieves substantial success as a communicator: with her son-in-law; with Aebutius' paternal aunt Aebutia, eventually bearing witness to Aebutia's morally spotless character and old-fashioned mode of conduct; and with the *scortum* Hispala, whom she persuades to share the truth about the Bacchic cult and takes into her household for protection.

Yet Livy thrice – at 39.11.4, 12.2 and 13.3 – speaks of this Sulpicia as *gravis*, dignified, to be taken seriously. This descriptive term immediately contrasts her with the Augustan elegist, who exults not only in her sexual misconduct but also in revealing it to the world. Furthermore, the elegist Sulpicia, as we have observed, talks contemptuously about a woman who vies for her lover's affection: by calling her a *scortum* and claiming that, though clad in the prostitute's toga, she masquerades as socially respectable by toting a basket of wool.

Livy's Sulpicia, however, accords Hispala respectful treatment, and earns Hispala's trust and respect in return. After the consul initially confirms the trustworthiness of his silent mother-in-law Sulpicia to Hispala at 39.13.1-4, Hispala falls to Sulpicia's feet, pleading with her to disregard as mere lovers' conversation what she has just shared about Bacchic cult activities. It is because of Sulpicia, who calms the angry Postumius and voices support for the *scortum*, that Hispala offers the additional information that enables the Roman state to make a case for outlawing the cult. Even though Livy underscores the differences in social class between Sulpicia and Hispala, he stresses that Sulpicia is able to aid the Roman state because she is capable of bridging these differences and earning Hispala's respect. Sulpicia the elegist clearly handles social distinc-

tions in a much less careful and caring way; Livy's Sulpicia is a means of faulting her for this, and other, moral shortcomings.

***A Sulpicia praised by Valerius Maximus and Applaud for her conduct during the proscriptions of 43 BCE***

While the explicitly moralizing author Valerius Maximus shared his *gentilicium nomen* with that of Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus and Valeria, mother of the Augustan elegist Sulpicia, he did not evidently partake of their blue-blooded lineage<sup>23</sup>. But he may well have regarded Sulpicia as somehow tarnishing the name of the Valerii with her provocative poetry. At the very least his "Memorable Doings and Sayings", written during the reign of Tiberius, uses the name for two different women he extols for virtuous behavior. The first, at 6.7.3, appears as the third instance in the section "On The Loyalty (*Fide*) of Wives Toward Their Husbands". There Valerius states, in a single sentence: "When Sulpicia was kept under guard in the most cautious manner by her mother Julia, so that she might not follow Lentulus Cruscellio, her husband, proscribed by the triumvirs, into Sicily, nevertheless, after she had put on the clothing of a household slave, with two female slave women and the same number of male slaves, she reached him by a secret flight, nor did she say no to proscribing herself so that her loyalty to her proscribed husband might be made known".

Writing a century later, in Greek, about the Roman civil wars that followed the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, Appian relates the story of this Sulpicia as well, in chapter 39 of Book 4. His narrative is longer, and more detailed:

The wife of Lentulus asked to accompany him in his flight, and carefully watched him with this goal in mind, but he did not want her to share his danger, and fled secretly to Sicily. Appointed praetor there by [Sextus] Pompeius he notified her that he was saved and holding public office. When she learned where on earth her husband was, she escaped from her mother, who was keeping watch over her, accompanied by two slaves. With them she travelled disguised as a slave, with great hardship and meager food, until she was able to cross from Rhegium to Messana at twilight. Having learned without difficulty the location of the praetor's tent, she found Lentulus not functioning in the capacity of a praetor, but on a low pallet with disheveled hair and horrible food, longing for his wife.

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23 — Whittick and Levick (1996) merely note that Valerius Maximus seems to have been a friend of the Sextus Pompeius who was consul in 14 CE, accompanying him to his governorship in Asia and composing "Memorable Doings and Sayings" after his return.

Although Appian furnishes a more vividly expounded and dramatically moving account of this Sulpicia's devotion to her husband, he omits certain details found in Valerius Maximus, and presumably his sources for this account. Most notably for our purposes, he does not mention either the name of Lentulus' wife Sulpicia or that of her mother Julia. While he notes that Lentulus' wife travelled to join her husband in slave's garb with two male slaves, he says nothing about the two female slaves in her retinue<sup>24</sup>.

Valerius' decision to include these details therefore requires some explanation, admittedly explanation of a speculative nature. I would propose that he is not only recalling Livy's account of the Bacchanalian conspiracy, with its implicit though constructive criticisms of how Sulpicia represents her behavior and her attitudes in her elegies, but also offering criticisms of his own. I would argue as well that he is also obliquely faulting Augustus' daughter Julia and granddaughter Julia for their immoral conduct, the cause of their punishment and banishment in 2 BCE and 8 CE respectively, in the years after Livy wrote<sup>25</sup>.

Livy presents the morally upright matron Sulpicia, who saves the Roman state by allowing Aebutius and Hispala to reveal the secrets of Bacchic worship, as a female foil to Aebutius' wicked mother Duronia; she – along with her second husband – had Aebutius initiated into the cult for nefarious purposes. By contrasting his Sulpicia's desire to join her husband with her mother's vehement opposition, Valerius Maximus creates a similar dramatic scenario, and thereby links his moral example with Livy's more expansive historical narrative. The decision of Valerius' Sulpicia not merely to dress like a female slave herself but also include two female slaves in her retinue also recalls Livy's Sulpicia, who bridges major Roman social divisions by her successful efforts to communicate with, and gain the trust of, the lowly *scortum* Hispala, presumably a former slave herself.

Appian clearly does not regard the name, or identity, of the mother in this scenario as of any consequence. It is not clear who this Julia is, and Valerius does not furnish further information. But since two of the three proscribing triumvirs had Julian blood – Octavian, great nephew of Julius Caesar, and Antony, whose mother was a Julia – it is likely that this Sulpicia's mother was somehow akin to these men, who had proscribed her son-in-law, and eager to protect her daughter from their wrath by kee-

24 — See Parker (1998: 165-168) on the representations of this Sulpicia: he notes that she is praised for pretending disloyalty in order to fulfill her husband's true wishes, and for proving that her love for her husband is more powerful than her ties to her agnatic family.

25 — For the exile of the elder Julia, see Syme (1978: 193-196) and Hallett (2006b); for that of her daughter, see Syme (1978: 206-208).

ping Sulpicia and her husband apart. If this Sulpicia, daughter of a Julia, was a sister of Servius Sulpicius Rufus and the elegist's paternal aunt, it is even possible that her mother Julia also protected her daughter's sister-in-law Valeria from having to remarry, and helped strengthen the close ties between Octavian and Valeria's brother Messalla<sup>26</sup>.

Whatever the relationship between this Sulpicia and the Augustan elegist, by characterizing her mother, named Julia, as opposing her daughter's efforts to be a devoted wife, Valerius may seek to associate her with two women of the same name, both notorious for their disgraceful wifely behavior: Augustus' daughter and granddaughter Julia. Indeed, a series of remarks by Augustus' daughter Julia, preserved for us by the later Macrobius, frankly acknowledge her extra-marital sexual activity and wittily challenge her father's authority; they thus have much in common with Sulpicia's self-portrayal in the eleven elegies<sup>27</sup>.

### *A Sulpicia praised by Valerius Maximus and Pliny as the most virtuous woman in Rome of the late third century BCE*

At 8.5.12, in a section on "distinctions" which have fallen to individuals (*Quae cuique magna contigerunt*), Valerius Maximus presents us with another Sulpicia from a much earlier period, and one widely renowned for her moral excellence:

Sulpicia, daughter of Servius Sulpicius Paterculus, wife of the consul Q. Fulvius Flaccus, is added deservedly to the commemoration of the men just mentioned. When the Senate had decreed that, after the Sibylline books had been scrutinized by the Board of Ten, an image of Venus Changer of Hearts (*Verticordia*) be consecrated, in order that the minds of maidens and women might more easily be turned to respectable sexual behavior from lust (*a libidine ad pudicitiam*), and that out of all the married women one hundred, and from that one hundred ten, chosen by lot, make judgment about the most virtuous woman, she was given precedence over all owing to her chastity.

26 — For the Iulii Caesares, including Antony's maternal family, see Hallett (2006b: 157-160). It is also possible that this Julia, at some point married to a Sulpicius, was the daughter of Gaius Julius Caesar Strabo Vopiscus: aedile in 90 BCE, Vopiscus is the main speaker on wit and humor in Cicero's *De Oratore*, and the paternal uncle of Antony's mother Julia. As Badian (1996) observes, Vopiscus made his former foes Marius and P. Sulpicius Rufus into allies. Just as Marius strengthened this alliance by marrying a Julia, one of Vopiscus' kinswomen, Vopiscus may well have married his daughter to a Sulpicius.

27 — For Julia's witty and at times bawdy remarks see Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.5.1-10.

Scholars date this Sulpicia to the late third century BCE, since her husband Quintus Fulvius Flaccus held his fourth consulship in 209 BCE<sup>28</sup>. Like Valerius, the elder Pliny, writing a half century later, relates that a Sulpicia was given the honor – after her fellow Roman matrons chose her out of a hundred candidates as the most sexually virtuous woman in Rome – of dedicating a statue representing Venus, in accordance with the sacred writings of the Sibylline books. However his scenario, at 7.35 of his *Natural History*, differs in key details:

Sulpicia, daughter of Paterculus, wife of Fulvius Flaccus, was on one occasion judged by the opinion of the married women to be the most sexually virtuous woman (*pudicissima*), chosen out of one hundred women previously selected, to dedicate a statue of Venus in accordance with the Sibylline books; on a second occasion, when the Great Goddess Cybele was brought to Rome by a test of religious sanctity, Claudia was also chosen.

While both Valerius and Pliny provide the name of this Sulpicia's father, only Valerius gives his *praenomen* of Servius. In so doing, he calls to mind Sulpicia's proud self-identification as *Servi filia Sulpicia* at 3.16. So, too, Valerius, but not Pliny, notes that the image of Venus dedicated by this Sulpicia was specifically *Verticordia*, Changer of Hearts. What is more, he specifies that in this cultic context the goddess turned the minds of both girls and mature women from lust (*libido*) to respectable sexual behavior (*pudicitia*). With these details, he also evokes Sulpicia's elegies, most notably 3.13.

In the opening line of 3.13 Sulpicia redefines *pudor*, sexually motivated shame, as requiring that she reveal rather than conceal the details of her love affair to an audience of readers. In lines 3-5, moreover, Sulpicia mentions Venus twice, first with the epithet *Cytherea*. There she asserts that the Roman Muses, *Camenae*, who inspire her poetry, persuaded Venus to bring her lover to her embrace, and thereby fulfill her vows. At elegy 3.11.13-14 Sulpicia addresses Venus directly, beseeching her not to be unjust, and to let her and her lover, equally bound in chains, either render the goddess service, or release the chains entirely. Sulpicia's Venus, however, does not change hearts from lust to respectable sexual behavior. Rather, she abets and validates unlawful passion: 3.13 culminates in Sulpicia's statement: *sed peccasse iuvat, vultus componere famaetaedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar*, "it is fun to have misbehaved; it wearies me to wear a false expression for the sake of rumor. May I be said to be a woman worthy of having made love with a worthy man".

28 — Scullard (1981: 96-97).

Like his scenario featuring Sulpicia the wife of Lentulus, Valerius' portrayal of the Sulpicia elected as a religiously endorsed paragon of chastity appears to recall and respond to the poems of the Augustan elegist; he thus also recalls and responds to Livy's earlier narrative of the Bacchanalian scandal. Valerius, unlike Livy, could not expect the elegist to be reading his moralistic writings. Thus he does not seem to be suggesting other modes of conduct to her, merely faulting what she says about herself in her poetry. But his inclusion of two Sulpicia-scenarios with evocations of the Sulpicia elegies constitutes a striking critique of her moral stance, and that of the genre in which she writes.

### *Ovid and the Sulpiciae*

In this context we should examine Ovid's description of how the temple of Venus Verticordia was established, at *Fasti* 4.157-160, composed in elegiac couplets if not a love elegy itself:

In the time of our ancestors Rome fell from sexually respectable conduct (*pudicitia*); people of olden times, you consulted the old woman of Cumae. She orders a temple to be built to Venus, and after these things were properly done, Venus holds the name of the changed heart (*verso... corde*).

As we see, Ovid refers to the Cumaean Sibyl, whose books – according to both Valerius and Pliny – led to the selection of his Sulpicia as the most virtuous woman in Rome. His account employs the word *pudicitia* to describe the declining state of Roman morals when the Venus Verticordia statue was consecrated. Valerius' Sulpicia-scenario uses *pudicitia*, too, and Pliny employs *pudicissima*. With *verso* and *corde*, metrical challenges notwithstanding, Ovid also manages to include the two verbal roots comprising the cult-title Verticordia; by way of contrast, Pliny does not make reference to this epithet. But Ovid does not mention the central figure in the scenarios of both Valerius and Pliny, a woman named Sulpicia herself.

This omission is striking because Ovid composed the *Fasti* around the time of his exile, at least a decade before Valerius was writing, and because the two later authors were presumably drawing on the same sources. As has been noted, too, Ovid and the elegist Sulpicia must have been acquainted, since he was a literary protégée of her maternal uncle Messalla. Ovid, however, never mentions the elegist Sulpicia in any of his poems.

Yet, as I have argued, Ovid evokes, and critiques, Sulpicia's elegies on more than one occasion. *Amores* 3.14, apparently written in the mid-teen BCE, can be read as echoing Sulpicia's words so as to fault her pride in openly celebrating and publicly sharing her transgressive sexual behavior

rather than keeping it under wraps, as well as to criticize Sulpicia's disregard for her *fama*, moral reputation. In his narrative about Pyramus and Thisbe in *Metamorphoses* 4, Ovid recalls Sulpicia's words to make an implicit comparison between Sulpicia's erotic communications and those of Thisbe, and to disparage Sulpicia's demanding, complaining, self-absorbed mode of speaking to and about her lover. By using the same words for the ivory statue created by Pygmalion in *Metamorphoses* 10 that Sulpicia employs to describe herself, Ovid spotlights Sulpicia's poetic preoccupation with her own physical appearance and adornment<sup>29</sup>.

Like several of Ovid's poems, *Tristia* 3.7, which offers literary advice to a young female protégée he calls "Perilla", accords prominence and praise to the Greek female poet Sappho. Yet Ovid does not acknowledge any Roman women poets as Sappho's literary successors. I have contended that Ovid's allusions to Sulpicia's elegies as well as his comments to and about other Roman women poets criticize their work, albeit obliquely, so that he can identify himself as Sappho's Roman female counterpart<sup>30</sup>.

What is more, to fault Sulpicia by name would devalue the genre of Latin love elegy itself, and require Ovid to align himself with moralistic writers such as Livy and Valerius. Their representations of aristocratic women named Sulpicia who share some of the elegist's traits, but differ sharply from her in their traditional, upstanding moral comportment, seem to suggest that Livy and Valerius regarded the elegist as embodying values that Augustus' moral and marital legislation sought to combat: indeed the very values celebrated in the genre of Latin love elegy.

To be sure, moralizing writers such as Livy and Valerius are not unique in critiquing elegy, its scenarios, and its values. Horace before them, and Petronius thereafter, have been read as offering critiques of their own, as taking comic and satiric rather than serious and sermonizing issue<sup>31</sup>. But serious and sermonizing were not Ovid's way of doing literary business; his poignant expression of solidarity with his fellow elegiac practitioners in both *Amores* 3.9 and at lines 41-56 of his autobiographical *Tristia* 4.10 afford the impression that he would say nothing to diminish the genre of elegy itself.

29 — See Hallett (2009a) for Ovid's intertextual critique of Sulpicia in *Amores* 3.14, Hallett (2009c) for Ovid's representation of Pygmalion's ivory statue as recalling and faulting Sulpicia, and Hallett (2010) for Ovid's representation of Thisbe as evoking and surpassing Sulpicia as an erotic communicator.

30 — Hallett (2009d), which examines Ovid's rosters of Greek and Roman love poets in *Tristia* 2 as well as his recommendations in *Ars Amatoria* 3 of Greek and Roman poets to be read by women eager to achieve erotic expertise.

31 — See Hallett (2003) for readings of Horace, *Satires* 1.2 and Petronius, *Satyricon* 26-34 as critiquing the agenda and assumptions of Latin love elegy, from a comic and satiric, yet moralizing, stance and a comic and satiric, yet morally subversive, posture respectively.





flesh: she is said to have produced a son (though there is no mention of his father). The meter of these verses strengthens the characterization of elegy and its practitioners, especially its one surviving female writer, as at strong odds with Roman moral rectitude. It also validates the claim that Latin love elegy was invested with a cultural significance extending beyond the literary genre itself.

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