

ABSTRACT

Girls Gone Wild: Female Authorship in Augustan Rome

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It is no surprise that, based on the records that we have today, the literary field of Ancient Rome consisted almost solely of men. However, one female author survives, hidden within the Tibullan corpus. In six short elegies, Sulpicia presents herself in the roles of both the author and the authored, the lover and the beloved. The voices of female authors also appear within the Ovidian corpus, this time authored by Ovid himself in the letters of mythical and historical heroines to their absent lovers in his *Heroides*. These women struggle with the limitations of separation from their male counterparts in various ways, using writing both to show their weakness and grief, and to gain some freedom to speak their mind, all the while being authored by a man. In this thesis, I will analyze the poetry of Sulpicia and three of the letters of Ovid's heroines, those of Penelope, Hero, and Sappho, to show the complicated relationship between the female voice and authorship. I will show that authorship confuses the female identity, obscuring it with the masculine qualities inherent in elegy, while still providing a platform for the feminine voice that might not have otherwise been heard.

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GIRLS GONE WILD:
FEMALE AUTHORSHIP IN ROME

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It is no question that the majority of our knowledge regarding the women of Ancient Rome comes from men. Historians, scientists, and statesmen all share what they express as fact regarding the lives of Roman women.¹ Poets, specifically those of love elegy, contribute to this veritable potpourri of biased information. Their contribution, however, is intentionally skewed, not to spread false information regarding the lives of women, but to manipulate the already existing stereotypes of “woman” to meet their needs as authors. They change the female presence in any given poem to fit the fantasy *du jour*. This especially skews our knowledge of lower class women, as they usually served as the subjects of their poetic fantasy.² Occasionally, the *puella* is more than written, she is voiced by the poet. This donning of a female persona results in an even more confusing idea of the Roman woman, as even her voice is not her voice.

Propertius’ Cynthia is a good example of this phenomenon. Propertius regularly gives voice to his lover, often resulting in the ridiculing or chastising of the *amator*

¹ See Eve D’Ambra, *Roman Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12 for reports from historians and scientists on young women and their sexuality; See also Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

² Even this is complicated, as Julia Hejduk points out in her book, *Clodia: A Sourcebook* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 19. The social class of the elegiac *puella* was subject to change as the poem called for, allowing the poet to speak of the same woman as both a slave and aristocratic woman.

himself. In 1.3, for example, Cynthia wakes up and rebukes her lover for returning home, late and drunk:

sic ait in molli fixa toro cubitum:
'tandem te nostro referens iniuria lecto
alterius clausis expulit e foribus?
namque ubi longa meae consumpsti tempora noctis,
languidus exactis, ei mihi, sideribus?
o utinam tales producas, improbe, noctes
me miseram quales semper habere iubes.
nam modo purpureo fallebam stamine somnum,
rursus et Orpheae carmine fessa lyrae;
interdum leuiter mecum deserta querebar
externo longas saepe in amore moras;
dum me iucundis lapsam Sopor impulit alis:
illa fuit lacrimis ultima cura meis.'

1.3.34-46

Having fixed her elbow in the soft couch, she spoke thus: "Has the injustice of another finally forced you out of closed doors, carrying you back to our bed? For where have you spent long hours of my night, exhausted, ah me, with the stars put out? Of how I wish that you could lead out such nights as you always order miserable me to have, greedy man! For just now I was deceiving sleep by a purple thread, and again by means of a song of Orpheus' lyre, tired; meanwhile I, deserted, was often lamenting gently with myself your long delays in external love; until sleep drove me fallen with his delightful wings. That was my last care for my tears".³

This passage contrasts strongly with his descriptions of her peacefully sleeping (1-8), and proves he was right to fear her "tantrums of well-proved fierceness" (*expertae metuens iurgia saeuitiae*, 18). Cynthia expresses her grief over the potential of a cheating lover. Her emotions seem hyperbolic when compared to the descriptions of her calm that preceded this. *Nostro... lecto* (35) and *meae... noctis* (37) parallel each other in their individual couplets, each separated by two words which identify his wrongs, thus showing the disruption of her night by her lover's actions in the words themselves. She emphasizes her hurt with the placement of *me miseram* at the beginning of the line (40).

³ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

She is a caricature of an indignant mistress. Propertius, then, is dramatizing the projected emotions of his puella, creating almost a parody of her. In her emotions, he presents a wild woman with violent emotions to be feared, although when she is asleep and unresponsive, she is a picture of serenity.

Additionally, she appears to pursue the pass-times of an educated woman, weaving and poetry/songs.⁴ Yet Cynthia appears with several different boyfriends throughout Propertius' work,⁵ thus confusing her status, as that behavior would go against the expected conduct of an upper class woman. Julia Hejduk places Cynthia with Tibullus' Delia in a category of confused nobility and class.⁶

The confusion surrounding the Roman woman that results from male-dominated reporting on the topic finds its rhetorical apex in elegy. There, men use the stereotypes given to women to their advantage, creating the ultimate fantasy of a love affair. The women that result from this are amorphous cartoons of women whose emotions, appearance, and words are appropriated and pulled apart to suit the needs of their male authors. Whether or not these women are real, the idea of "woman" is still appropriated by Roman elegists according to their stereotypes and biases with only a whisper of the authentic female voice to balance it, a whisper found almost solely within the pages of reports written by men.

There is, however, a single extant female Latin poet who has survived from the Classical era. Sulpicia, the niece and ward of Messalla, was a writer of elegy. Her poems

⁴ See D'Ambra, "Women's Work" in *Roman Women*, 93-140.

⁵ Cf. 2.16; 4.8.

⁶ *Clodia: A Sourcebook*, 19.

appear in the third book of the *Corpus Tibullianum*, which consists of a collection of poems from the circle of Messalla, who was the patron of Tibullus. Authorship, let alone publication, was extremely rare for a Roman woman to undertake, at least from the literature that remains today. As an activity dominated by men, publication would not have been generally been allowed for a woman. Thus through her connections with Tibullus via her uncle, her poetry survived, published among the works of a man. Her works record her love affair with Cerinthus, a strikingly taboo subject matter for an aristocratic, unmarried young woman. Thus in both the act of writing and the content about which she writes, she rejects the norms of behavior that have been laid upon her by her society.

For centuries, Sulpicia's work was under extreme scrutiny and debate. Firstly, the gender of the writer was supposed by many to be false, a machination of a male elegist practicing the female point of view. This idea was partially due to the subject matter of her work, presuming it to be too explicit and too countercultural to be the work of a woman. As N. J. Lowe puts it, "The case could easily be put that Sulpicia, more perhaps even than Sappho, has found her poems condemned by accident of gender to a century and a half of condescension, disregard, and willful misconstruction to accommodate the inelastic sexual politics of elderly male philologists".⁷

Second, her work was called amateurish, impervious to deciphering, and of no interest beyond her gender.⁸ Her poems are widely considered to be some of the most

⁷ "Sulpicia's Syntax," *The Classical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1988): 193.

⁸ Lowe, "Sulpicia's Syntax," 194.

difficult to translate in the Latin Language because, as the OCD says, “they are beset, in parts, by textual difficulties, but it also seems to be the case that Sulpicia is trying to make the Latin language do things it does not ordinarily do”.⁹ This has resulted in what Gruppe referred to as a *feminine* grammar, full of colloquialism, obscurity of construction, and a simplicity that makes linguistic analysis difficult.¹⁰

Another debate which plays a part in both of the previously discussed problems revolved around the so-called *amicus Sulpiciae*, the author of the five poems that precede the Sulpician corpus and are concerned with the love affair between Sulpicia and Cerinthus. Of the five poems, two are written from the perspective of Sulpicia (3.9 and 3.11). The others place her in a more traditional role as an elegiac *puella*. There has been much debate over the identity of the *amicus* and of Sulpicia, with some scholars crediting all eleven elegies to Sulpicia, some crediting all of them to Tibullus, or some to a different author from a different time.¹¹ Gruppe, however, by reason of scale and style differences, decided that they are not of Sulpicia’s hand.¹² Because of this, the poems of the *amicus* are not included within this thesis, as it focuses on Sulpicia as an author, rather than as authored by a man. However, the case of the *amicus Sulpiciae* shows how scholarship through the ages has attempted to disregard Sulpicia as an author in her own right, trying to deny her the deserved title of elegist on the grounds of gender.

⁹ OCD s.v. Sulpicia (1), elegiac poet. For a discussion of what “feminine Latin” means, see Lowe, “Sulpicia’s Syntax.”

¹⁰ Gruppe, O. F., *Die römische Elegie* (Liepzig: Wigand, 1838), 49-50.

¹¹ Lowe, “Sulpicia’s Syntax,” 194.

¹² Gruppe, *Die römische Elegie*.

Among the whispers of the female voice that exist in the annals of surviving Roman literature is a book of letters written by Ovid called the *Heroides*. Of these 21 letters, the first 14 are written from the perspective of mythological women to their abandoned lovers, the 15th from the perspective of Sappho, famed female Greek lyric poet from Lesbos who gained notoriety because of her poetry and her sexual preference for women, and the last 6 (16-21) form pairs, three written by men (Paris, Leander, and Acontius) to their female lovers (Helen, Hero, and Cydippe) who each write a response. Unlike the use of the female voice à la Propertius' Cynthia, Ovid does not make sweeping attempts to hyperbolize the struggles of these women, instead donning their personas and writing in a way that is arguably somewhat accurate in presenting a female perspective.

Ovid refers to these letters in his other works. He references their composition in Am. 2.18:

quod licet, aut artes teneri profiteamur Amoris
 ei mihi, praeceptis urgeor ipse meis!),
 aut quod Penelopes uerbis reddatur Vlix
 scribimus et lacrimas, Phylli relictas, tuas,
 quod Paris et Macareus et quod male gratus Iason
 Hippolytique parens Hippolytusque legant,
 quodque tenens strictum Dido miserabilis ensem
 dicat et †Aoniae Lesbis amata lyrae.†

Am. 2.18.19-26

Rather I practiced the arts of soft Love, the thing which is allowed (ah me, I myself am weighed down by my own precepts!), or I wrote the word of Penelope which were delivered to Ulysses and your tears, abandoned Phyllis, what Paris and Macareus and what badly ungrateful Jason and the parent of Hippolytus and Hippolytus read, and what miserable Dido said holding the unsheathed sword and the Lesbian lover of the Aonian lyre.

He mentions nine of the fifteen single letters in this passage. He also references them in the *Ars Amatoria*, where he claims to have invented a new genre:

uel tibi composita cantetur EPISTVLA uoce;
ignotum hoc aliis ille nouauit opus.'

Ars. 3.345-346

Or let the Letter composed for you be sung by your voice; he invented this work unknown to others.

Obviously, these letters were important enough to Ovid to reference more than once in his more popular works.

Nevertheless, there has been significant debate over the authenticity of some of these poems, particularly the letter of Sappho, and letters 16-21. The last 6 letters included in the *Heroides* are often set into their own category because of their content. Since the other fifteen are singular¹³ letters written by women, the fact that these last 6 function as pairs of letters, with 17, 19, and 21 acting as the female-authored responses to the male authored 16, 18, and 20 separates them from the other fifteen. This has led some scholars to believe that the male-authored letters are in fact the work of Sabinus, Ovid's friend whom he also mentions in 2.18, saying that he wrote responses to some of his letters (27-28). Other scholars believe the last 6 poems to be a later addition from the pen of Ovid, written around the time of his *Fasti*.¹⁴ For the purposes of this thesis, I will avoid the question of the authenticity of these poems and treat them as part of the same work as the original 15, since those from the female perspective serve the same purpose whether or not they were published at the same time, or even by the same man.

The fifteenth epistle, that of Sappho, is the most broadly debated of all of them. The question of why Sappho, who was not only real but also Ovid's authorial inspiration

¹³ Singular meaning there is no response to the letter.

¹⁴ OCD s.v. Ovid.

whom he recommended should be read alongside himself,¹⁵ in a book otherwise filled with the perspectives of mythological characters has captivated many scholars.¹⁶ However, the reality of its Ovidian authorship and its placement within the work is largely agreed upon by scholars.¹⁷ As with letters 16-21, Sappho's letter will be treated as a product of Ovid's authorship and as a part of the *Heroides*, as the letter serves the same purpose with regard to female voice whether or not the authorship or placement is correct.

As the only extant female Roman elegist, Sulpicia writes in the voice of her female poetic persona, providing a contrast against the otherwise only male-written female personas in Augustan poetry. This invites comparison of the two. How realistic are the women written by men? Can a man present the female voice in an authentic way? What effect does a male author have on the female voice? In this thesis, I will compare the poetic persona of Sulpicia to the female personas that Ovid writes in his *Heroides*. I will show the accuracies and inaccuracies of Ovid's representation of the female voice and experience when compared to the real voice and thoughts of a Roman woman through close analyses of each.

¹⁵ E.g. *Ars* 3.331, *Rem.* 761, *Tristia* 2.365.

¹⁶ For one recent example of a discussion of Ovid's reason for this letter, see Vicky Rimmell, "Epistolary Fictions: Authorial Identity in *Heroides* 15," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, no. 45 (1999): 109-135.

¹⁷ For an opposing opinion of the inclusion of the Sappho's letter within the *Heroides* at all, see Albert R. Baca, "Ovid's Epistle from Sappho to Phaon (*Heroides* 15)," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 102 (1971): 29-38.

Before the analysis of these two authors can begin, an understanding of the cultural background surrounding Roman women is crucial. The lack of female authorship from Ancient Rome is a product of their culture surrounding women.¹⁸ The existence of even one female writer is surprising, especially considering the content of her poetry, given the expectations of behavior that rested on them. For all women, their primary role was bearing children. The concern for those children to be legitimate heirs led to the strict control over female sexuality. Women, especially young women, were considered unable to control their sexual desires, and thus required a handler, or guardian, in the form of her father or a stand-in. As Eve D'Ambra puts it, "Female sexual desire was considered a dangerous, antisocial force by male authorities who saw it as a base appetite better suited to animals than to humans".¹⁹ However, the guardian could be simply a title "to give the appearance of male control over property".²⁰

The solution to the problem of female sexuality was marriage, arranged by the girl's father usually to a man about 10 years older than his bride. Because a girl is fully under the legal and financial authority of her father, these marriages could occur with or without *manus*, meaning she could either be transferred to fall under the authority of her husband, or could remain under her father's authority. While marriage was arranged by the girl's father and required some ceremony, divorce was a simple statement of the end of the marriage from one member of the party to the other in front of witness. Although

¹⁸ Most of the information from this section comes from common knowledge, the OCD, or Eve D'Ambra's *Roman Women* unless otherwise stated.

¹⁹ *Roman Women*, 12.

²⁰ OCD s.v. women.

marriages were arranged and all authority over the woman rested with either her husband or her father, a woman could often come into some legal and financial autonomy by outliving her husband or father.

The concern over female sexuality resulted in a strict code of conduct enforced by the society around them. Roman women, especially upper-class Roman women, were expected to be pillars of culture and traditional morality. As they were the guarantors of a Roman culture moving forward in their primary role as begetters of children, they were expected to act as an example of that culture and morality, which they must pass along to the next generation. If a woman were to break out of that mold and do something that does not follow the expectations of a good Roman woman, she would be subject to ridicule and could bring embarrassment and a worse reputation on her family and/or husband.

An explanation of the genre of the works under discussion is also in order. Both Sulpicia and Ovid write elegy, a genre of love poetry that is highly thematic and has been said to be “obstinately male”.²¹ The tropes and mechanisms of the genre generally require a male author to fantasize about, dominate, serve, and objectify the female object of his affection. Clearly, this becomes problematic when elegy has a female author. By manipulating these tropes, the female voices that write the elegies discussed in this thesis are able to don the role of elegist and still retain the role of subject of the poem, making them both the lover and the beloved.

There are three elegiac tropes that are particularly important to understand for the purpose of this thesis:

²¹ Lowe, “Sulpicia’s Syntax,” 193.

- *Love as war* presents love as a battle to be fought in the bedroom. This often manifests itself in violence involved in a sexual encounter.²²
- *Militia Amoris* is the idea that loving resembles military service. As Julia Hejduk puts it, “Either the girl herself or Venus... is like a general leading her lover on a difficult campaign”.²³
- *Love as sickness* is the idea that love often comes on a lover as a sudden disease, incapacitating the lover.

It is also important to understand the difference between poet and the poetic persona. There is a distinction between the author and the voice in which he rights. Obviously, Ovid’s donning of the persona of Penelope does not reflect the real thoughts and experiences of Ovid, despite the first person in which he writes. Just as today one wouldn’t expect a novel with a first-person narrator to reflect exactly the thoughts of the author, one cannot treat the personas of either Sulpicia or Ovid as autobiographical representations. An author can play a character in his or her poetry just as well as they can write supporting characters. In this thesis, I do not attempt to pass judgement on the intention, actions, or identity of the authors. I focus on their personas and the effects of authorship on those personas. Whether or not the author intended those effects, they are present and can be studied.

²² For the distinction between love as war and *militia amoris*, see Monica Gale, “Propertius 2.7: Militia Amoris and the Ironies of Elegy,” *JRS* 87 (1997): 77-91.

²³ *Clodia: A Sourcebook*, 13.

CHAPTER TWO

Sulpicia: Elegist, Character, Woman

A true female voice is nearly impossible to find in what remains of Ancient Roman literature. In fact, only one survives. Sulpicia, the niece and ward of Messalla, the patron of Tibullus, wrote elegies, of which a mere 40 lines survive due to their preservation in the fourth book of the Tibullan corpus. As a female elegist, a generically masculine genre,¹ she adapts elegiac tropes to create a space for herself within the genre. Her poetic persona is, therefore, worthy of study. In this chapter, I will first discuss each of Sulpicia's poems and examine the female voice contained therein.² I will then discuss the persona that results, and how it is shaped by societal pressures. Finally, an analysis of Sulpicia's persona will show that three main shortcomings—a lack of agency, a missing identity, and a divided self—define the female image that Sulpicia presents in her poetry, problems which are partially resolved by adopting the roles of *amator* and of author.

¹ Kristina Milnor, "Sulpicia's (Corpo)reality: Elegy, Authorship and the Body in {Tibullus} 3.13," *Classical Antiquity* 21.2 (October 2002): 261-262.

² For the purposes of this chapter, the so called "Garland of Sulpicia" written by the *amicus Sulpiciae* will not be included. The "Garland" is made up of the five poems before the corpus of Sulpicia. Debate has occurred over whether these poems are written by the same author as those accredited to Sulpicia herself. However, Otto Gruppe identified these poems as the work of a different author writing about the same subject matter in 1838. Since then, scholars have generally agreed that the *amicus* is indeed an admirer of Sulpicia and not Sulpicia herself. See Otto Gruppe, *Die römische Elegie*, Leipzig: Wigand, 1838. For a more recent discussion of the nuances of these poems, see S. C. Fredericks, "A Poetic Experiment in the Garland of Sulpicia (Corpus Tibullianum, 3,10)," *Latomus* 35, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1976): 761-782.

Firstly, the first Sulpician poem of the six preserved in the Tibullan corpus is by far the most shocking. Her first poem is written after the consummation of a love affair with a nameless lover. In 3.13, she boastfully celebrates what would be shameful not to share:

Tandem uenit 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, uelim,
sed peccasse iuuat, uultus componere famae
taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar.

3.13.1-10

Finally love has come, love of the sort which to have hidden it for shame would be more of a scandal to me than to have revealed it to someone. Venus, persuaded by my Muses, has brought him into our lap and laid him there. Venus fulfilled her promises: let him tell of my joys, whoever is said to not have his own. I would not wish to entrust anything to sealed tablets, so that no one may read me before my own, but it pleases me to have sinned, it irks me to compose my face for the sake of reputation; I will be said to have been a worthy woman with a worthy man.

The use of the perfect infinitives (*texisse*, *nudasse*, *habuisse*, *peccasse*, *fuisse*) and the perfect verbs (*uenit*, *attulit*, *deposuit*, *exoluit*) indicate that the action occurred prior to the writing of this poem. Her word choice reveals her exultant tone. *Tandem* indicates the realization of an expectation or hope from its position as the first word in the first line of her poem. Its length also emphasizes this, with the long vowels slowing down the line at the beginning, providing the reader with a sense of the realization of something long-awaited. The pride she feels over this realization becomes evident with her change in tense. *Narret* (5) begins a series of wishes in the present subjunctive (*legat*; *uelim*, 8) expressing a hope for her present and beyond into the reader's present. She follows this with the present indicative, which has a similar effect. *Iuuat*, *taedet* and *ferar* (9-10) all

express her feelings at the time of composition while simultaneously projecting those feelings forward into the time of reading. Thus, she writes this poem so that her actualized affair becomes her legacy.

From the very beginning of the poem, Sulpicia does not act according to the expected demeanor of a chaste, aristocratic woman. Rather, she claims to have sinned and, what is more, that it pleased her to do so (*peccasse iuvat*, 10), going so far as to say that she rejects comporting herself so as to project a “face of good report” (*uultus componere famae taedet*, 9-10). She uses the terms *texisse* and *nudasse*, words typically reserved for undressing, to refer to poetic self-censoring and composition. By using *nudasse* to convey both poetic expression and the physical act of disrobing, she relates the revelation of her affair to the revelation of the female body, a trope typical of the elegiac conquest of a woman.³ Thus, laying bare her affair in writing cannot be done without the composition of her body itself. Similarly, *texisse* references her own body as well as her deed about which she writes, resulting in her body also being a shame to hide. In this way, she offers her body to the eye of the reader in the avowal of her love affair. This forces a kind of voyeurism upon the readers, making the very act of reading her poem sexual, or at least scandalous, in nature.

Furthermore, the invocation of the name of Venus in lines 3 and 5 suggests the sexual nature of their relationship. As Milnor points out, Venus, the Muses, and Sulpicia herself form a “community of females” in which the still unnamed object of her love is circulated.⁴ Venus is prompted by Sulpicia’s Muses to bring Sulpicia’s love to her lap.

³ Cf. Prop. 2.15; Ovid Am. 1.5.

⁴ “Sulpicia’s (Corpo)reality,” 272.

The author, then, attributes to herself the power to persuade a goddess by the arts of other goddesses which she describes as her own (*exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis*, 3). Again, her pride in having accomplished the sex act is apparent as she ascribes to herself persuasive power over a god.

As she continues, Sulpicia goes on to claim that she “would not wish to entrust anything to sealed tablets, so that no one may read me before my own” (7-8), desiring to keep it private. Such an act amounts to a *praeteritio* in her denial of an action she is acknowledging. In the very act of documenting her actions, she has allowed the world to “read her.” Once again, this underscores the pride she bears for the occasion. In the same way that she brings the reader into the affair through language that forces voyeurism and brings it into the reader’s present, her refusal to consign her poetry to the eyes of only one opens herself to the public. In the couplet prior to this, she admits a desire for exactly this, saying that her love can be told by those who don’t have love themselves (5-6).

From the very beginning of her corpus, Sulpicia “positions herself against the grain of expectation”.⁵ From her very position as a female elegist, she lays the foundation for the content of her poems to be counter to the expected behavior of an upper class Roman woman. This has led Percy to conclude that the nature of her relationship with her lover transgresses societal norms.⁶ In this first poem, she relishes the sinful nature of her actions. She does not wish to conceal the nature of their relationship, but rather wants to flaunt its sexual reality. Her thread of rebellion continues in the last line of the poem, in

⁵ L.T. Percy, “Erasing Cerinthus: Sulpicia and her audience,” *The Classical World* 100.1 (Fall 2006): 34.

⁶ “Erasing Cerinthus,” 34.

which she expresses her desire for the public to know the affair's intimate nature. There she explicitly expresses her desire to be known for her sexual activity. The position of *digno digna* in the cum clause of line 10 (*taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar*) is noteworthy for the pairing of the masculine and feminine forms of *dignus*, which are separated only by the caesura. The closeness of the only words that directly describe either Sulpicia or her unnamed lover represents the physicality of their relationship. In light of the larger context of the poem, the close proximity of *digno digna* once again draws attention to the sexual nature of their relationship.

Despite the arrogance and pride demonstrated throughout the poem, Sulpicia, interestingly, never names herself or her lover.⁷ Throughout the instances of expressed desire for the affair not to remain private and her disavowal of any cultural obligation toward purity, she boasts that these actions were done of her own accord. However, the fact that she does not sign her name to these claims undermines her perceived pride and adds a layer of obscurity to her straightforward proclamation of sin. Through this, Sulpicia acknowledges the remainder of societal expectations that still press on her, even in her eternal, public proclamation of unapproved behavior.

As suddenly as Sulpicia throws her reader into the apex of her affair, in the next poem of the corpus she just as quickly reverts to a time well before the events of 3.13. This makes the shockingly counter-cultural nature of her first poem even more curious. She makes the consummation of her relationship with the unnamed lover the introduction to her work. After she has introduced the audience to her persona and her actions, she

⁷ Barbara L. Flaschenreim, "Sulpicia and the Rhetoric of Disclosure," *Classical Philology* 94, no. 1 (Jan. 1999): 41.

casually introduces her lover in the middle of the second line of her second poem. The suppression of the identity of her lover compared to the emphasis on the consummation of their affair, which the arrangement of the poems presents, makes Sulpicia and her agency the crux of her corpus.

In addition to a striking difference in tone, 3.14 shows a different Sulpicia, one before she has claimed agency over her actions. In 3.14, she bemoans being forced against her will to spend her birthday away from the finally named Cerinthus:

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 tempestivae saepe, propinque, uiae.
hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo,
arbitrio quamvis non sinit esse meo.

3.14.1-8

My hated birthday is here, which must be spent, sad, in the annoying countryside and without Cerinthus. What is sweeter than the city? Or could a villa and the cold river in the Arretine fields be suitable for a girl? Now, Messalla, too eager for me, relax, journeys are often not opportune, uncle. Having been led away here, I leave behind my heart and mind, although you do not allow it to be according to my judgement.

She begins and ends this poem with an emphasis on her inability to fulfil her desires and her helplessness against the whims of those with more power. The passive periphrastic construction in the second line shows her lack of agency in the decision to leave Rome on her birthday. It feels as if there is some disembodied force against which she is powerless. She ends with “your power does not allow it to be according to my decision” (7-8). The power of her uncle over her prevents her from acting according to her wishes. *Non* (8), resting in the middle of the line immediately following the caesura emphasizes the extent of her inability, as the surrounding words (*quamvis... sinit esse*, 8) indicate

why she has no power. Finally, Sulpicia's power, shown in *arbitrio...meo* is relegated to the opposite ends of the line, forced apart by the same hand that forces her away from her lover.

Furthermore, Sulpicia plays with the idea of *aptum* in this poem. What is more appropriate for a girl, living at Rome or staying in a villa in the country where she has nothing to do? Having just read the lascivious 3.13, propriety has already been thrown out in place of her desire from the perspective of the audience. Now, she throws the reader back into a time when decorum was forced upon her, and she was not given, or had not yet claimed, the power to act as she desires.

In her comparison of the city versus the cold stream in the countryside in lines 3 and 4, it is hard to ignore the reference to the stream that appears as a signature for Callimachean aesthetics. As an elegist, she prefers the setting in which she is near Cerinthus, as that is where the fodder for her poetry resides. She thus identifies herself as an author of love poetry, not bucolic poetry, and wants to remain where it is appropriate for such an author to remain. This could also be a comment on the content that is appropriate for her as a female author. She is able to write about love because she has experienced it; she cannot write about the beauty of the countryside because she does not have any sort of mastery of the subject.

In the last couplet, she further labels herself as an elegiac poet by referencing a generic motif. The absence of one's heart, sense, love, emotion, soul, etc. is a typical sentiment for the *amator* to express when he is away from his *puella*.⁸ Sulpicia puts

⁸ The paraclausithyron is a good example of the madness/desperation that results from the separation of the *amator* from his *puella*, the implication being that he goes mad when he is not with her. Cf. Tib. 1.2; Prop 1.16; Ovid Am. 1.6; etc.

forward the same sentiment toward her partner, reversing the gender norm of a man longing for his woman from whom he has been separated. Thus, she solidifies her position as an elegiac author by giving an example of the way she transforms the tropes of the genre to allow her, as a woman, to be its author. Here, that transformation requires the removal of agency from Sulpicia in order to allow a woman to write according to elegiac tradition while the agency remains with the male figure in power, in this case, Messalla.

The story of her “hated” birthday does not end there, however. In 3.15, she rejoices to inform Cerinthus that she will be in Rome for her birthday because of an unexpected change of plans:

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 uenit.

3.15.1-4

Do you know that the gloomy journey has been taken out from under the heart of your girl? Now it is permitted that I am in Rome for my birthday. Let that birthday be spent by us all, which perhaps comes to you not expecting.

With the perfect passive participle in the first line, she again shows her inability to fulfill her desires. Even when something favorable occurs, as it does here, it was not her doing. The “gloomy journey has been lifted” unexpectedly from her, not by her (1).

This poem reveals what Sulpicia wants from Cerinthus: devotion. She wants him to rejoice at celebrating her birthday. She hates not being with him and fears that he does not feel the same way. Thus, she wants to surprise him with an unexpected return, which is visible in the wishful tone of the last line with *opinanti tibi* indicating the surprise she wants. By expressing this desire for him to want to see her, she is simultaneously longing

for her lover as she did in 3.14, but also desiring for him to long for her. Here, she, the author and *amator*, wants Cerinthus, the object of her writing, to express the kind of desire that a male elegist would express to the female object of his poetry. She thus solidifies her role as *amator* within her elegy by herself craving the love of her dear one, as her generic predecessors did before her,⁹ and by inviting her male love to be the author of his own desire for her. However, this also serves to highlight her lack of agency in the affair thus far. She cannot force him to mourn her departure or to rejoice upon her return. She can only hope.

3.16, however, contrasts sharply with the previous three poems. The relationship, which up to this point has seemed relatively smooth and successful, now seems close to falling apart. Sulpicia bitterly confronts Cerinthus about his rumored affair with a prostitute:

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.

3.16.1-6

I'm thankful that you, secure, now allow much for yourself when it comes to me, so that I, foolish, do not have a bad fall. Let the care for the toga and the prostitute pressed by her wool basket be more powerful for you than Sulpicia, the daughter of Servius: there are those who are worried on our behalf, those to whom it is the greatest cause of grief that I might yield to an unknown bed.

In the first two lines, we learn that Cerinthus feels secure regarding Sulpicia, and because of this allows himself many freedoms. The first two lines read as a mocking response to

⁹ Paraclausithyron type poems are once again a good example of the kind of desire she is employing. See n. 8.

perhaps Cerinthus' excuse for his affair. These first two lines are rife with sarcasm, starting the accusation of her cheating lover with *gratum est* (I am thankful) and ending this couplet by calling herself *inepta* (foolish), presumably for believing he would stay with her. The use of a negative purpose clause also adds to the sarcastic tone, making the irony of *gratum est* all the more prevalent, as if he was doing her a favor by cheating on her.

This opening couplet also highlights the disparities in the freedom allowed to men and women within a relationship. Cerinthus is "secure regarding her," not only because she is in love with him, but also because culturally she cannot cheat on him without coming under scrutiny. While it was commonplace for men to have casual sex, her status as an aristocratic woman bars her from that. Clearly at this point in the literary affair, the acts celebrated in 3.13 have not yet taken place, as she would already have fallen under the same scrutiny for sleeping with her lover that cheating on Cerinthus would gain her. Thus, in the third poem of the series, Sulpicia presents a persona that is still concerned with the *vultus famae* that she rejects at the beginning of her corpus (3.13.9).

Moreover, this is confirmed in the last couplet of 3.16, where she acknowledges she is not the only person who cares about her lover's recent behavior. Whether this line is intended to indicate that Cerinthus is not her only suitor, or this shows that Cerinthus is not of the same rank, or it simply warns Cerinthus that her family or some other relation is watching,¹⁰ Sulpicia reinforces that this is not just a private matter, but one of social importance.

¹⁰ See N. J. Lowe, "Sulpicia's Syntax," *The Classical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1988): 201.

Furthermore, this poem reveals the source of her identity. She relies heavily on her rank and name when shaming Cerinthus and his lover. She identifies her rival through the physical objects that indicate her status, the toga and the wool basket. This dehumanizes the courtesan, turning her into nothing more than the physical objects that she lives by.¹¹ Sulpicia then pulls her rank by saying that she is “Sulpicia daughter of Servius” (4). Aristocratic Roman women remained under the house of their fathers, which provided them their rank, wealth, status, etc., and Sulpicia is no exception.¹² In the composition of the line, *Servi* comes right before the caesura, emphasizing that word so that the words that follow, *filia Sulpicia*, do not carry the same weight. Thus she places more importance on the name of her father than her own name. Nevertheless, she takes refuge in her family name as she has the comfort of social rank to make her more important, to elevate her beyond identification by trade to identification by name. By denoting her name and position in this way, she not only belittles her rival further but also invites comparison to her naming of Cerinthus, which is unspecific and unimportant by comparison. His identification was delayed and overlooked, as discussed above (3.14.2). Sulpicia’s signature, in comparison, rings out, taking up more than half of a pentameter line, in the same poem in which she refuses to name her cheating lover at all.¹³

The next poem, once again, shifts drastically in tone and content. Now, in 3.17, she begs Cerinthus to give her a reason to recover from illness and to continue living:

Estne tibi, Cerinthe, tuae pia cura puellae,

¹¹ See Flaschenreim, “Rhetoric of Disclosure,” 46-7.

¹² Eve D’Ambra, *Roman Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2007), 46.

¹³ Flaschenreim, “Rhetoric of Disclosure,” 49.

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?

3.17.1-6

Is there devoted care of your girl for you, Cerinthus, because now fever harries my tired body? Ah, I would not desire to overcome sad illnesses otherwise than if I thought you also wish it. And now what does it help me to conquer this illness if you are able to bear my misfortunes with untroubled heart?

In the first line, she identifies herself as his (*tuae...puellae*, 1). Because she finds her identity in her father in the poem immediately before, this shift to attributing herself to Cerinthus is striking. She wants to make the transition from receiving her rank and status from her father to receiving it from Cerinthus, thus fully achieving the role of his woman or wife.¹⁴

Once again, as in the second poem, she transforms typical elegiac themes. Like the *amator* calling his girl his reason for living and withstanding the sickness of love, she begs Cerinthus to want her to live, to be bothered by the idea of her death.¹⁵ Here, she plays with the thematic sickness of love that is so popular among elegists.¹⁶ Her desire to live revolves around his desire for her to live. Otherwise, there is no point. In giving him the power to decide whether she lives or dies based on his desire for her to recover, she

¹⁴ The status of their relationship, and thus the next step in their relationship, is unclear.

¹⁵ Prop. 4.7, in which the ghost of Cynthia chastises Propertius for not mourning passionately enough, offers an interesting comparison to Sulpicia begging Cerinthus to want her to live.

¹⁶ See Ruth Caston, "Love as Illness: Poets and Philosophers on Romantic Love," *The Classical Journal* 101, no. 3 (Feb-March 2006): 271-98.

reaffirms the sentiment of *tuae* (1). She hands over her agency to the man in whom she wishes to place her identity.

In the next poem of the corpus, 3.18, once again, Sulpicia's tone takes a sharp turn from what we have seen so far. In this poem, she anxiously apologizes for abandoning a planned tryst with Cerinthus the other night:

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.

3.18.1-6

May I not be as fervid a care not as also I seemed to have been a few days before,
my light, if I, stupid, have done anything in my entire youth of which I would
concede to have regretted more than that I left you alone yesterday night, desiring
to conceal my passion.

In one long sentence, Sulpicia presents an anxious tone, jumbling her word order and making it hard to follow, concealing the point of the poem until it is revealed in the last line. This results in a very anxious tone. However, the seemingly chaotic nature is intentionally organized. As Milnor says, "The mode of expression suits the subject matter.... As many have noted, the poem is about concealment and the language is indeed concealing".¹⁷ The series of subordinate clauses and passive verbs with complimentary perfect infinitives confuses the action of the poem (*videor... fuisse*, 2; *fatear paenituisse*, 4). The last couplet shows the intentional word order especially. *Te solum* is set in the middle of the line, far from the subject that the verb at the end of the line provides (*reliqui*, 5), separating the object from the subject and thus leaving the phrase itself alone. All of this intentionally confusing word order works to disguise the intention of the

¹⁷ "Sulpicia's (Corpo)reality," 277.

poem. She is apologizing for leaving Cerinthus the other night in an attempt to conceal her own passion, an idea which is mimicked in the language of the poem. In the last line, the reader does not know whose passion she wants to conceal until the very last word, thus obscuring it in the very poem.¹⁸

The reason for her running away, and for obscuring her passion within the poem, is the social stigma of female sexuality. For women, especially aristocratic women, there was an expectation of purity, forcing the young female to suppress her sexual desires. This stifled sexuality pressures Sulpicia to abandon her love, an action which she regrets at the time of writing 3.18 (4). She feared going against custom and the stigma that comes with such rebellion. Obviously, this is very different from the bold pride of the woman who has just succeeded in consummating her love in 3.13. The composition of 3.18 occurs before she has rejected the expectation of decorum. The writing of 3.13, then, occurs chronologically after the rest of her corpus, although she places it at the beginning, thus emphasizing her love affair and her socially inappropriate behavior even further.

Three themes have run through our analysis of the corpus of Sulpicia: agency, identity, and the divided self.¹⁹ Each of these themes is discussed by a pair of poems. 3.14 and 15 focus on agency, 3.16 and 17 focus on identity, and 3.18 and 3.13 focus on the divided self. 3.13 also functions as the culmination of all of these, offering a kind of resolution to the problems that arise from these themes.

First, 3.14 and 15 focus on her lack of agency. In 3.14, Sulpicia has no influence over the decision to leave Rome, nor does she credit herself with any responsibility over the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See Flaschenreim, "Rhetoric of Disclosure," 46 for more of this term.

sudden change of plans in 3.15. As discussed above, the passive constructions of both poems indicate that the power is out of her hands (it must be spent, *agendus erit*, 3.14.2; has been taken out from under, *sublatum*, 3.15.1). These things happen *to* her, not *because* of her. The power, instead, rests in the hands of the male authority figure in her life; in this case, it lies with Messalla. Additionally, the only effort she expends to gain any power over the situation comes from the attempts at persuasion in 3.14, in which she argues for what is appropriate for a girl her age as she tries to cause pity in her uncle, who separates her from her heart and mind (*animum sensusque*, 7). Despite the fact that she does get her way, the perfect passive participle in the opening of 3.15 once again indicates that this change occurred out of her control. So far, Sulpicia's persona remains in someone else's control, unhappily doing what she is told (*tristis*, 3.14.2) as she lacks the agency to change her position.²⁰

Similarly, her identity rests in her connection with the male figures in her life. This is the focus of 3.16 and 17. Her ability to claim rank over the sex worker relies on her ability to identify as the daughter of Servius, not on her own name, as shown above in the arrangement of the line. Additionally, her only real threat against Cerinthus is the concern of others on her behalf. Therefore, any sort of repercussions for his actions must come from outside their relationship. Her ability to maintain her reputation once it is being affected by an external force rests in her connections with others and their concern for her wellbeing, showing once again her want of agency and tying her identity to others who have the power she lacks. Moreover, Sulpicia places her identity in another in 3.17, when

²⁰ *Tristis* is used adverbially and agrees with *natalis* (1), thus she is sad as she goes on this sad journey.

she expresses her desire to switch from the house of her father to Cerinthus' house. This is shown in her identification of herself as *tuae puellae* (1). The possessive indicates the kind of authority that the leading male figure has over her, effectively making her out to be property.²¹ She also attributes her desire to live to Cerinthus' desire for her to live. She is then not only giving Cerinthus power over her identity, but also power over whether she continues to exist at all. Thus she links identity and agency in this poem, giving both to Cerinthus, the male figure she hopes to be the next governing force over her life.

Finally, the first and the last poems of her corpus discuss most explicitly the divided self that exists throughout her poetry. Sulpicia creates a persona who is trapped between her own desire for freedom²² and the societal expectations of behavior that rest on her as an aristocratic woman. She is thus divided between two concepts that guide her behavior, propriety and desire. These dictate her every move for most of her corpus. Thus, in 3.14-17, she does not make any major attempts to gain power in any realm of her life. Instead, she accepts the identity found in the masculine figures and acts according to the whims of those men, although begrudgingly, according to the expectations of her culture. In 3.18, however, she writes about the failure of her first real attempt at gaining freedom. Although she desired to be with Cerinthus that night, propriety demands that she "desire to conceal her passion" (*ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum*, 3.18.6). She failed in an attempt to shirk off the behavioral expectation. The constraints of society still restrict her activity. Nevertheless, this poem shows a desire to escape cultural pressures, providing

²¹ D'Ambra, *Roman Women*, 46.

²² Freedom in practically every aspect of life, but most explicitly in the freedom to have agency over her own actions in their love affair.

the reader with the first situation in which Sulpicia resembles in any way the Sulpicia in the first poem of her corpus.

Furthermore, 3.13 takes place after the completion of the attempts made in 3.18. She has made a move toward fulfilling her own desires at the expense of cultural expectations. Through the consummation of their affair and the composition of it, she has gained agency over her body, something which she did not experience in the rest of her poetry. This is made clear in the language of undressing and the agency she claims in the fulfillment of Venus' promises, as expressed above. She begins to claim her own identity in her use of personal pronouns and first person verbs. However, she never fully comes into her own identity. She does not sign her own name or mention Cerinthus' name in her proclamation of illicit behavior. The closest thing to a signature in the poem occurs in the final line, when she labels herself and her lover as *digno digna*.²³ This suggests that the problem of the divided self has not been completely solved. Although she aggressively rejects cultural obligations of purity, she still carries the remnants of societal pressures apparent in the lack of names in 3.13. That poem, then, resolves the anxiety over her relationship with Cerinthus found in 3.18, and attempts to resolve the three main problems that are posed throughout the other poems. However, cultural expectations mandate that only so much progress can be made in the latter, resulting in an incomplete escape from the norms she attempts to reject.

Her corpus as a whole offers a path into the mind of a Roman woman. The three problems just discussed also exist for women outside of poetry, and Sulpicia's persona offers a unique opportunity to view the female body from a female point of view. As a

²³ Flaschenreim, "Rhetoric of Disclosure," 41.

woman Sulpicia is required to find her identity in her male caretaker, and to hand over the control of her life to the same male figure, as discussed previously. The Roman woman, then, is required to view her body and self through another. Her identity and agency are not her own, and she must rely on the male figure in authority at any given stage of her life.

Sulpicia's corpus, however, shows how a woman can gain some freedom from the controlling masculine grip. Interestingly, she accomplishes this by donning what amounts to a masculine persona. Through becoming a writer of elegy, she turns herself into *amator*, allowing her to gain agency as her poems progress. 3.13, then, shows the result of authorship for Sulpicia. While in the rest of her corpus, she indicates the problems that come with womanhood in a Roman society, she also builds herself up as an *amator* by adapting elegiac tropes to allow for a female author, as discussed above. It is through the donning of this role that occurs throughout 3.14-18 that she is able to reach any form of a resolution to the problems of agency, identity, and divided self. 3.13 shows the result of becoming an elegist, namely the freedom which she gained to shirk cultural norms and become her own person through the power of authorship. Nevertheless, while some freedom is gained, she still is unable to gain complete control over her life. She is still in some way affected by the rules of society, as the lack of signature indicates. Whether this is meant to be a hopeful indicator of the steps toward freedom a female can make, or a bleak reminder of the inescapability of societal pressures, it certainly sums up the problems that exists throughout the remainder of the work.

In conclusion, Sulpicia's corpus offers a unique female voice in a male-dominated genre. Her persona gives the reader insight into the daily struggles of a woman without

control of her own life or identity. Sulpicia's poetry is rife with tonal shifts and complexity made possible by her seemingly chaotic, yet carefully organized word order that reveals her emotions. Ultimately, her persona struggles with a lack of agency, an identity not her own, and a self divided between her own desires and societal expectations, yet through authorship she is able to find the power to move toward being her own person, unhindered by the pressures of her culture.

CHAPTER THREE

The Female Personas of Ovid's *Heroides*

Within Ovid's corpus is a set of epistolary elegies, the *Heroides*, written mostly from the perspective of legendary female figures from myth with only the exception of Sappho, the historical—though equally famous—female lyric poet from Lesbos. These letters were addressed to male lovers who had in some way abandoned the female authors. Each of these women experiences the effects of authorship in different ways. Penelope, still alone as her husband wanders for ten years after the end of the Trojan war, finds a voice to express the loneliness that hinders her from being heard. Hero explains the helplessness she feels as she waits for Leander to cross the stormy sea, finding a strange power in writing about her frailty. Sappho, torn from her usual meter into a meter appropriate for her lament, switches from hurt pride to deep sadness, ultimately deciding on suicide as the only means of solace without her lover Phaon and without the poetic talent he took from her. Through expressions of weakness and lack of agency, anxiety, and sexuality, their letters show the freedom that authorship offers them, as well as the confusion and desperation that follows when that freedom is taken away. This authorship, although allowing them to use their voices, complicates their identity as women through the forced donning of masculine characteristics in order to become elegiac poets.

Yet behind these revelations of the female voice lies the male author who composed them. These female personas reach such depths of grief and emotional turmoil that one forgets they are written by a man. Ovid, the man who took elegy to, or even

beyond, its logical extreme in his *Ars Amatoria*, teaching men how to woo a woman (without gifts) for the purpose of sexual conquest, wrote a series of letters expressing the feminine experience in ways that show an uncanny understanding of the innermost workings of the female psyche. The question of why, although interesting, cannot be answered without asking the author himself. However, one can investigate how a male author affects these expressions of the female voice. Ovid himself becomes an example of the problem of female authorship, highlighting both the freedom it can provide a woman and the inherently masculine nature of writing in Ancient Rome. While he provides a platform to exhibit their stories and voices, he shows that that platform wouldn't exist without the man behind it.

The first female voice to shine is that of Penelope, the wife of Ulysses renowned for her chastity. She still remains at home without her husband who left for the Trojan War twenty years ago.¹ Despite being a woman of power in a kingdom without a ruler, she cannot take complete control of her life because of the pressures from others to move on and stop waiting for Ulysses. In her letter, she writes herself into the roles she should be able to fulfill but cannot due to the extent of her loneliness. She begins by praising her own virtue. In a war begun by lack of virtue², Penelope stayed firm in her faithfulness and was rewarded for it:

¹ This timeline follows that of Duncan F. Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's *Heroides*," *The Classical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1984): 413-422.

² The text invites the comparison of Penelope's virtue that brought an end to the war to the lack of virtue that started it. Whether that lack of virtue be Helen's lust for Paris, or Paris' willingness to break the expectations of *xenia*, it is unclear; however, as the two are both Greek queens and brides of Achaean leaders, it is more likely the comparison concerns Helen.

Sed bene consuluit casto deus aequus amori.
 versa est in cineres sospite Troia viro.
 Argolici rediere duces, altaria fumant;
 ponitur ad patrios barbara praeda deos.
 grata ferunt nymphae pro salvis dona maritis;
 illi victa suis Troica fata canunt.
 mirantur iustique senes trepidaeque puellae;
 narrantis coniunx pendet ab ore viri.
 atque aliquis posita monstrat fera proelia mensa,
 pingit et exiguo Pergama tota mero:
 “hac ibat Simois; haec est Sigeia tellus;
 hic steterat Priami regia celsa senis.
 illic Aeacides, illic tendebat Ulixes;
 hic lacer admissos terruit Hector equos.”

Her. I. 23-36

But the god, kind, looked after chaste love well. Troy has been turned to ashes
 with my husband safe. The Argolic leaders have returned, the altars smoke;
 barbarians prizes are placed before the gods of our fathers. The brides bear thank
 offerings on behalf of their saved husbands; the men sang the fate of Troy
 conquered by their own. Lawful old men and anxious girls marvel; the wife
 hangs on the mouth of her storytelling husband. And someone shows the fierce
 battles with the table positioned, and paints all of Pergamum with a little wine:
 “Simois flows here; this is the Sigeian land; here the lofty palace of old Priam
 stood. There the son of Aeacus, there Ulysses was holding; Here torn Hector
 terrified urged horses.”

By placing the destruction of Troy immediately after the god favors her virtue,
 Penelope writes herself as the author of Ulysses' survival and victory at Troy,
 rewarded by the gods for her chastity (23). The second sentence becomes the result of
 the first, effectively presenting Achaean success at Troy, and by extension her
 husband's life, as the reward for her virtue. Immediately after attributing this causal
 role to herself, she begins to take on an epic tone in her word choice, beginning her
 account of the return of war heroes with words like *duces* (25), *barbara praeda* (26),
 and *nymphaea* (27). She now writes herself not only as the author of Trojan success,
 but the author of epic homecomings as well, applying to herself both the creative sense
 and the compositional sense of “author”. The switch in tenses from perfect to present

in line 25 (*rediere*, they have returned, to *fumant*, they smoke) indicates the donning of this role, turning from an account of a previous experience to the narration of a present scene set up by Penelope the bard.³ This continues when she gives voice to a soldier who recounts the Trojan battlefield, now becoming a female Homer (31-36). Thus in her letter, she is able to take on the authorial role she believes she had in success at Troy, a role which she can only claim within the realm of writing.

However, despite the returned soldiers and the joyful homecomings, the famed exploits of Ulysses and the destroyed city of Troy now turned to grain fields (37-59), Ulysses is still gone. Since they gained no information from Pylos or Sparta (59-65), Penelope remains alone, without any knowledge of Ulysses' whereabouts, and expresses her frustration in this letter addressed to her absent husband:

utilius starent etiamnunc moenia Phoebi—
 irascor votis, heu, levis ipsa meis!
 scirem ubi pugnares, et tantum bella timerem,
 et mea cum multis iuncta querela foret.

Her. I. 67-70

More usefully would the walls of Phoebus still now stand- I myself, fickle, am angered at my vows! I would know where you fight, and I would fear only war, and my complaint would be joined with many.

In her sadness, she would rather have the continuation of the war than a wandering husband. The placement of *etiamnunc* underscores her exasperation (even still, 67). Her frustration goes so far as to make her regret the chastity and faithfulness that has made her legendary. The spondaic first half of line 68 mimics the anger of those first two

³ For discussions on the implications of Penelope as bard, see R. Alden Smith, "Fantasy, Myth, and Love Letters: Text and Tale in Ovid's *Heroides*," *Arethusa* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 247-273; Anastasia Belinskaya, "Penelope's Odyssey," *The Classical Journal* 115, no. 2 (Dec 2019- Jan 2020): 175-199.

words, adding weight and emphasizing the anger of *irascor*, while the dactylic ebb and flow of the second half matches the fickleness she ascribes to herself (*levis*, 68).⁴ The cluster of pronouns referring to herself at the end of the line (*ipsa meis*) also places the focus on herself, which had been almost solely on Ulysses since Penelope identified herself as his savior in line 23. These pronouns also emphasize the agency she desires. She cannot do anything about the vow she made without sacrificing her virtue. Meanwhile, her husband could be facing no danger at all, wrapped in the arms of another woman, a fear which she expresses later.⁵ She regrets the vows she has been so careful to uphold, which undercuts the “reward” of her husband’s life. She seems to suggest that, had she not been so virtuous as to save her husband’s life and merit a successful campaign, she would know where her husband is and what kind of danger he faces.

Furthermore, the last line of this passage expresses the reason for her regret. As she writes this letter, she is alone. Besides her husband being gone, her household has turned against her as it is ravaged by suitors. Her people push her to decide on a new husband as her maids and servants turn on her in favor of the suitors. She also cannot find a companion in her grief outside of Ithaca, since no one else still awaits the return of their war-torn soldiers. During the war, her complaint was joined with the complaints of the many who begged for the survival of their men as they fought far

⁴ *Levis* is a typically feminine characteristic, common in elegy. See Ovid Am 3.1.40, 3.2.49; Prop. 1.18.11, 2.12.22. See also Duncan Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the discourse of Roman love Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁵ See lines 75-76, discussed below.

from home. Now she alone remains still praying for Ulysses' return. She is also one of the few on Ithaca who still hopes for his return, as most have already finished grieving and have moved on, begging their queen to do the same. She is truly without any companion. According to her letter, her loneliness invalidates her complaints and prevents them from carrying any weight, if she voices them at all. It is only in writing that she finds the freedom to speak.

Ovid writes Hero as a very different heroine with very different problems.⁶ A priestess of Venus separated from Leander, her lover from Abydos, by a stormy sea, Hero waits anxiously for his return to her, while her state of mind mimics the sea in its turbulence. In her letter, she waxes philosophical on the fundamental differences between men and women:

urimur igne pari, sed sum tibi viribus impar:
fortius ingenium suspicor esse viris.
ut corpus, teneris ita mens infirma puellis—
deficiam, parvi temporis adde moram!

Her. XIX. 5-8

We burn with an equal fire, but I am not equal to you in strength; I suppose the nature of men is stronger. Like the body, so the mind is weak for tender girls—I could die, add a delay of a short time.

Here, within the first ten lines of her letter, Hero has set up the crux of her entire complaint: she believes women are weaker than men physically and mentally. Thus, she

⁶ As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, I have elected not to concern myself with the question of authenticity of the double letters (Her. 16-21). My purpose is to show the effect of female personas being authored by a man. The identity of that author does not so much affect that. Since it is safe to say that a published admirer of Ovid was more than likely male, my discussion remains the same. See Martin Pulbrook, "The Original Published Form of Ovid's *Heroides*," *Hermathena*, no. 122 (Summer 1977): 29-45; Valerie A. Tracy, "The Authenticity of *Heroides* 16-21," *The Classical Journal* 66, no. 4 (April- May 1971): 328-330.

is far less capable of dealing with separation from Leander than Leander from her. Hero dwells on the frailty of women for the rest of the letter. Immediately after she states her belief about the inferiority of women, she discusses the discrepancies between the activities of men and women:

Vos modo venando, modo rus geniale colendo
ponitis in varia tempora longa mora.
aut fora vos retinent aut unctae dona¹ palaestrae,
flectitis aut freno colla sequacis equi;
nunc volucrem laqueo, nunc piscem ducitis hamo;
diluitur posito serior hora mero.
his mihi summotae, vel si minus acriter urar,
quod faciam, superest praeter amare nihil.

Her. XIX. 9-16

You, now by hunting, now by tilling the genial country, you place long hours in various delays. Either the markets retain you or the gifts of the oily wrestling gym, or you bend the neck of a responsive horse with a bit; now you lead the bird with a snare, now the fish with a hook; the later hour is diluted with placed wine. For me who is barred from these, even if I would be burned less bitterly, what could I do, nothing remains except loving.

While Leander can fill his time with the activities in which he as a man is expected to participate, Hero can only wait. Not only do these hobbies serve as a distraction from grief, but also a potential hindrance to his speedy return to Hero. She on the other hand can do nothing other than love and weave, which she refers to later as the “feminine art” (*feminea... arte*, 38), which she only uses to keep herself awake hoping Leander will follow the lights she places out as signals every night to guide his path to her. She has no distraction, because her ‘feminine weakness’ hinders her from finding one. Even if it would be beneficial for her, she could not take advantage of such distraction, as the placement of *vel si* immediately after the caesura emphasizes (15). On the other side of the caesura, *summotae* (15) not only indicates the cultural blockage that obstructs her way toward improvement, it also forms a physical block between her (*mihi*) and the potential

betterment that distraction could provide (introduced by *vel si*), making the caesura into her proverbial jail cell of cultural limitations.

Furthermore, she recalls her thoughts on her frailty as the letter comes to a close. Her attitude toward attempting to cross the sea herself is similar to her attitude toward distracting pass-times; if she could, she would, but she can't:

ire libet medias ipsi mihi saepe per undas,
sed solet hoc maribus tutius esse fretum.
nam cur hac vectis Phrixo Phrixique sorore
sola dedit vastis femina nomen aquis?

Her. XIX. 161-4

It is often pleasing to me to go through the middle of the waves myself, but this sea is accustomed to be safer for men. For why, with Phrixus and Phrixus' sister having been carried by this sea, did the woman alone give her name to the vast waters?

Just as before, her self-diagnosed inferiority prevents her from doing what might help her. Although she does not have the physical strength to withstand the stormy seas, Leander should be able to, since this sea in particular is accustomed to being safer for men. This relationship is also seen in her word choice. When reading through the line, it is unclear whether *maribus* (162) is the dative plural of sea (*mare, maris*) or man (*mas, maris*) until the very last word of that line makes it clear. This verbal confusion justifies her claim on a linguistic level, making it seem almost natural that the sea be safer for a man. She then qualifies this claim with myth. Phrixus' sister was Helle, who fell off the golden ram that was carrying her and her brother across the sea, giving her name to those waters thereafter called the Hellespont.⁷ By employing mythology to qualify her claim,

⁷ There are two versions of this story. Most commonly, the two were swimming across the sea and she drowned from exhaustion. The other version has the ram with the Golden Fleece fly them across the sea. I drew my translation from the latter because Leander in his letter to Hero references the ram (Her. XVIII. 143-146), and because

she legitimizes her letter, and her opinion on the frailty of women. She appears to believe genuinely that women are inferior, an idea that has been engrained in her by her culture, and an idea with which she is so comfortable that she would argue for her status as lesser-than.

With the letter to Sappho, Ovid does something completely different from any of the other letters of the *Heroides*. Not only was she a real woman, she was a poet who influenced Ovid.⁸ Because she wrote in lyric rather than elegiac meter, Ovid has to explain her sudden shift to elegy:

Ecquid, ut adspecta est studiosae littera dextrae,
Protinus est oculis cognita nostra tuis—
an, nisi legisses auctoris nomina Sapphus,
hoc breve nescires unde movetur opus?
Forsitan et quare mea sint alterna requires
carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis.
flendus amor meus est—elegiae² flebile carmen;
non facit ad lacrimas barbitos ulla meas.
Uror, ut indomitis ignem exercentibus Euris
fertilis accensis messibus ardet ager.

Her. XV. 1-10

When the letters of my eager right hand were looked upon, were our letters recognized immediately by your eyes—or, unless you had read the name of the author, Sappho, would you not know from where this brief work was moved? Perhaps also you ask why my songs are alternating, since I am more suited to the lyric modes. My love must be wept—the doleful song of elegy; no lyre is made for my tears. I burn, as the fertile field burns with harvests on fire, with untamed east winds cultivating the flame.

vectis being passive indicates the agency of something else doing the carrying, although I suppose the sea could be carrying them. See OCD s.v. Helle.

⁸ For an interesting discussion of the Ovid's intentional intertwining of himself with Sappho, see Vicky Rimell, "Epistolary Fictions: Authorial Identity in *Heroides* 15," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, no. 45 (1999): 109-135.

Although she suddenly writes in a meter unaccustomed to her, this new meter suits her state better. According to Howard Jacobson, the change in genre, and recognition of that change, show “how the quality and turns of her life are defined in accord with the categories of her art” (*Ovid’s Heroides* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974], 288). The image of the burning field references her previous meter, and even her own style. In one of Sappho’s poems, she appears burning with passion (λέπτον δ’ αὐτίκα χρῶ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν, 31.9-10) and is herself greener than grass (χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας ἔμμι, 31.14-15). In her letter, however the fire is more destructive, ruining the harvest rather than making the author herself become new. She is no longer talking about the fiery passion of a forbidden love with a nearby woman, but the painful, wild burning of the one that got away. The corruption of the image with such destructive language therefore indicates the insufficiency of lyric for her current purpose.

Beyond being in an unexpected meter, this letter is addressed to an unexpected gender. Immediately following her explanation for writing in elegiacs, she addresses Phaon, whose masculinity is confirmed when she says, “Wicked one, that which belonged to many women, you alone have” (*inprobe, multarum quod fuit, unus habes*, 20). This is a Sappho with whom her ancient audience is unfamiliar. When one reads the name *Sapphus* (3), one expects to hear about a newfound lady love for whom she has fallen hard. Her usual attraction to women known through her own poems made Sappho a fairly masculine figure, as both authorship and attraction to women were traditionally male roles. This Sappho who shifted back towards femininity (or the norms ascribed to femininity) is surprising to the reader.

Moreover, as this now somewhat feminine Sappho begins a letter unprecedented for her in many ways, she points out aspects of her that are not feminine, namely her lack of physical beauty. She openly admits to it, and uses her poetic abilities to compensate:

si mihi difficilis formam natura negavit,
ingenio formae damna repende meo.
sim brevis, at nomen, quod terras inpleat omnes,
est mihi; mensuram nominis ipsa fero.

31-34

If nature, difficult to me, denied me form, balance my loss of beauty against my genius. I may be short, but a name which fills all lands is mine; I myself bear the measure of the name.

She clings to her poetic talent and the reputation that has fashioned her identity. This again complicates her femininity. If she grounds her identity in her authorial skill and not her physical beauty, as she does with the repetition of *nomen* (33-34), she is once again subverting expectations. The pride she bears for her reputation is evident from the imperative (*repende*, 32) by which she claims her reputation is of equal or perhaps even greater value than physical beauty. The emphasis on the word *nomen* immediately before the caesura in line 33 and immediately after in 34 (*nominis*) carries a prideful tone. She doesn't have to be beautiful when she can woo men and women with her voice alone.

So far in their letters, Penelope, Hero, and Sappho have all expressed areas of weakness or lack of agency in their letters. Penelope experiences a loneliness which cripples her ability to speak her mind. Hero is convinced of her inferiority to men which her culture has taught her. Sappho admits a lack of physical attractiveness and clings to her poetic talent to compensate, even as she enters into a poem of new meter addressed to a lover of unexpected gender. With these examples of weakness and agency comes anxiety over various aspects of their lives, a theme which appears in each of their letters.

First, Penelope fears what Ulysses faces. The unknown origin of whatever is threatening her marriage forces her into a state of persistent worry. When she addresses the potential of a woman being the cause for his delay, her anxiety appears:

quid timeam, ignoro—timeo tamen omnia demens,
et patet in curas area lata meas.
quaecumque aequor habet, quaecumque pericula tellus,
tam longae causas suspicor esse morae.
haec ego dum stulte metuo, quae vestra libido est,
esse peregrino captus amore potes.
forsitan et narres, quam sit tibi rustica coniunx,
quae tantum lanas non sinat esse rudes.
fallar, et hoc crimen tenues vanescat in auras,
neve, revertendi liber, abesse velis!

Her. I. 71-80

What I fear, I do not know—nevertheless out of my mind I fear everything, and the site lies open wide for my cares. Whatever danger water has, whatever danger land has, I suspect to be the causes of your so long delay. While I, foolish, fear these things, you could be captured by a foreign love, which is your lust. Perhaps you even tell how rustic a wife there is for you, who allows only the wool not to be wild. May I be deceived, and may this crime face into the soft breezes, and may you not want to be absent, free to return!

Penelope's fear is of an unknown origin. The uncertainty doubles her fear, a duality which the language in line 71 mimics through *ignoro* being surrounded by forms of *timeo* on either side. Both uses of *timeo* are metrically hidden, the first of which elides into *ignoro*, physically obscuring the fear. The second appears immediately following the caesura and the completely spondaic *ignoro*, the metrical weight of which makes the two shorts of *timeo* sound small and almost hidden. *Stulte* (75) introduces her anxiety regarding herself. Appearing immediately before the caesura, it emphasizes her worries concerning appearances toward her subjects, as well as her husband. She does not want to appear dim or naïve for waiting for her husband who turned out to be unfaithful. This continues into the comparison of the “foreign love” to the “rustic wife”

(*peregrino...amore*, 76; *rustica coniunx*, 77) *Rustica*, along with meaning simple or plain, is commonly used in elegy to refer to someone who is naïve. She, a woman capable of writing so eloquently and of holding off the suitors through schemes for years, does not want to appear ignorant for obeying a vow. She also does not want to appear simple in the eyes of her husband in comparison to the exotic love he could find elsewhere. She ends this explanation of anxiety with a plea to be deceived in her worry. She wants to be wrong, and for her husband to return to her willingly.⁹

Even in the last lines of her letter, her anxiety over his return is evident. While she does want him to return, she worries he will not like what he sees when he returns, especially when compared to the “foreign loves” she fears cause his delay:

Certe ego, quae fueram te discedente puella,
protinus ut venias, facta videbor anus.

Her. I. 115-16

At least I, who was a girl when you left, even if you come straightaway, I will seem to have become an old woman.

The concerns over her physical appearance and age are evident. The twenty years between Ulysses’ departure and longed for arrival have left her uncertain about his love for her, or even his attraction to her. In comparison to how he remembers her, she is an entirely different woman. The positions of *puella* and *anus* at the end of their respective lines indicate this change. The appearance of *puella* above *anus* in the written lines creates a visual hierarchy as well. The choice to end the poem with this comparison shows her great concern over the matter.

⁹ For an interesting explanation of this wish as an example of the differences between male and female writing according to Ovid, see Joseph Farrell, “Reading and Writing the *Heroides*” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998): 307-338.

Other than the concern over the reason for Leander's delay (Her. XIX. 9-16), Hero's primary anxiety comes from her own self-devaluation. As was typical of Roman women, Ovid's Hero grounds her identity in her patronage.¹⁰ She expresses her worry that she will be deemed insufficient based on her background:

Interdum metuo, patria ne laedar et impar
dicar Abydeno Thressa puella toro.

Her. XIX. 99-100

Meanwhile I fear, lest I be wounded by my fatherland and I, a Thracian girl, am
said to be unequal for an Abydenian bed.

Because a woman's identity was tied to her family, her eligibility and desirability as a bride would have been defined by her nationality and her ancestry. As a priestess of Aphrodite and a girl from Thrace, she does not know whether she is worthy of Leander, her lover from an exotic land across the sea. While his position may have been no better than that of her family, she nevertheless worries whether she is enough, as her lineage is all that matters. Being from a different place, she worries whether she would be accepted, indicating the exotic appeal of a foreign man. The separation between the two lands is shown in the words, appearing on opposite sides of the caesura of the pentameter line (100), forcing a break between the names of the countries. Hero's belief in the inferiority of women is here extended to their appeal. No matter their love for each other or her value as a person, her identity is defined by her nationality and ancestry, yet again putting something out of female control.

¹⁰ For more on Ovid's framing of these women and their lives within a Rome-like framework, see Lucille Haley, "The Feminine Complex in the *Heroides*," *The Classical Journal* 20, no. 1 (Oct. 1924): 15-25; Maurice P. Cunningham, "The Novelty of Ovid's *Heroides*," *Classical Philology* 44, no. 2 (Apr., 1949): 100-106.

In a similar vein, Sappho is also anxious about her worth in the eyes of her lover. As stated above, Sappho admits to lacking in physical beauty, relying heavily on her poetic talent to woo lovers. Since her poetry and voice is what attracted Phaon in the first place, and that did not change before he left, she wonders what changed, why she was no longer enough for him. This concern appears repeatedly throughout her letter, resulting in physical symptoms that make her already subpar appearance even worse (73-78).

As her letter progresses from a prideful tone to one of sadness and grief, her anxiety shifts. Because she was abandoned without warning and without reason, she fears being forgotten:

Nil de te mecum est nisi tantum iniuria; nec tu,
admoneat quod te, pignus, amantis, habes.

101-102

There is nothing with me from you except only injustice; nor do you have a symbol of your lover, which might remind you of your lover.

For someone who places their identity in their authorial abilities, being forgotten is probably the worst outcome imaginable. She immortalizes her lovers and their love story in poetry. It would be an insult to her and her talent to be forgotten by the lovers who make up the material of her work that gave her a world-renowned name. This letter which she sends him, then, will be the only thing he receives from her. Just as she won him with her words, she hopes now at least to be remembered by her words, if not win him back through them.

Each of these letters contains references to sexuality and passion. The repression of such feelings, which resulted from their abandonment by their lovers, expresses itself in varying forms. At the outset of her letter, Penelope expresses her dislike of her cold bed, wishing that she would never have been put in this position in the first place:

o utinam tum, cum Lacedaemona classe petebat,
obrutus insanis esset adulter aquis!
non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto,
nec quererer tardos ire relictas dies;
nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem
lassaret viduas pendula tela manus.

Her. I. 5-10

Oh how I wish then, when he was seeking Sparta in his ship, the adulterer had been crushed by insane waters! I would not have lain cold in a deserted bed, I, abandoned, would not complain that days go slowly; nor would the hanging warp tire widowed hands for me seeking to deceive the long night.

Here, Penelope directly addresses her empty bed. As Alden Smith puts it, “Penelope here refers rather forth rightly to her suppressed sexuality in spite of the fact that she was a proverbial symbol of chastity in the ancient world (as can also be inferred from line 10)” (Fantasy, Myth, and Love Letters, 261). As noted above, Penelope had previously claimed that her chastity brought the Greeks success at Troy (1-10). She now reveals that chastity as somewhat problematic, or at least not always desirable, thereby presenting the famously faithful Penelope as possessing a tumultuous mix of emotions. On one hand, her husband won the war and she attributes the success of him and her people to her virtue, making her a hero. On the other, she is alone, and has been for twenty years. The back and forth between regret and pride over her virtue in her letter shows her own confusion as to whether this was all worth it. The reference to her bed shows yet another aspect to the regrettable effect of being alone, the nonfulfillment of companionship and of sexual desire. The adjectives that describe Penelope, *frigida* and *relicta* (7 and 8), both occur as the penultimate word of their respective lines, connecting the two and drawing attention to the effects of abandonment on her. Both words emphasize the physical consequences of Ulysses’ absence. Penelope is physically affected by his absence by

necessarily having to lay cold and alone in her bed, and in a broader sense she is left behind everywhere else as well, leaving her without even the solace of the marriage bed.

These effects go so far as to make her regret her vows and her virtue that made her legendary (I. 67-70). As discussed above, she suggests that if she had not been so virtuous, she at least would know the whereabouts of her husband. Since she remained true, she has not been able to act on any feeling for a man since her husband left for war twenty years ago. She forces her own desires away in order to follow the vow she made. While she does not directly acknowledge that this stifled desire is the reason for the regret of her vow, it is at least a factor, when combined with the complaint about her deserted bed.

Contrary to Penelope's references to sexuality, Hero's desires manifest themselves dramatically. In a dream, she is able to force an unwilling Leander to be with her and reenact their previous meeting, at least as long as the night lasts:

forsitan invitus mecum tamen, inprobe, dormis,
et, quamquam non vis ipse venire, venis.
nam modo te videor prope iam spectare natantem,
bracchia nunc umeris umida ferre meis,
nunc dare, quae soleo, madidis velamina membris,
pectora nunc nostro iuncta¹ fovere sinu
multaque praeterea linguae reticenda modestae,
quae fecisse iuvat, facta referre pudet.
me miseram! brevis est haec et non vera voluptas;
nam tu cum somno semper abire soles.

Her. XIX. 57-66

Perhaps, wicked one, you, unwilling, will nevertheless sleep with me and, although you yourself do not want to come, you will come. For now I seem to see you already swimming, now you seem to bear wet arms to my shoulders, now to give clothing to your dripping limbs, which I am accustomed, now to warm your joined chest in my embrace and many things besides which ought to be left unsaid by a modest tongue, deeds which it pleases to have done, deeds which are a shame to repeat. Miserable me! These pleasures are brief and not true; for you always are accustomed to go with sleep.

For a woman who insists that she is weaker, she exhibits a shocking amount of force in the manifestation of her suppressed desires. She forces an unwilling Leander to stay with her (*invitus*, 57) whether he wants to or not. She is suddenly put in a position of violent power over a helpless dream-Leander. Her sexual desires spring forth violently after being suppressed during Leander's absence. In her sexual frustration, she is able to exert force over a false Leander in a way unlike anything she thinks she can do while awake.

In this dream, she describes the events of their previous escapade, which she relives in her sleep. She describes the events leading up to their sexual rendezvous, moving from him approaching, to them embracing, to clothing his naked limbs, to further embracing. She then abruptly avoids physical description and switches to more modest referential language, only suggesting what occurred without narrating it. She calls their deeds those "which ought to be left unsaid by a modest tongue, deeds which it pleases to have done" (64).¹¹ She makes an attempt to maintain modesty, yet she does not hide that the deed occurred, as this letter is addressed to the other party. The final line reminds the reader that these deeds are occurring in a dream, thereby minimizing the shamefulness of the deed by reinforcing its non-existence. Hero, then, admits to not being pure, but tries to retain her dignity by cutting off her description before her sin is fully committed.

Sappho's sexuality appears more brazenly than either of the other two. She recounts two different encounters with Phaon. In the first she proudly describes in fairly

¹¹ Notice the difference from Sulpicia's "love which the rumor to have hidden it would be more shameful for me than to have revealed it to someone"(3.13). Hero still attempts to maintain some level of modesty which contrasts to Sulpicia's rejection of socially expected chastity.

explicit detail one encounter with her lover, going so far as to describe the movement, the speech, and the exhaustion that followed:

At mea cum legerem, sat iam¹ formosa videbar;
unam iurabas usque decere loqui.
cantabam, memini—meminerunt omnia amantes—
oscula cantanti tu mihi rapta dabas.
haec quoque laudabas, omnique a parte placebam—
sed tum praecipue, cum fit amoris opus.
tunc te plus solito lascivia nostra iuvabat,
crebraque mobilitas aptaque verba ioco,
et quod, ubi amborum fuerat confusa voluptas,
plurimus in lasso corpore languor erat.

XV. 41-50

But when I was reading mine, I already seemed beautiful enough; you were swearing that I alone should always speak. I was singing, I remember—lovers remember everything—you were giving seized kisses to me singing. You were also praising these, and I was pleasing from every part—but then especially, when it was the work of love. Then our playfulness was delighting you more than usual, both quick movement and words appropriate for joke, and that, when the joys of both had mixed together, the feebleness was intense in tired body.

Just as she is proud of her name, she is also proud of her sexual exploits at the beginning of her letter. She clearly revels in having aroused Phaon with her voice, repeatedly referencing her singing and speaking (*loqui*, 42; *cantabam*, 43; *cantanti*, 44). When considered alongside her anxiety over her appearance (31-34), the repetition of these words emphasizes the importance of her voice and her poetry in attracting Phaon. The use of *sat* in the middle of the line (41) gives the following exposition of their relationship a tone of rebuke, which is reinforced by the repetition of words referencing her poetic talent, as if she is asking “if then why not now?”

The explicit description of the introduction and conclusion of their sexual encounter is striking. While Penelope only referenced her stifled desire for her absent husband (I. 7), and Hero simply nods to it and calls the actions that followed “a shame to

repeat” (XIX. 64), Sappho describes her encounters with Phaon overtly. She depicts the movement and the words spoken, as well as the deep-seated exhaustion that resulted.¹² This reinforces the prideful tone of the beginning of her letter. As a woman notorious for openly shunning norms in her poetry regarding appropriate work for women and regarding sexuality, her attitude toward explaining the attractive power of her own voice is no different. She takes pride in having done wrong in the eyes of society, just as she takes pride in the voice that gave her to opportunity to do wrong.

However, as mentioned above, her attitude shifts as the letter progresses. She turns from a tone of hurt pride to desperate sadness. With this sadness comes shame. When Phaon appears in her dreams, her shame and longing is apparent:

Tu mihi cura, Phaon; te somnia nostra reducant—
Somnia formoso candidiora die.
Illic te invenio, quamvis regionibus absis;
sed non longa satis gaudia somnus habet.
saepe tuos nostra cervice onerare lacertos,
saepe tuae videor supposuisse meos;
oscula cognosco, quae tu committere lingua
aptaque consueras accipere, apta dare.
blandior interdum verisque simillima verba
eloquor, et vigilant sensibus ora meis.
ulteriora pudet narrare, sed omnia fiunt,
et iuvat, et siccae¹³ non licet esse mihi.

¹² It is interesting to note that the meter of 47-50 reflects the movement she speaks of, with 47 switching between a spondee and dactyl twice before falling into a fully dactylic line, save for the pentameter-required extra half feet, giving the line an ebb and flow or rise and fall feel that adds to the *mobilitas* described in the line. 49 has two spondees in the second and third feet, giving a climax to the line and the episode described, followed by the slower dactylic end once the “joys have been mixed” (*fuerat confusa voluptas*). The next has a similarly spondaic foot in the second position that provides a final rise, before settling into the *languor* which they are now engulfed in.

¹³ Other manuscripts have *sine te*, which translates easier. However, the Loeb refers to the Codex Francofurtanus as “the best authority on XV.” See Grant Showerman,

You are a care to me, Phaon; my dreams call you back—dreams brighter than a beautiful day. I find you there, although you are absent from these regions; but not long enough are the joys sleep has. Often I seem to burden your arms with my neck, often I seem to place my arms under your neck; the kisses that you were accustomed to entrust with your tongue, I recognize, ready to receive them, ready to give in return. Meanwhile I am flattered and I utter words resembling the truth, and my mouth watches for my sense. It is shameful to tell further, but everything happens, and it is pleasing, and it is not allowed for me to be without tears.

Compared to her first mention of sex in lines 41-50, she now seems more modest and less bold. She calls the rest of her joys “shameful to tell further” (*ulteriora pudet narrare*, 133) although in her previous account she reveled in describing the details, which showed the extent of the power of her voice. Her poetic abilities still remain potent, however. She flatters (*blandior*, 131), and utters words resembling the truth (*verisque simillima verba eloquor*, 131-2). Her power is still more present than Phoen's, this still places her in the masculine role of *amator*. Nevertheless, she stops short of describing the full dream, choosing to use referential language like Hero in her account of her dream (XIX. 19). She is not nearly as proud of her exploits this time around, as evident in her premature ending. The differences in these two accounts of sexual encounters serve as a clear example of the decline of Sappho's mental health throughout the letter. The closer she moves to her considered suicide, the deeper into despair she falls.

Women, including those in the *Heroides*, were not given a voice to discuss weakness or lack of agency, anxiety, and sexuality in their daily loves. It is only in authorship that they find the privacy and power to do this. Authorship provides each of them something different. Penelope finds the freedom she needs to use her voice, a

trans., *Ovid: Heroides, Amores*, LCL 41, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1914), page 190, note 1.

freedom that she cannot find at home, where she is entirely alone.¹⁴ Authorship is her only companion in a time when she has no place to ground her identity. Her husband is gone, and her people and household have turned against her. She cannot claim her role as wife, as author of Achaean success, even as mourner for her husband, because she has lost all companionship in these realms, the companionship required for her to express complaints. Instead, she finds a companionship in writing that allows her to speak her mind.

For Hero, authorship gives her power which she does not have otherwise. Due to the biases of her culture, she has been taught to think of herself as inferior to men. When she writes, she forces herself into the role of elegist, a role which clashes with the frailty she believes she has. She takes on the attributes of an *amator* as she longs for her far off lover, while simultaneously repeating the idea that she is weak and inferior. By presenting herself as not having the strength to go on, she adopts the voice of an elegiac poet who both wastes away from love while playing the *exclusus amator* (as she tries to do at her loom, anxiously asking her nurse why he hasn't come (39-55)) and who fantasizes and sexualizes the weak female, as she does in her dreams. By simultaneously painting herself as weak and writing about her weakness, she is both the fantasizer of the weak female and the object of that fantasy, thus playing both the author and subject of elegy.¹⁵

This idea is underscored in her acknowledgement of the differences in the activities permissible for her and Leander. The only activity besides weaving which she is able to partake in is to love, much like the elegist who recuses himself from military duty, from Roman male-appropriate activities like hunting, fishing, wrestling, and horseracing,

¹⁴ See Farrell, "Reading and Writing," 1998.

¹⁵ Once again, note the similarity to Sulpicia.

and from farming. However, unlike the elegist, she has no choice (*quid faciam*, 16). Hero, here, is even prevented from the only elegiac-author-appropriate activity she lists: drinking excess wine without supervision. She, as a writer of the epistolary elegy, cannot act exactly as one is expected to in that role. Instead of the drunken *amator* composing his return to his longing love, she is the *amatrix*, longing for the return of her potentially drunken love.

She shows her conflict as weak female/elegist by taking advantage of some typical elegiac motifs. The forceful language used to describe her dream mimics the explicitness to which an elegist would describe such an encounter, as well as the force used in many such accounts.¹⁶ She also uses myth to legitimize her claim that women are truly weaker, another tool of the elegist to fortify himself as an author.¹⁷ Finally, she utilizes the theme of *militia amoris*:

in tua castra redi, socii desertor amoris;
ponuntur medio cur mea membra toro?

Her. XIX. 157-160

Return to your camp, deserter of your ally love; why are my limbs placed in the middle of my bed?

She charges Leander with desertion of his position, using *castra* and *socii* to reference this elegiac trope (157). She takes on a rebuking tone in the next line, with a rhetorical question pointing out his wrongdoing, a tone not uncommon for the *domina* of an elegist.¹⁸ In the utilization of these tools, the confused role of weak female elegist is made

¹⁶ Cf. Prop. 2.15; Ovid *Am.* 1.5; Tib. 1.4; etc.

¹⁷ Cf. Prop. 1.3, 2.5, 2.6; Ovid *Am.* 1.1, 2.5, 2.8; etc.

¹⁸ Cf. Propertius' Cynthia, especially 2.5; Ovid's Lesbia, especially *Am.* 2.7.

clear, with these examples of power and poetic talent contrasting starkly against her belief in the inferiority and weakness of women which she references time and again.

Yet again, Sappho's case is more complicated. As mentioned previously, Sappho is an author. Therefore, authorship cannot do for Sappho what it does for Penelope and Hero. Instead of showing what authorship can provide for a woman, Sappho's letter shows what happens to a female author when her ability to write is taken away. From the very beginning of this letter, her theme was change. She changed meters, gender preference, and emotions. Now, another change has come in the form of the removal of her ability to write:

nunc vellem facunda forem! dolor artibus obstat,
ingeniumque meis substitit omne malis.
non mihi respondent veteres in carmina vires;
pectra dolore iacent muta, dolore lyra.
Lesbides aequoreae, nupturaque nuptaque proles,
Lesbides, Aeolia nomina dicta lyra,
Lesbides, infamem quae me fecistis amatae,²
desinite ad citharas turba venire mea!
abstulit omne Phaon, quod vobis ante placebat,
me miseram, dixi quam modo paene "meus!"
efficite ut redeat; vates quoque vestra redibit.
ingenio vires ille dat, ille rapit.

XV. 195-206

I wish that I would be eloquent now! Grief hinders arts, and all genius is stopped by my ills. Strengths of old do not respond to me in song; the silent plectrum lies still in grief, the lyre in grief. Daughters of Lesbos by the sea, offspring both about to be married and married, daughters of Lesbos, names spoken by the Aeolian lyre, daughters of Lesbos, you lovers who have made me notorious, cease, my crowd, to come to the citharas! Phaon took away everything, which was pleasing to you before, miserable me, how I just now almost said "my!" Make it that he returns; your poet will also return. He gives strength to my genius, he takes it away.

In this letter, she claims that her grief hinders her art and prevents her from writing. The wooing of Phaon gave her power to use her authorial abilities for new purposes, power

which he stripped away and replace with pain which hinders beyond the lack of material caused by his absence. Her songs which formerly praised the names of the *Lesbides* which begin lines 199-201 are left behind and cannot be used again, as she cannot use her skill without the strength that Phaon provided (206). Her return to song is dependent on his return to her (205). Grief's disfiguring effect on her authorial abilities takes physical form when her tears obscure her writing with smears (*adspice, quam sit in hoc multa litura loco!*, 98). This letter, which is her last attempt to be remembered by the one by whom she wants to be remembered most, is obscured by his very departure, as that took away the freedom she previously found in writing. His abandonment prevented any chance of efficacy of her words on him or anyone from then on.

Furthermore, this letter is her last piece of authorship. She has all but given up trying to gain back the talent Phaon stole from her and has decided to kill herself. As she sends this letter out as her final poem and last hope of being remembered by Phaon, she closes the poem with a request for a response:

sive iuvat longe fugisse Pelasgida Sappho—
 non tamen invenies, cur ego digna fugi —
 hoc saltem miserae crudelis epistula dicat,
 220ut mihi Leucadiae fata petantur aquae!

XV. 217-220

Or if it is pleasing to flee far from Pelasgian Sappho—You will not find, however, why I am worthy to be shunned—At least let a cruel letter tell miserable me, so that fate might seek Leucadian waters for me!

The pride seen earlier flares up again briefly amidst her searching for confirmation of her planned suicide. Her aside indicates how hurt her pride still is, claiming he will not find a fault such that she deserves to be deserted (218). She then requests that he respond, at least to seal her fate and condemn her to the release of suicide. She, the famous author,

asks for a piece of authorship from the thief of her abilities that would officially revoke her status as author forever. Interestingly, the last three lines of the poem contain an acrostic at the end of the lines, I T E (218-220). The command “Go!” begins just as she says there is no reason for him to leave her. She ends the letter in pain, in a grief filled command for him to go and a request for him to confirm his abandonment, to confirm her planned suicide. The reader can hear the tears which smeared the writing in 97-98, can see the beaten breast and wild hair that she described in 113-116. The finality of the acrostic and the promise to kill herself add to the hopeless tone. Thus, the notorious poet condemns herself to die in a poetic flourish at the end of her final work, devastated by not only the loss of her lover, but the loss of her only constant companion, authorship.

Simply put, authorship means freedom to these women. Penelope finds the space she needs to express her worry and frustration over her circumstances, even allowing herself to express her repressed sexual desires. Hero, who disqualifies herself from autonomy by insisting on the inferiority of women, gains astonishing power that can turn violent when given the space to do so, as it does in the account of her dream. Conversely, Sappho shows the effects of the loss of authorship and the despair which follows, while also referencing the power and freedom it gave her before it was taken away. She does this through discussing the ability to ground her identity in her skill rather than her appearance, resulting in a reputation beyond measure. Each letter discusses restrictions on the agency of women, sexuality, and anxiety. Through these, they show how donning of the elegist persona obscures female identity. Authorship has the effect of making Penelope, legendary for chastity and faithfulness, into a wife unwillingly chaste and full of regret for a vow she wishes she never made. For Hero, it puts her on a seesaw of

strength and weakness, of masculinity and femininity, making her emotions and tone change like the waves whipped by the wind she rebukes. For the only real woman of the group who also happens to be an author, Sappho's letter complicates her as a figure. Authorship, which gave the historical Sappho so much freedom and renown, leads to her demise when it is taken away.

For all three of the women discussed, their identities are obscured by authorship. However, they are further obscured by being authored by a man. Ovid's writing has the effect of doing physically what he shows authorship does to their identity figuratively. The confusion that authorship provides to the female identity is underscored by the male voice behind all of it. The fact of Ovid's authorship complicates the female voice that appears to have been given a platform in writing, yet that platform is only provided in the donning of that female persona by the man who provides the voice. It is only through a man donning a female persona, which in turn dons a masculine persona of elegist, that these female voices are heard. The layers of obscurity necessary for the female voice to come forth prevents that voice from coming forth as authentically female.

That being said, Ovid does show the struggle these women dealt with in being separated from their lovers, combining the role of *amator* and the *puella* in a way that resembles the conflict found in the actual woman-authored poetry of Sulpicia. In Sulpicia, the combination of the masculine role of author combined with her aristocratic status resulted in a poetic persona that balanced the line between *amator* and *puella*, author and material. In taking ownership of her own body, she also prostituted it by writing it down and opening it up to the audience of her work, commandeering the elegist's gaze to look at herself. Ovid in his *Heroides* embodies this complicated nature

of female authorship in a Roman society, especially the authorship of a genre coded to be written by a man. The question of genre can especially be seen in his portrayal of Sappho, who begins a poem by saying she might be unrecognizable and repeatedly saying that she can no longer write poetry because her love is gone. The switch to elegy has prevented her from writing further or even going back to her previously used meter. Ovid provides a platform for the female voice to shine, while also highlighting the problems of female authorship by himself donning their personas, doing what was necessary to give them a voice, and using those voices to show the complicated nature of female authorship.

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