

2013

# Looking for Reality in Latin Love Elegy

Brett C. Evans

*College of William and Mary*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses>

---

## Recommended Citation

Evans, Brett C., "Looking for Reality in Latin Love Elegy" (2013). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 634.  
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/634>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

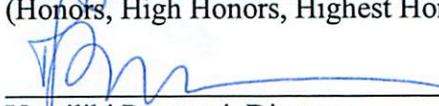
Looking for Reality in Latin Love Elegy

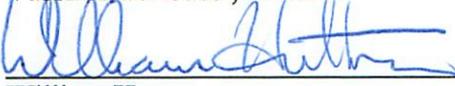
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies from  
The College of William and Mary

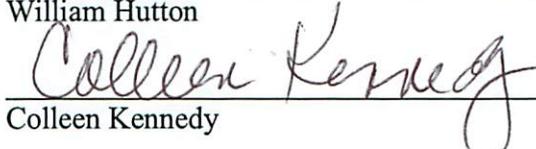
by

Brett Charles Evans

Accepted for Highest Honors  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

  
Vassiliki Panoussi, Director

  
William Hutton

  
Colleen Kennedy

Williamsburg, VA  
April 30, 2013

Looking for Reality in Latin Love Elegy

by

Brett Evans, Department of Classical Studies

Professor Vassiliki Panoussi, Advisor

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	x
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Interpreting the Dream in Propertius 2.26a	7
Chapter 2: Says Who? Attributing the Voice in Sulpicia 3.13	40
Conclusion	73
Bibliography	77

## Acknowledgements

It is my great pleasure to thank my advisor, Professor Lily Panoussi, for supporting and encouraging me from our first meeting years ago to the completion of this thesis. She has sharpened my writing, all with her characteristic kindness. I feel ready to embark upon my academic and professional career thanks to her guidance. I want to thank Professors Bill Hutton and Georgia Irby for bringing the sounds of Greek and Latin to life in the courses we have had together. I am also happy to thank Professor Erika Nesholm, who first introduced me to Classics and taught me Latin. Were it not for her seminar and her encouragement to continue academic work outside of the classroom, I would not have realized how much the past can teach us about our own contemporary lives.

Outside of Classics, my thanks go to Lisa Grimes for her mentoring me since my first semester at William and Mary. Her friendship and great conversation have directed me into literary theory and more books than I could have imagined. She has graciously listened to many of my ideas and helped me to refine them. I am grateful also to Professor Colleen Kennedy for helping me think about metafiction, introducing me to Blanchot and leading me back to Sylvia Plath. Authors of fiction often do write the best theory.

Finally, I want to thank my parents, who have supported me throughout my college career. Mom and Dad, you have taught me to ask questions of everything, to live humbly, and to love generously. Your love has made everything possible for me. I dedicate this work to you

## Introduction

The genre of Latin love elegy flourished for less than 100 years and was composed mostly in the first century BC. The genre's narrative riffs on this theme: a speaker, usually male, confesses his love for his beloved, usually female, and discloses all of those feelings – hate, jealousy, sorrow, and elation – that attend his passion. This genre developed largely as Augustus took power in Rome after the decisive battle of Actium in 31 BC. As emperor, Augustus enacted legislation for the purpose of moral reform among the elite. In 17 BC, he passed a law (*lex Iulia*) that made adultery punishable by exile; fathers could murder their adulterous daughters and their partners; husbands could murder their cheating wives. Even Augustus himself banished his daughter and granddaughter under this law.

Latin love elegy openly defies these cultural proscriptions. In the poems of Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid, men talk openly about their love lives with their mistresses, who are mostly prostitutes, married women, or women whom the speaker would not marry. Women in turn publicly flaunt their affairs with men. In the 1970s, scholars with an interest in feminist criticism identified a 'counter-cultural feminism'<sup>1</sup> present in Rome to which these liberated poet-lovers bear witness. For example, a poem which portrays a girl as mistress and the poet as her slave must be read as evidence of real women who were sexually free and who defied Augustus's conservative social policies. According to this view, the private elegiac relationship defies the public social agenda.

More recently, scholarly work on Latin elegy has identified the genre's trademark devices of realism and metapoetics resulting in a reconsideration of previous arguments, namely that elegy reveals the reality of Roman love lives and gender relations. Viewed in this light,

---

<sup>1</sup> The seminal article in this vein of criticism is Hallett 1973.

realism is the technique by which literature and other creative media attempt to present real life as it really is. The realist text is a mirror onto reality. To be more specific: the realist text *attempts* to be a mirror onto reality. For example: the ‘real experience’ of a love affair that the elegist purports to tell is not real experience, but crafted narrative. The slice of life a poem appears to show us is a representation of life; the poem is not a reflective mirror or transparent window but a finely crafted art-object. The elegiac mistress is a fictional woman. She never walked in the Roman alleys but rather sauntered through, lingered in the Roman mind. According to Wyke (1989), the elegiac beloved can show us ways that Roman authors thought about women, their sexuality, their private lives, and their social identities.<sup>2</sup> She is not a woman, but a symbol whose meanings resonate in political, social, and poetic discourses.

Whereas realism describes and evokes real life experiences and feelings, metapoetics refers to the ways in which the author draws attention to the poem’s fictiveness. He refers self-consciously to his poem’s style and poetic artifice within the poem itself. For example, Propertius in poem 2.1 declares his poetic allegiance to the poet Callimachus. This earlier Hellenistic poet advocated for and created a poetic style whose trademarks were brevity of form, density of allusion, and references so learned as to reach the point of obscurity. Propertius in turn employs Callimachean metaphor and imagery in his poetry. In 3.1.1 he invokes the shade of Callimachus, and he ends his poem with a prayer to the Lycian god, which is the epithet Callimachus gives to Apollo in the prologue to his famous poem, the *Aetia* (Hunter 2006: 7-8).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> This influential article (Wyke 1989) has since been revised for publication in Wyke 2002. See pp. 11-45.

<sup>3</sup> On Roman poets’ reception and interpretation of Callimachus, see Acosta-Huges and Stephens 2012: 204-69; Hunter 2006.

Realism and metapoetics do not constitute a binary opposition but often operate simultaneously. The word *amor*, ‘love,’ signifies the emotion, the beloved, and a love-poem,<sup>4</sup> so that when Ovid talks about his *amores*, he is talking about lovers, love affairs, and his own love poetry. Although we know we can choose to read a multivalent statement in both ways, it is easy to prioritize one reading over the other. A classic passage for discussing metapoetics in elegy is Propertius 1.1.1-2:

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis,  
contactum nullis ante cupidinibus.<sup>5</sup>

Cynthia first with her eyes captured miserable me, touched  
never before by desires.<sup>6</sup>

Cynthia is not only, as Propertius explicitly says, the name of his first mistress; Cynthia is also the name of this book of poetry. Roman poems were often referred to by their first word, so this book of poems would have been called ‘Cynthia.’ So, the question arises: when Propertius uses the name Cynthia in his poems, is he talking about his girlfriend or his fiction?

Kennedy (1992) has written at length to show that any determination that one reading or interpretation is the real, primary, essential one can always be subjected to scrutiny and debunked. He explains that scholars end up buying into elegy’s ‘reality effect’ and ground their analyses on whatever they decide is a poem’s core reality.<sup>7</sup> For example, a recent trend in scholarship on elegy has been to identify the mistress’s body uniformly as a metaphor for the poet’s text. Greene (1998) exemplifies this type of interpretation: she sees, for instance, that Propertius dominates his girlfriend by regarding her solely as material for him to turn into

---

<sup>4</sup> OLD s.v. *amor*

<sup>5</sup> I use the standard edition (OCT, except where noted) of each text referenced: Heyworth’s *Sexti Properti Elegos* (2007); Bailey’s *Lucreti De Rerum Natura Libri Sex* (1947); Owen’s *P. Ovidi Nasonis Tristium Libri Quinque; Ibis; Ex Ponto Libri Quattuor; Halieutica; Fragmenta* (1922); Kenney’s *Heroides XVI-XXI* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Postgate’s *Tibulli Aliorumque Carminum Libri Tres* (1924); Ogilvie’s *Titi Liui Ab Urbe Condita: Volume I: Books I-V* (1974); Mynors’s *C. Plini Caecili Secundi Epistularum Libri Decem* (1966).

<sup>6</sup> All translations are my own.

<sup>7</sup> See Kennedy 1992: 1-23.

poetry.<sup>8</sup> But this reading gives primacy to Propertius the poet. Greene's reading seems to say that Propertius is fundamentally a writer interested in his own work; however, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary.

'Propertius is not really a writer;' 'no, Propertius is not really a lover:' Kennedy advises us that this argument will go on endlessly. Is there any way to avoid the cycle of prioritizing one meaning of the text over another? No, it seems not: every interpretation is oriented with respect to some 'reality.' For example, if we were to take it as given that Propertius the historical man were writing poetry about his beloved, then our interpretation would be based on the fact that these poems represented a real relationship and the real feelings of a man towards a woman. In order to describe a text's possible meaning, beauty, or effect, we must limit the text. We assume, for example, that an author wrote the words that we are reading, and this commonly-held assumption determines and limits our interpretations of these poems.

In my goal to explore the realist and metapoetic elements of Latin love elegy, I have chosen to examine two very different poems and authors. First, I analyze Propertius's elegy 2.26. In this poem, the speaker relates a dream he has in which his beloved nearly drowns. I attempt to provide a realist reading of the elegy by treating the dream as real (for a while) and suggest that it resembles a Freudian anxiety dream, whose function is to confer psychological protection and defense upon the speaker at the cost of repeating a certain past trauma. Second, I attend to the metapoetic concerns of Sulpicia's poem 3.13. I find that Sulpicia encourages us to view the poem's voice as her own and take it up for ourselves so that we too can experience the joys of love as she does.

In the first chapter, I employ ideas from psychoanalysis to show that Propertius 2.26 offers us a chance to examine our role as interpreters who delve into a fictional account and yet

---

<sup>8</sup> Her chapter on the *scripta puella* of the *Monobiblos* is particularly relevant: see Greene 1998: 37-66.

must return to the world outside of fiction. After I introduce Freud's theory on dreams and Irigaray's and Lacan's theories on the gaze, I analyze poem 2.26a focusing on how Propertius's gaze allows the reader to look upon both the *puella*, his 'girl' or mistress, and Propertius the narrator. I then focus on passages that show how Propertius sees his girlfriend as the instrument necessary to his own poetry: her death spells his own. In an effort to find out more about the Propertian persona, I examine Propertius 1.17 and argue that it engages in dialogue with the dream in 2.26a. My analysis shows that the dream in 2.26a can be read as an anxiety dream stemming from the earlier experience described in 1.17. Finally, I step back from this mode of analysis, recognize that the dream I have been examining is fictional, and show how this recognition allows us to leave the poem's fiction and re-enter our own lives with a better understanding of 'reality.'

In the second chapter, I show that contemporary understandings of 'voice,' which involve the possibility of recording, reveal the limitations of the term 'voice' as it pertains to the poet Sulpicia. In order to demonstrate that we are listening to the work's voice, not the author's, I first introduce theoretical ideas of Maurice Blanchot about the author's relationship to his work. I then turn to the poem "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath, showing how Plath's recording of her poem tempts us to look through the poem for the real woman behind it. I have chosen this poem because its thematic concerns are similar to those of Sulpicia 3.13, such as equating its speaker's body to the poem. I then show how Sulpicia promises herself to her readers but gives them only her physical text. Finally, I use the concept of the work's voice to show how we readers attribute the voice to Sulpicia, and the processes by which she encourages us to take it as our own. Instead of listening for the voice of the author Sulpicia, I argue that we should focus on her work's voice. I show that concepts of 'voice' have changed over time only by placing Sulpicia next to Plath.

My interpretations of these poems, however, do not constitute my thesis's end-point or take-away message; rather, my goal is to demonstrate that, by putting ancient poems in dialogue with our contemporary assumptions about life and literature, we craft more nuanced readings of poems that reveal not only something about the ancient world, but also about our own.

## Chapter 1: Interpreting the Dream in Propertius 2.26a

The Latin love elegists are notorious for their accounts of passionate affairs and all that they entail: tenderness, violence, cheating wives, learned girls, poet lovers, wealthy rivals, magic, myth, and all else in between. Their first-person mode of address lends these poems their enduring fascination. These are stories told by the man or woman who lived them, lending them an extraordinary vividness and veracity. These characters are, however, fictional, and fictional characters do not live in the world outside of their stories. Their Rome resembles the city of the Romans. We cannot assume that these stories reflect real life events, but we can hardly avoid the assumption. Wyke (1989) and Kennedy (1992) have been instrumental in overthrowing this illusion; and yet it persists. The illusion no longer lies in scholarly conclusions about these poems – no longer is it fashionable to read these poems as truthful<sup>9</sup> or indicating some counter-cultural reality<sup>10</sup> – but now lurks in the assumptions behind our interpretations. For better or for worse, we interpret literature in the way that we interpret life: we work in the discourse of reality.

The fictional dream presents us with an opportunity to examine our assumptions. I have chosen to analyze a poem, Propertius 2.26,<sup>11</sup> that continues to intrigue scholars with the dream it records, the ambiguity of the dream's ending, and the relationship between the two different

---

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Lyne 1980: 'The romantic belief [in love transcending death] itself reflects a stubborn honesty. While we notice this, we may notice a fact of Propertius' style. He means what he says' (142).

<sup>10</sup> Hallett 1973: 103-24.

<sup>11</sup> Much scholarship on 2.26 has focused on its unity or lack thereof. Those who support the unity of 2.26 cite the thematic similarity of 2.26a and b, each poem a meditation on drowning and shipwreck (Papanghelis 1987: 80-1). Other scholars who take issue with this argument, focusing on the difference between dream in 2.26a and fantasy in 2.26b (Papanghelis 1987: 81) or the poems' 'two beginnings': '...even if we make a psychological link, with Propertius dreaming of Cynthia shipwrecked because he is aware of her intention to go on a voyage, there is no need to make a single poem of material that stems from two quite separate beginnings (a dream, 1; a voyage conceived, 29)' (Heyworth 2009: 222-3). Any argument for a continuous 2.26 that takes conceptual unity as evidence, however, is unconvincing. I will not focus on this argument for unity and believe the manuscript tradition to be the best source of evidence for arguments about unity. See Butrica 1984 on the manuscript tradition of the whole Propertian corpus; Heyworth 2009 on the critical apparatus.

parts of the poem. Some have called the dream a nightmare; if ambivalence is a cause of fright, then the entire poem should be called a night terror. In the poem, Propertius speaks to his love, telling her that he has seen her drowning in a dream. He watches her flounder in the waves, he prays that she not die, and she is rescued by a dolphin. His dream ends as he begins to throw himself into the water. Propertius then apostrophizes on how much the woman loves him and how well she honors his verses, reading them aloud. Finally, he dreams up a fantasy in which the two of them sail away together, make love on deck, and make love again on the shore when the waves wash them up.

One need not look far for ideas as to the underlying thoughts behind this poem: we might look for connections between sex and death, for example, or consider how death's approach in the dream leads Propertius to imagine an everlasting future with his mistress. I, however, am eager to provide a different sort of analysis. Throughout 2.26 Propertius carries on a double-speak: he talks about his girlfriend as the instrument necessary to his poetry, and his fantasy of their lovemaking is for him the same thing as the fiction he will write about two lovers. Poem 2.26, I argue, is a meditation on the relationship between a poet's life and his fiction.

I will introduce twentieth-century psychoanalytic ideas about dreams and human nature in order to approach an interpretation of the dream. A common criticism of psychoanalytic interpretations of literature is that no fictional character, or at least none written before Freud, has an unconscious mind; therefore, psychoanalysis, which arose from the study of real human subjects, is useless when applied to literature. However, life only becomes 'real life' in the process of naming. Theorists such as Jacques Lacan argue, for instance, that the unconscious mind partakes of language and signification: psychoanalysis, which aims to elucidate such mechanisms, is just one way of thinking about the signifying processes that produce 'real life.'

After trying to interpret a fictional dream like a real one, in particular by asking where it comes from, I will show that securing the dream's 'reality' would make the task of interpretation no easier. By encouraging the reader to interpret the dream, Propertius encourages this reader to give up the search for reality, allowing his fictional story to be fiction and nothing more.

I begin with a theoretical introduction in Section 1, in which I introduce psychoanalytic ideas and vocabulary useful for discussing dreams and literature. I then carry out a close reading of poem 2.26 in Sections 2 and 3, focusing first on how the gaze structures the relationship between Propertius and his girlfriend, then demonstrating the metapoetic imagery in the dream and in Propertius's following fantasy. In Section 4, I argue that this poem is an invitation to interpret. I then locate a source of this dream's material in poem 1.17, in which Propertius is stranded on a foreign shore, and argue that the dream in 2.26a functions like a Freudian anxiety dream. In Section 5, I demonstrate the self-knowledge that we gain about ourselves by removing ourselves from this fictional dream and considering the implications of analyzing a fictional dream like a real one.

## 1. Theoretical Introduction

### *Freud on dreams and repetition*

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud argues that a dream is a transformation of content from waking life. Freud takes as given that the material of a dream is "reproduced or remembered" from everyday life experiences, but denies any simple connection between experience and dream content because of the strange workings of memory during dreams (Freud 1954: 11). He distinguishes between the manifest and latent content of a dream. Whereas the manifest content is the raw material of the dream, the latent content of the dream is what lies

beneath the manifest content as the seminal meaning of the dream recoverable by interpretation. The manifest and latent contents of the dream in turn are related by an unconscious wish or desire, and the dream acts as a fulfilling of that wish. Slavoj Žižek, an important reader of Freud and Lacan and a philosopher himself, asserts that this wish or desire can be uncovered only in the form of the dream itself.

The structure [of the dream] is always triple; there are always *three* elements at work: the *manifest dream-text*, the *latent dream-content* or thought and the *unconscious desire* articulated in a dream. This desire attaches itself to the dream, it intercalates itself in the interspace between the latent thought and manifest text. ...its only place is in the *form* of the 'dream'... (Žižek 2008: 6 [=Žižek 1989])

The form of the dream that gives place to the unconscious desire is generated by Freud's idea of dream-work. This work is the unconscious's method of translating latent content into manifest content. Freud specifies two processes constituting dream-work: condensation and displacement, or metaphor and metonymy.<sup>12</sup> As Freud shows in his own presentation and subsequent analysis of his own dream, known as "Irma's Injection," analysis can proceed to uncover the latent content of a dream with awareness of these two arms of dream-work (Freud 1953: 96-121). I wish to raise a point now that I will be crucial for my argument: while a dream is meaningful insofar as analysis can reveal its latent content, it is more important to direct one's attention towards the form of the dream and the dream-work involved in its production (Žižek 2008: 7). Desire can be found, according to Žižek's analysis, only in the dream's form. Because the dream in its totality is triple – manifest-text, latent-content, and desire in the interstices – any analysis that does not consider the form of the dream *qua* receptacle of desire is incomplete.

Freud discusses a specific type of dream and wish-fulfillment in his work. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud uses war veterans' recurring dreams of past trauma as evidence of the

---

<sup>12</sup> See Freud 1953: 277-338 for the relevant section in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*; see Lacan 2006: 510-3 for an explanation of Freud's terms for different kinds of dream-work and their relationship to processes of signification.

ego's tendency, or rather compulsion, to seek pain instead of pleasure (Bersani 1986: 57). As

Freud says:

The study of dreams may be considered the most trustworthy method of investigating deep mental processes. *Now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident,\* a situation from which he wakes up in another fright....* I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with *not* thinking of it.... If we are not to be shaken in our belief in the wish-fulfilling tenor of dreams by the dreams of traumatic neurotics, we still have one resource open to us: we may argue that the function of dreaming, like so much else, is upset in this condition and diverted from its purposes, *or we may be driven to reflect on the mysterious masochistic trends of the ego.\** (Freud 1955: 13-4, \*emphasis mine)

The subject does damage upon himself in repeating these dreams, and the pleasure principle – the motivation for all human activity is to increase pleasure and curb unpleasure – offers no explanation. Instead, Freud highlights a reversal in the dreamer's position to the pain. In the originary trauma, the subject's mental apparatus was unprepared for the anxiety that it resulted from the shock, whatever it was; as a result, the stimulus dominated the subject and did damage to him. The traumatic dreams that later frighten the dreamer do not give him a rush of pleasure; rather, 'these dreams are endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis' (Freud 1955: 32). These dreams try to give the dreamer control over the shock that spawned his neurosis. The dream helps him to regain his mastery and agency.

This example of traumatic dreams is paired with another instance in which humans seem to demonstrate an impulse for mastery that overrides the pleasure principle. Freud next discusses his grandchild's *fort/da* game, in which the toddler repeatedly tossed his toy reel away, saying *o-o-o*, for the word *fort* ('gone'), and pulling it back, saying *da* ('there'). Freud interprets this game as the child's representation of his mother's departures and returns to him that are by turns

painful and pleasurable. Like man with recurrent dreams of his past trauma, the child repeats this *fort/da* game over and over, revisiting his pain. Freud poses several explanations for this question but does not yet settle on one. First, the pain of tossing the mother away may have been simply in the service of re-experiencing her joyful return; however, he observed the child play the *fort* game, tossing a toy away and uttering his cry, far more often than he saw him play the *fort/da* game (Freud 1955: 16). This observance made him consider the possibility of some instinct that goes beyond the pleasure principle. In real life, the mother left the child: she was the active agent, he the passive object. In the child's representation of the event during his play-time, however, he reversed the roles and took on the active role. He makes his 'mother' (the toy reel) leave him and then return to him. He becomes her master in his play world, suggesting to Freud the possibility of an instinct toward mastery. Freud also suggests that the child at play may be acting out an impulse to punish his mother that he suppressed. Whatever the psychic explanation of this game, Freud notes that the boy in his game stages the pain of his abandonment and exposes himself to it again and again so that he might master it.

Freud sees both the child's *fort-da* game and the veterans' war dreams as remarkable instances of repetition. Based on the evidence of psychoanalytic transferences and examples drawn from peoples' lives, he concludes that there is a compulsion to repeat that overrides the pleasure principle. For example, patients undergoing psychoanalytic treatment do not simply remember what is repressed – the repressed can never be remembered fully – but repeat it anew through the transference of the psychoanalytic relationship. The child's thwarted sexual desire – he cannot sleep with his mother whom he desires – is the feeling that he repeats as an adult when he experiences feelings of self-worth and ineffectuality (Freud 1955: 21-2). The playing child and dreaming veteran both manifest this compulsion to repeat: they do not just remember their

pain, but repeat it whether in the world of play or the world of dreams. Freud's argument is profound and effective, paradoxically, because of its ineffectuality, passivity, and repetition. Freud's agenda is to describe what happens beyond the realm of the pleasure principle; however, this path is constantly tripped up by the pleasure principle.<sup>13</sup> The child's game can be explained easily by the pleasure principle: the child enjoys punishing his mother and assuming an active role instead of a passive one, and this pleasure exceeds the unpleasure of restaging his loss of her. As soon as Freud makes a stride past the pleasure principle, it catches up with him and proclaims its dominance.

I introduce this psychoanalytic material from Freud in order to give a critical vocabulary and set of ideas for discussing the dream-text in Propertius 2.26a. With Freud in mind, we can begin to look for the cause of the dream and the function it serves for the speaker. Freud, however, does not provide enough insight into the gaze that Propertius casts on his *puella* and is cast on him during the dream. Because the gaze is a fundamental topic in psychoanalysis and literary criticism, I will present and examine two theorists' different understandings and interpretations of the gaze, which are useful for a more complete interpretation of the dream poem in question.

### *The Gaze: Irigaray, Lacan*

#### *Irigaray*

Propertius makes sight the most important sense of this elegy at the outset: his first three words are 'I saw you' (*uidi ego te*, 2.26a.1). He relates himself to his girlfriend using vision; he perceives her with his eyes. Inherent to the gaze is a distance that separates subject and object. In

---

<sup>13</sup> Much in the way of Blanchot's man who tries to grasp an essential something in the first night but falls into the trap of the *other* night, as I will detail below.

and through the very act of perceiving the world beyond ourselves, we confront the feeling that we are not one with what we see. The effects of the gaze are variable: the subject can feel paralyzed by what he sees (as in Prop. 1.1.1-2) or can feel a sense of mastery and control over what he sees (as in Prop. 1.3). Ellen Greene (1998) studies the specifically male gaze that Propertius casts upon Cynthia in the *Monobiblos*. Greene draws heavily on Luce Irigaray's formulations of female sexuality in her essay "This Sex Which Is Not One." Irigaray argues that vision and the visual are instrumental to male but not female sexual desire; as a result, woman strives to be a passive, beautiful object for man to lust after and seek completion in (Irigaray 1985: 25-6).<sup>14</sup> Restating this idea, Irigaray compares woman to a product and man to a consumer; the consumer wants to use the product and control it, and the product is compelled to exist just as it is for the fulfillment of another's satisfaction (Irigaray 1985: 31-2).

Greene identifies this same masculine gaze that seeks to control and use the woman in Propertius's poetry. In elegy 1.3, for example, she argues that Propertius's imagined gaze upon the sleeping Ariadne, Andromeda, and maenads and his subsequent gaze upon his sleeping mistress demonstrate how he inscribes his desires and fantasies of dominance upon the passive female object; after 'gazing' upon these mythical women, with whom he can imagine whatever he likes, he then looks at his lover and manipulates her hair and hands. Looking offers pleasure and turns to touching and controlling; thus Propertius demotes the *puella* to the status of an object made for his own pleasure. Furthermore, Greene argues that Propertius represents the girl primarily as *materia* to be spun into poetry rather than a 'flesh and blood woman' (Greene 1998: 37). In the male gaze, woman is made into an object.

---

<sup>14</sup> In objection to Irigaray, consider the episode from Longus's novel *Daphnis and Chloe* 1.13. Chloe falls in love with Daphnis while she bathes him. He pleases her eye, and she enjoys the feeling of washing him with her hands.

*Lacan*

Lacan emphasizes that we as subjects normally feel ourselves to be the object of the gaze; we are objects being looked at. Janan (1994) begins her summary of Lacan's formulation of the subject at the mirror stage.<sup>15</sup> Between the age of six and 18 months, a child is able to look into the mirror and identify himself as the image of the mirror. Finding himself in the glass, he is able to say to himself, 'That is me.' In other words, he confers subjectivity upon himself. His recognition, however, is misrecognition; for how can he, the one looking into the mirror, be the one that he sees in the mirror? How can the perceiver be the perceived? In Lacan's terminology, we are split subjects.

The gaze (*le regard*) is a fact of our existence. In the gaze, we see the other. Yet at that moment, we realize that the other can see us too. We see and are seen. Lacan's formulation of the gaze is precisely this: a third perspective (self, other, gaze) that sees us seeing and being seen (MacCannell 1986: 135-6). Lacan takes a hint from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who described the gaze as what covers things, like clothing, so that we might never see them fully exposed (Lee 1990: 155-6). The gaze is thus associated with its object, not with its point of origination. Lacan also agrees with Sartre that one's presence depends on being seen by the gaze, or being given-to-be-seen by a gaze we imagine. Crucial for Lacan is that our eyes desire this gaze like the child's mouth desires the mother's breast: we want to see the gaze that sees us and the way it sees us (157). Moreover, our knowledge of the gaze frustrates us because it confronts us with our status as split subjects: there is a separation between our identities as ones who see and our identities as ones who are seen. To complicate things, the gaze our eyes desire is different from a look that an actual person gives us (158). As Lacan says in his eleventh Seminar, '*You never look at me from the place where I see you*' (Lacan 1998: 103). Despite – or because of – this discrepancy

---

<sup>15</sup> I direct readers interested in the specifics of psychoanalytic theory to Janan (1994): 1-37.

between imagined and actual gaze, we play with our appearance and make ourselves to be seen by the other. The child feels alienated and helpless to the power of the gaze when he realizes that he, the one looking into the mirror, is the object he sees within. Man, however, can play with the gaze, presenting himself as he wishes to be seen; instead of passively suffering the gaze, he enters, manipulates, influences, and connects with what or whom he imagines sees him. O'Neill (2005), for example, explains Žižek's interpretation of Jacques Lacan's gaze, writing that 'the eye belongs to the spectator and the gaze belongs to the spectacle' (245); O'Neill then offers a reading of select Propertian elegies in order to demonstrate how Cynthia responds to the speaker's male gaze and manipulates him with her own.<sup>16</sup>

Lacan studies the importance of the gaze in our experience of visual arts. In geometrical paintings that make use of a vanishing point, the viewer is made to feel as if he has been reduced to the point from which the painting unfolds. The logic of the painting becomes him; the painting denies that he is a complex, thinking human being. Painting and the visual arts confer subjectivity upon the viewer, for they are objects intended for a subject to look upon. For Lacan, the painting grants subjectivity because it allows the viewer to focus on gazing upon an object and to abandon his search for the gaze that objectifies him. The painting offers something to our eyes, not to the gaze, and requires that we lay down the gaze like weapons (160). The gaze is what upholds our image of ourselves; in setting it down, we more fully embrace our status as physical, sensate, human beings who are subjects, and not objects. Art thus has a strong social value and we can begin to see why we value it so highly (161).

## 2. The Gaze in Propertius 2.26

---

<sup>16</sup> For another analysis of the gaze in Latin elegy, see Frederick 1997.

In this section, I focus on different types of gazing in poem 2.26. Previous scholars have already highlighted that vision structures the dream. Wiggers (1980) comments that Propertius's painterly descriptions, melodious Greek names, and elaborate similes clash with the danger and crisis that the speaker must feel at seeing his beloved drowning. Flaschenriem (2010) carries Wiggers's argument further, deciding that this dream-text is the product of Propertius's conscious reflection and representation. She lays weight on the abundance of visual detail and panoramic field of vision offered by Propertius, who has the gaze of an artist glancing over his canvas.<sup>17</sup> In these scholars' assessments, Propertius writes his poem as if it were an ekphrasis, describing a work of art.

Building on Wiggers's and Flaschenriem's work, I focus on the gaze that generates this visual material; however, I consider the gaze as a relation between subject and object. First, I catalogue and analyze the feelings that attend Propertius's gaze upon his girl, arguing that his watching but not acting reveals a Freudian confluence of pain and pleasure. Second, I focus on the moment when Propertius turns the narrative eye onto himself, and how that reveals his awareness of the gaze watching him throughout the poem.

### *What Propertius Sees*

From the first word of poem 2.26, we are encouraged to think visually. The first line reads, *Vidi ego te in somnis fracta, mea uita, carina* ('I saw you, my beloved, shipwrecked in a dream, 1).<sup>18</sup> The first word means *I saw*, and Propertius thus draws our attention to the gaze. As soon as one dives into the poem, the distance between Propertius and his lover becomes clear.

---

<sup>17</sup> Hubbard (2001) has argued that Propertius's visual details – e.g., purple waves and golden fleece (2.26a.5-6) – derive from works of art with which Propertius would have been familiar, and that he presents the visual details of the shipwreck scene in the order that a viewer would be naturally focus on them in a painting (166-8).

<sup>18</sup> For the translation 'in a dream,' see OLD s.v. *somnus* 1c *in ~is*, 'in one's sleep (usu. in references to dreams); sim. *per ~um (~os)*.'

His first word, *uidi*, emphasizes the importance of vision in dreams, as it is the most powerful form of perception. Moreover, the placement of *ego* and *te* next to each other puts the subject and his object, Propertius and his beloved, next to each other on the page, allowing them a proximity that is not present in the dream itself.<sup>19</sup> Propertius after all only sees his beloved and hears her; he does not touch her or hold her. The placement of *uidi ego te*, especially at the beginning of the poem, betrays his desire to be close to her, a longing reflected in his meditated leap into the water at the dream-narrative's close. Their closeness, however, is illusory, being weakened by an aural separation. The elisions linking *uidi ego* and *te in somnis* belie the closeness between *ego* and *te*. Even stronger than the proximity of *ego* and *te* are the collapsed compounds '*uidego*' and '*tin somnis*.' As a result of the elision, Propertius is tethered to his gaze (*uidi ego*) while his beloved is caught up in the dream-world she is a part of (*te in somnis*).

The *topos* of watching trouble at sea while safe at a distance recalls the beginning of Lucretius's second book. There, Lucretius describes the sweetness of watching another struggle through a storm.

SVAVE, mari magno turbantibus aequora uentis,  
 e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem;  
 non quia uexari quemquamst iucunda uoluptas,  
 sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suaue est. (Lucretius 2.1-4)

It is sweet to watch from the land the great hardship of another on the great sea, while the winds make stormy the water's surface; not because it is a joyous pleasure that anyone might be tossed about, but because it is sweet to see from which misfortunes you yourself are free.

---

<sup>19</sup> I follow this reading (*uidi ego te*) as presented by Heyworth 2009. He accepts this reading from the conjectured hyparchetypal manuscript labeled Γ from which the J, K, and L mss. are derived (for *sigla*, see Heyworth 2007: lxxix-lxxx). Earlier manuscripts print *uidi te in somnis*. Propertius five other times starts a line with *uidi*, and each time the word *ego* follows. Only once is *uidi ego* metrically required (4.5.61 *uidi ego rugoso tussim concrescere collo*); therefore, Heyworth argues that Propertius prefers the *uidi ego* as a stylistic choice, and that the later hyparchetype Γ presents Propertius's intended phrase *uidi ego te in somnis*. See Heyworth 2009: 223.

This Lucretian passage is relevant for its association of gazing upon suffering with the arising pleasure. In line 2.2, Lucretius shows the magnitude of the toil rhetorically, employing the hyperbaton *magnum...laborem* to bracket the nominal infinitive *spectare* that follows the impersonal *suaue* that begins line 2.1. In this way, *labor* is woven into sweetness. By watching another suffer, one truly recognizes one's freedom from suffering. Even though he dislikes seeing someone else suffering, he feels pleasure. Lucretius attempts to separate his own delight and relief in 2.1 from the other's *labor* in 2.2; yet pleasure rings throughout this four line passage. In line 3, the dactylic foot starting on the second syllable of *iucunda* gives release to the tension built up by the long syllables of *uexari quemquamst*; it is pointed that the 'sweet pleasure' is placed on the fifth dactylic foot after a line of heavy spondees. Despite Lucretius's qualification and justification of his happiness in 2.3-4, the entire passage is bracketed by the repetition '*suaue/...suauest.*'

This Lucretian confluence of sweet and sour is also at work from the beginning of Propertius 2.26a; indeed, the uncomfortable confluence of pleasure resulting from trouble at sea seems to be a *topos* from Lucretius that Propertius reworks into elegy. In the second line of Propertius 2.26a, Propertius provides more details about what exactly he sees his mistress doing. '[I have seen you] leading your weary hands from the Ionian splash' (*Ionio lassas ducere rore manus*, 2.26a.2). The beloved has been in the water for some time now, as the hands which she raised from the water are fatigued (*lassas...manus*, 2.26a.2). She is not in just any body of water, but the Ionian sea. This detail is not superfluous but a telling indicator of Propertius's emotional state: when he says '*Ionio*' he also seems to be uttering the shout '*io, io.*'<sup>20</sup> Soldiers shouted *io triumphe* during triumphs (Beard 2007: 244). The verb *ducere* is used to describe both the

---

<sup>20</sup> I realize that the first o in *Ionio* is short, and so the first *io* is not equivalent to the shout '*io,*' which has a long o. I believe, however, that my reading holds, especially given that it is unclear at Cat. 61.117-8 and 137-83 whether the o in *io* is long or short.

leading of a triumph and the leading of a bride to her new home.<sup>21</sup> The word *Ionio* aurally suggests a power differential between Propertius and his passive *puella*. Yet this near shout of ‘*io, io*’ also evokes the sound of ecstatic mourning from Greek tragedy, *io, io*.<sup>22</sup> This double-speak of mastery and desperation, both strong emotions implying a degree of ecstasy, heightens the emotional tenor of the first couplet.<sup>23</sup>

This coexistence of pain and pleasure proves to be indicative of what Freud calls the instinct toward mastery. He tells his lover that he has seen her drowning in a dream, and he sets out to describe it to her in full detail. He is worried for her life, he prays for her to be saved; he is pained by his impending loss of her and does not want to think of life without her. At the same time, he punishes her and gains a mastery of sorts over her. In this poem, he tells her that he had a dream where she took back all the lies she ever told him (*et quaecumque in me fueras mentita fateri*, Prop. 2.26a.3), and that she called his name again and again (*saepe meum nomen iam peritura uocas*, 12). He controls her speech, like the child who controls his mother’s movements. Also like the child, he cannot help but subject himself to pain in the process (*Ionio*, 2) as he fears that the sea will perhaps take her name (*quam timui ne forte tuum mare nomen haberet*, 7). In order to punish her, he must harm himself in a lose-lose game. We can see his pain and longing for her even though he punishes her when the dolphin takes her away and he shows himself in distress, about to throw himself into the water: ‘[a]nd now I was trying to throw myself from the highest rock, when fear shattered such visions for me’ (*iamque ego conabar summo me mittere saxo / cum mihi discussit talia uisa metus*, 19-20).

---

<sup>21</sup> See entry 5 in the OLD: ‘(of a man) To bring home as a wife, marry.’

<sup>22</sup> See entries 1 and 2 for *io* in the LSJ: ‘an exclam. chiefly in dramatic poetry (lyr.); freq. repeated twice, rarely three times...; esp. in invoking aid...2. freq. also of grief or suffering, *oh!*...’ I believe it significant that *Ionio* seems to enact two shouts of *io*, but see the above note on the imprecision of the transliteration.

<sup>23</sup> The Ionian sea also evokes the story of Sappho recounted in *Heroides* 15. Sappho must sail to the Ionian sea and leap off of a cliff into the water in order to cleanse herself of her love for the ferryman Phaon. Seen in this way, Propertius implicitly compares himself to Sappho.

*When Propertius is Seen*

The ending of this poem has received much critical attention. After the appearance of the dolphin, Propertius finally reveals his position as observer: he has either begun to jump or has been trying to throw himself<sup>24</sup> from a cliff into the water below (*iamque ego conabar summo me mittere saxo*, 19). He leaves his intent unstated, whether to save the girl or purge himself of love by throwing himself off. Jacobson (1984: 137-40) argues that ancient readers would have understood Propertius's jump as a lover's leap given the dream's setting in the Ionian sea, famous for such purgative leaps. I side with Jacobson, but argue in addition that the moment Propertius plunges into complete despair comes when the dolphin carries her away. Although he believes she has been saved, she has still been taken away from him. In this respect, a dolphin rescue is not much better than drowning. Both result in his loss of the *puella*.

The last couplet of the poem gives the reader a vision of Propertius as the object of vision, when at once it is taken away by fear. For nine of the ten couplets, the girl has been the object of the reader's vision. In 2.26a.1-18, Propertius describes the *puella* as he watches her: as a result, the reader 'sees' with the eyes of Propertius and visualizes the *puella* as object. After the *puella*'s rescue, however, the reader's eyes turn towards the speaker. In 19-20 ('And now I was trying to throw myself from the highest rock, when fear shattered such visions for me,' *iamque ego conabar summo me mittere saxo / cum mihi discussit talia uisa metus*), Propertius finally becomes the object of the reader's gaze, but only the moment before the dream ends. The reader for this instant approximates the viewpoint of the Lacanian gaze, embracing Propertius as both subject who is telling the story and object who is seen.

Although the dream ends here, we can imagine the outcome of his action: whether alive or dead, he will enter the water that nearly claimed his girlfriend. The water and the *puella* in it

---

<sup>24</sup> Attempting to render the imperfect seems difficult in English.

have been the objects of Propertius's narrative vision, and at the end of the dream he makes a move to enter the water himself. The viewer wishes to merge with what he sees; the subject wants to join the object. I earlier quoted Lacan's formulation of the lover's complaint: *you never look at me from the place where I see you*. Distance separates subject from object, and the lover wants to collapse the gap. Propertius's intended leap can be understood in this way: he wishes to bridge the gap between his girlfriend and himself, between *ego* and *te*. The two pronouns lie next to each other in the first line, yet they are doomed to remain separate. Likewise, Propertius and his *puella* will never unite; they are always to be separate. Perhaps this knowledge of perpetual separation and distance between Propertius and his girl stokes the fear that ends the dream.

### 3. Metapoetics in Propertius 2.26

#### *2.26a: The Dolphin Rescue*

Just as he thinks that his girlfriend will surely drown, a dolphin miraculously saves her. 'But I saw a dolphin rush to your relief, who, I think, had carried Arion's lyre beforehand' (*sed tibi subsidio delphinum currere uidi, / qui, puto, Arioniam uexerat ante lyram*, 2.26a.17-8). Arion was a lyric poet famous in antiquity for having invented the dithyramb, as Herodotus tells us (1.23), and the story of his rescue by a dolphin is told by both Herodotus (1.23-4) and Pliny the Elder (9.VIII.28). Pirates had taken the singer hostage, and they had him jump overboard so that they could steal his money. They allowed him to play a final song before he jumped off the deck. He then jumped into the ocean, but a dolphin came to rescue him and carried him safely to land. Neither author mentions what happened to his lyre. Propertius adds an innovation to the story by saying that the dolphin who carried away Arion's lyre now carries away his girlfriend, comparing the *puella* to Arion's lyre. She is the poet's instrument, the necessary implement by

which he makes his song and fame. Pliny additionally reports that dolphin is a ‘friend to the art of music’ (*amicum...musicae arti*, 9.VIII.24); because of the animal’s love of music, a flock swarmed to listen to Arion before he jumped (9.VIII.28). Arion saved himself because his final song was pleasing to the dolphins. The *puella*, however, does not sing: she takes back her lies (2.26a.2) and repeatedly shouts ‘Propertius’ (12). If she is like Arion’s lyre, which does nothing but produce music, than her shouts are like the lyre’s strumming. Her revoked lies and Propertius’s name musically draw the dolphin to her rescue.

The dolphin’s inclusion reveals that this dream is carefully tailored to the audience who will receive it. The helpful dolphin was a *topos* in Roman thought, so much so that a dolphin implies a good, friendly creature. Pliny the Elder reports that Maecenas, who was Propertius’s patron, and other Augustans had a favorite dolphin story to tell about a dolphin who carried a poor boy to school every day, mourned for the boy upon his early death, and soon thereafter died of mourning (9.25-6). The readers in Propertius’s circle seem to have had a fondness for this dolphin story, and Propertius’s inclusion of the dolphin may be a nod in their direction. The dolphin also resonated as a symbol of Augustus’s victory at Actium; dolphins are prominent, for example, in the statue of Augustus at Prima Porta.<sup>25</sup> By including this benevolent dolphin in the dream, Propertius includes an Augustan symbol of benevolence and victory to delight Maecenas and Augustus alike.

### *2.26b: Composing Lovers, Seeking Immortality*

After an interlude and a possible lacuna, the motifs of drowning and shipwreck return in 2.26b as part of Propertius’s fantasy. His girl, he tells us, contemplates a journey across the sea.

---

<sup>25</sup> See Zanker 1990: 82-5. Dolphins famously decorate Aeneas’s shield in its depiction of the Battle of Actium (*Aeneid* 8.671-4).

‘I will follow this girl, and one breeze will lead two faithful people’ (*‘hanc sequar, et fidos una aget aura duos,’* 2.26b.30). The future tense conveys both how vividly he imagines the situation and how eagerly he wishes it to come to fruition. Propertius’s desire – straightforward, insistent – is to become one with his *puella*.

hanc sequar, et fidos una aget aura duos.  
unum litus erit sopitis, unaque tecto  
arbor, et ex una saepe bibemus aqua.  
et tabula una duos poterit componere amantes,  
prora cubile mihi seu mihi puppis erit. (2.26b.30-34)

I will follow this girl, and one breeze will conduct two faithful people. One shore will belong to them when made to sleep, and one tree for a roof, and we will drink often from a single source of water. And one board will be able to join two lovers, whether the prow or the stern will be my bed.

Propertius belabors his point with *uariatio*: must he enumerate every object he will share with his girlfriend? Yet upon closer inspection, Propertius subtly develops a scene where he and his lover become more and more physically connected. Shore and tree that serve as bed and roof are external to the lovers; yet the water that they drink crosses the corporeal boundary of both speaker and *puella*. It is specifically one source of water (*ex una...aqua*) from which they partake, strengthening the connection between the two. Water, which was the engulfing danger of 2.26a, is fluidly transformed in 2.26b into a sustaining drink for the pair. The threatening swell of the dream becomes the lovers’ nourishing drink in Propertius’s fantasy.

What is really odd about this passage, however, is that it unsettles any interpretation that finds a Propertius who wishes to lie with his ‘flesh and blood’ mistress. In line 33, there is a strong metapoetic undercurrent. The *tabula* is not only one of the ship’s planks for the lovers to lie on, but also a writing tablet; similarly, the phrase *duos...componere amantes* carries two senses, that of physically ‘joining two lovers’ and of ‘composing/writing two lovers.’ Propertius’s fantasy is simultaneously to have sex and to write about a love affair. For

Propertius, these two activities amount to one and the same thing. The poet who sleeps with his mistress is writing a poem about it, and vice versa. His poetic work is never far from his thoughts.

Soon after Propertius writes down this erotic image, his thought of sleeping with his *puella* becomes tinged with thoughts of death.

illa meis tantum non umquam desit ocellis,  
incendat nauem Iuppiter ipse licet.  
certe isdem nudi pariter iactabimur oris:  
me licet unda ferat, te modo terra tegat. (2.26b.41-4)

Jupiter himself may burn our ship, so long as she might never be far from my eyes. Without a doubt we will toss about naked – equally – on the same shores: a wave may carry me away, so long as the ground shall cover you.

Propertius wishes that they will toss about naked, equally (*pariter*, 43);<sup>26</sup> yet the relationship that he has portrayed is anything but equal. His girlfriend is his instrument, his *Arionia lyra*. She is the vehicle for his artistry and his route into the world of readers. Once they have made love on the shore, he says that it is permitted (*licet*, 44) for his body to be surrendered to the waves and denied burial and mourning so long as he can be assured of his mistress's proper burial.

Propertius's statement can, again, be best understood when taken metapoetically. On the one hand, by surrendering his body to the waves, he marks himself as a specifically elegiac hero, contrasting with the epic hero, whose chief concern in such a situation is that he should die at sea and be denied glory instead of suffering an honorable death on the battlefield.<sup>27</sup> In 2.26b.43, Propertius alludes to Vergil's *Aeneid*, a work which elsewhere in the *saem* book he regales as something greater than Homer:<sup>28</sup> Propertius's line ends with *oris*, just as the first line of the *Aeneid*; so too does *iactabimur*, 'we will toss about,' draw on *iactatus* of *Aeneid* 1.3, used to

---

<sup>26</sup> See Papanghelis 1981: 87-8 on the erotic import of *pariter* and on the scene's intermingling of sex and shipwreck.

<sup>27</sup> See the famous laments of Odysseus in *Odyssey* 5.408-23 and Aeneas in *Aeneid* 1.94-101.

<sup>28</sup> See Propertius 2.34.63-6.



brilliance comes from the fact that *carmen* is the word for both a poem and a spell;<sup>30</sup> Catullus desires his papyrus to tell its poem (*carmen*) like a witch chants her spell (*carmen*). In poem 1.2, lines 41-52, Tibullus illustrates the range of the old crone's (*saga*, 42) magical repertoire. Of particular interest is her use of a *carmen* to change the direction of a stream (44), her ability to split the earth and draw ghosts out of their graves with an incantation (*cantu*, 45), and her technique of reanimating and commanding an army of the dead (47-8). Catullus desires his papyrus to speak like an old woman who is associated with *carmina* and can bring the dead back to a kind of life. She then has the power to do with them what she will. The immortality that Allius would get from Catullus's poem, then, is subject to the *carta*, to the poem's sheet. The poem and the poem's physical medium have control over Allius's second, poetic life.

#### 4. Interpreting the Dream

How are we to interpret this dream? Propertius calls his girlfriend 'my life' (*mea uita*) in the first line of the poem. On the one hand, the term is meant to be read by his girlfriend as a declaration of his affection, desire, and love for her. On the other hand, the term serves as an invitation for his readers to consider what his *uita* really is. As I suggested at the outset of this chapter, Freudian dream-interpretation rests upon an understanding of dreams as triple in composition: manifest-text, latent-content, and desire. An interpretation of a dream must necessarily account for these three components. We have already analyzed the dynamics of representation at play in the manifest-text, poem 2.26a; the task now is to locate the experiences outside of the dream – the latent-content – that inform this poem.

---

<sup>30</sup> The association between poetry and spells is attested from the Hellenistic period and onward. See especially Theocritus *Idyll* 2 and Vergil's *Eclogue* 8.

Scholars have long been eager to assess the meaning of the dream in poem 2.26. Sullivan (1976: 91, 100) takes the approach of analyzing this dream according to his Freudian pathology of the Propertian lover, who is akin to the jealous lover Swann in the first volume of Proust. Wiggers (1980: 122-3) disagrees, deeming Propertius more insecure than jealous. She argues, however, that each reader may interpret the dream as he sees fit. As she writes, “Propertius offers no explanation of his nightmare in II. 26 and leaves the awesome task of analysis up to his readers” (122). Before we begin analysis, however, we must ask a different question: why do we feel compelled to ‘analyze’ this poem at all? How does Propertius invite the reader to analyze this poem? This query is logically prior to proceeding with analysis and has not yet been treated in scholarship. The answer will come in several parts. First and foremost, I argue that Propertius himself cleverly sets the task of interpretation before the reader by the choice of *mea uita* (2.26a.1) as the epithet he gives his beloved. This appellation is frequent in Propertius and connotes the importance of his girlfriend to his life and well-being (Flaschenriem 2010: 191). Surely *mea uita* is a term of endearment; however, I argue that it carries additional significance in this dream-poem. We can take *uita* literally as his waking life outside of the dream. But what waking life, and whose? I argue that it is the speaker’s waking life, which is the poet’s ‘written life’ that the reader knows about from reading his previous poems. In the world of fiction, the speaker’s waking life is comprised of the poems that we have read.

As readers of Propertius’s poetry, our minds are primed to seek parallels in previous poems we have read, and, as luck would have it, Propertius wrote a poem in Book 1 in which he is shipwrecked himself. In poem 1.17, Propertius himself is stranded on a foreign shore, ‘and deservedly, since I was able to leave my girl’ (*et merito, quoniam potui fugisse puellam*, 1.17.1). This start mid-sentence gives the impression of a man who has been lamenting for quite some

time, and we have only just entered his thoughts. In the next line, Propertius tells us that ‘now I address the lonely halcyons’ (*nunc ego desertas alloquor alcyonas*, 2). His prayers fall on the inhospitable shore (*omniaque ingrato litore uota cadunt*, 4). The poem’s recurrent image is of Propertius’s bones, which he fears will be covered by the sand and denied burial. Having chosen to leave his *puella* behind, he now wishes that he had endured her harshness.

nonne fuit leuius dominae peruincere mores  
    (quamuis dura, tamen rara puella fuit)  
quam sic ignotis circumdata litora siluis  
    cernere et optatos quaerere Tyndaridas? (15-8)

Was it not less onerous to overcome the habits of my mistress (although harsh, my girl was nevertheless one-of-a-kind) than to make out the shores surrounded by unknown forests, as I am now, and to beg for the welcome sons of Tyndareus?

He chose to leave, but now he has been reduced to a man passively lamenting his helplessness.

Numerous points of contact prove poem 2.26a to be in a dialogue with 1.17 characterized by inversion. There is, of course, the broad similarity in the poems’ dramatic situations; both 2.26a and 1.17 narrate the effects of shipwrecks, and male speakers lament their relationships with their beloveds. The crucial difference is in the poems’ structure: Propertius is shipwrecked in 1.17 whereas the beloved drowns in 2.26a. It is, however, the smallest of details that convey that the *puella* of 2.26a to some extent mirrors Propertius in 1.17. The first two couplets set up the inversion. The word *fracta carina* appears in 2.26a.1; the *carinam* appears 1.17.3. Propertius talks to the seagulls in 1.17.2; the beloved likewise speaks (*fateri*, 2.26a.3) the lies she told Propertius. Later on in each poem, it becomes clear that both Propertius and the *puella* set out to sea to escape their harsh treatment at home. In 1.17.15-8, Propertius berates himself for getting himself stranded on a foreign shore:

nonne fuit leuius dominae peruincere mores  
    (quamuis dura, tamen rara puella fuit)  
quam sic ignotis circumdata litora siluis  
    cernere et optatos quaerere Tyndaridas? (1.17.15-8)

Was it not less onerous to overcome the habits of my mistress (although harsh, my girl was nevertheless one-of-a-kind) than to make out the shores surrounded by unknown forests, as I am now, and to beg for the welcome sons of Tyndareus?

Propertius sailed away to escape his harsh girl (*dura...puella*, 1.17.16). I argue that the *puella* escapes for the same reason in 2.26a. Propertius compares his beloved to Helle with her hair weighed down by the water (2.26a.4-6). In myth, Helle and her brother Phrixus escaped the harsh treatment of their stepmother Ino with the help of the golden-fleeced ram, who took them across the sea. Along the way, Helle drowned in the Hellespont, but Phrixus made it safely to the land of King Aetes. Their wicked step-mother never saw them again. Propertius's comparison implies that his *puella* was escaping from harsh treatment; although – or because – Propertius omits the offender's name, it is tempting to assume that the *puella* was fleeing from him. The *puella* is in many ways the reflection of Propertius in 1.17.

Nowhere in poem 2.26, however, is this previous misfortune at sea referenced, especially one so similar. What could be the significance? I wish to make an approach to an interpretation of 2.26a that takes into account its intratextual relationship to 1.17. What if, for example, taking Freud's theory of interpretation, we assign the labels of manifest-text to 2.26a and latent-content to 1.17? What interpretation obtains? Could Propertius who abandoned his beloved, whose ship was wrecked, who was stranded on an unknown island, who prayed to his harsh mistress to stop her prayers against him – could Propertius later have the dream of 2.26a? The dream touches upon so many finer details of 1.17 that we might view these details as marks of real experience, or waking life, in the dream. Following Freud, what wish might this dream fulfill? On the one hand, the manifest-text's double-speak of pleasure and pain, which I discussed above, could

betray Propertius's wish to see his mistress suffer for her harshness (*dura...puella*, 1.17.16); on the other hand, his fear that she might die and his intended lover's leap may fulfill a desire to atone for his abandonment and reassert his fidelity to her. Such explanations are, however, superficial and unsatisfying. Unlike a patient who may be analyzed in the context of the analyst/analysand relationship, the Propertian speaker may not be set down on the couch and listened to, so to speak.

The problem with taking poem 1.17 as the 'waking life' or latent-content informing poem 2.26a is that it presupposes that Propertius of poem 2.26a is the same speaker who experienced shipwreck himself in 1.17. Propertius of Propertius's second book of elegies adopts the persona of the author of Propertius Book I. In elegy 2.1, he begins by engaging his reading public:

QUAERITIS unde mihi totiens scribantur amores,  
unde meus ueniat mollis in ore liber.  
non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo:  
ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit. (2.1.1-4)

You all ask from whence come to me the loves that are so often written, from whence the soft book arrives in my mouth.

Propertius addresses a plural audience. Although Propertius addresses his patron Maecenas after line 17, he makes no mention of him until the prefatory lines 1-16 are completed and he begins his elegiac *recusatio* of epic. The opening *quaeritis* refers to the readers whose eyes have seen and listeners whose ears have heard the earlier elegies of Propertius. The *amores* of line one are Propertius's previous love poems; I will assume that these *amores* to refer to Book I. In fact, Propertius asserts that he is the author of Propertius Book I by making an immediate allusion to his earlier poem 1.2. When he writes '*siue illam Cois fulgentem incedere cerno, / totum de Coa ueste uolumen erit*' ('If I notice that shining girl march in Coan silks, the entire volume will be of Coan cloth,' 2.1.5-6), he recalls the tantalizing picture of the *puella* offered to the reader in 1.2:

*Quid iuuat ornato procedere, uita, capillo / et tenues Coa ueste mouere sinus* ('What does it serve to appear, my life, with hair adorned and to stir the curves soft from<sup>31</sup> Coan cloth' 1.2.1-2). While Propertius fashions the same image of his mistress, striding in luxurious silks, the poetic situations differ strikingly. Whereas Propertius in 1.2 addresses his beloved, in 2.1 he addresses his readers who have already read about and enjoyed the beautiful girl of poem 1.2. He writes Book II for those already familiar with his erotic verses and tales of Cynthia.

As I argued in Section 2, Propertius writes 2.26 with a focus on metapoetics throughout, just as in poem 2.1; because he assumes not only the role of a man who loves a woman but also a poet who writes love poetry about a *puella* who is his instrument, our attempt to find the 'waking life' or 'real experience' of the author in poem 1.17 becomes quite complicated. In 2.26, the poet treats his girlfriend as a symbol for his poetic instrument; he fantasizes about making himself and his beloved the starring couple of an erotic fiction; he throws away his body and his place in the underworld for poetic immortality. How can Propertius, who posed as the author of the *Monobiblos* in Propertius 2.1, be the same speaker who was shipwrecked in elegy 1.17? For this to be the case, we must assume that Propertius of the *Monobiblos* actually experienced the events that he wrote about<sup>32</sup>, and that Propertius of Book 2 is the same as Propertius of Book 1.

If we accept these premises, then a possible explanation is that Propertius has had something of a Freudian anxiety dream. As I discussed in Section 1, Freud writes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* about the puzzling dreams of war veterans which do not seem to fulfill a wish, but rather repeat a real-life trauma. He judged that the function of these dreams was to confer mastery over the frightening stimulus to the dreamer. In poem 2.26, however, Propertius does not revisit his own shipwreck, but sees his lover shipwrecked. Freud does not discuss such a

---

<sup>31</sup> Heyworth (2009): 12. *Coa ueste* is perhaps an ablative of material.

<sup>32</sup> In other words, we readers buy into the 'reality effect' of the elegies: see Kennedy 1992: 1-23.

redirection or inversion of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, yet could this dream perform the same function? Propertius repeats the shipwreck, but the death no longer faces him but threatens his lover. This is not the old trauma, but a new one. In poem 1.17, he took an active role by abandoning his mistress Cynthia, but the shipwreck left him passive and helpless on the shore: ‘all my vows fall on the ungrateful shore’ (*omniaque ingrato litore vota cadunt*, 1.17.4). The *puella* of 1.17 may certainly deserve to be punished: he fled from her because she was *dura* (‘harsh,’ 1.17.16), and he believes her to be praying for the winds not to let him leave the lonely island as he commands her to change her savage complaints against him for the better (*tu tamen in melius saeuas conuerte querelas*, 9). In his dream in 2.26a, he gains a sort of mastery over his girl. He gazes upon her as she drowns and passively watches her instead of actively attempting to save her. What is more, he is punished by his own dream, which makes him confront the possibility of the *puella*’s death, which entails the death of his mistress and the end of his poetry. Flaschenriem (2010) argues that the *puella*’s death offers Propertius the possibility of commemorating her; making this argument, however, she fails to recognize that Propertius cannot make poetry without her. Just as Arion could not be a lyric poet without his lyre, so too Propertius cannot write poems without his beloved, for his instrument would be lost in the sea. The dream makes him confront the possibility of the end of his own life as a poet.

##### 5. Self-Knowledge Gained from Interpretation

The conclusion that 2.26 is an anxiety dream is intriguing, and helps us see that the loss of Propertius’ *puella* spells his own death as a poet. As a conclusion, I will interrogate the interpretive sleight-of-hand that has allowed us to proceed with a dream analysis. We termed the previous poems in the corpus the ‘waking life’ from which the dream’s manifest content was

fashioned. What are the assumptions that have allowed us to think in this way about the speaker's life, and in turn, what can these assumptions teach us about how we read and think about the world we live in? Propertius neither interprets the dream for us nor makes it obvious how it is connected to the rest of his poem;<sup>33</sup> he leaves this task up to the reader. Seen in this way, I take Propertius 2.26 as an invitation to interpret the dream. Along the path of interpreting, the reader necessarily confronts the distinction between literature and the life outside of it. In turn, by reflecting on how he reads and interprets, the reader of 2.26 can embrace himself more fully as a Lacanian subject by putting down the gaze.

### *The Poet, the Speaker*

As I said at the beginning of Section 4, the speaker's waking life is the poet's written life. What I did not make explicit then, I will now: the speaker of the poem is not to be identified necessarily with the poet. Such a disclaimer is inscribed on all written material: the existence of writing implies 'someone made me.' The poet is the creator who exists outside of the poem; the speaker is a character created by the poet who lives only within the fictional world. As a result, 2.26 is not the poet's anxiety dream, but the speaker's.

Within this framework, Latin love elegy emerges as a type of masquerade: the speaker is himself a poet, as in poem 2.26, but he is a fictional character in a fictional world. A poet in the real-world creates a look-alike, fictional poet in a fictional world. The elegist Ovid is quite explicit about his craft: his love poetry does not come from his life, and much of its content is made up. The poet was relegated by Augustus to Tomis on the Black Sea in 8 AD on the basis of an unnamed *carmen*, 'poem,' and an *error*, 'mistake,' which was probably political.<sup>34</sup> Writing

---

<sup>33</sup> Hence the consternation over the unity of Propertius 2.26

<sup>34</sup> For an overview of the evidence for and major arguments about Ovid's exile, see Volk 2010: 30-2.

from exile to Augustus in the *Tristia*, Ovid declares that his poetry is fictional and does not reflect his own mind or habits.

crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostro  
(uita uerecunda est, Musa iocosa mea)  
magna pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum;  
plus sibi permisit compositore suo.  
nec liber indicium est animi, sed honesta uoluntas (*Tr.* 2.353-7)

Believe me, my habits stand apart from my poem (my life is modest, but my Muse is full of jokes). A large part of my work tells lies and is made-up; it permits more for itself than for its writer. Nor is a book proof of the author's mind, but his reputable goodwill is.

Ovid argues that he should not suffer censorship and exile because he is not guilty of the things he wrote about. He tells us point-blank that we cannot read his poetry autobiographically: 'a large part of my works is lying and made-up.' This disclaimer shows that Ovid imagines that people have read his first-person love poems as a window into his own life and real experience, although whether or not readers actually read autobiographically we cannot be sure. Ovid, however, explicitly denies the reader such an interpretation. According to his word, his poems tell us nothing about his life except that he is a writer and spinner of tales. If, however, we take him to be joking now, we assume that his *Amores* represent his real habits. Is he joking here or telling the truth?

### *Reality*

Just like Ovid, so too Propertius made up stories and posed as the author of elegies. As I showed in Sections 3 and 4, he presents himself as an author in poems 2.26 and 2.1. If we know that the dream in poem 2.26 is fiction, then why do we seek a psychoanalytic explanation for it? If psychoanalysis is aimed to tell us about the human mind, and the speaker who suffers this dream does not have a real human mind but one made up by a poet, then why use psychoanalysis

at all? Psychoanalytic criticism is often discredited because the unconscious mind of a character is not *real*. We invoke reality when we discuss things existing outside of language. For example, mathematical realism is the belief that numbers and their operations exist outside of language and the human mind as universal truths. '1+1=2' is true always and everywhere, and it exists outside of language and the human mind. It is a deduced truth.

We often think of the human mind, the *animus*, in such a way; some part of our minds exists outside of language, and words cannot express it. Many people are comfortable assuming this about themselves: we might think of the soul, for instance. This comfort, however, turns to uncertainty and unease when we deal with fictional characters. One critic, for example, lampooned Erossini Spentzou's 2003 monograph for positing the existence of 'a literary heroine's character independent of the author's fiction' (Lingenberg 2004). Certainly these characters are bound to the language that we use to produce them and their world in our imagination; how, though, is this any different from the people in our own lives? My father, for example, exists: he has a body, he talks like me, he thinks somewhat like me. He lives in my world; why should he not be real like me? I bestow upon him reality. So too with my dog; so too with the tree in my front yard. I perceive them, I interact with them, and they do not contradict the rules I have gathered about how the world works. I can grant them reality because I can grant them a place in my world.

Literary characters, however, do not quite mesh with our reality. They might look and act like us, but their universe is fictive, made up. They live in literary worlds, not ours; however, why can we not treat them as if they lived in ours? If a character in a story drops a hammer, we assume and understand that gravity is operative. If a character suffers a fever, we assume and

understand that his body is fighting off infection.<sup>35</sup> Why not assume and understand the same for dreams? Psychoanalytic criticism allows us to understand the represented lives of our characters just as we understand our own represented lives.

### *Putting Down the Gaze*

Propertius 2.26 is an overture to interpretation. The speaker has a dream, and though he does not explain it for us, there are enough clues scattered throughout his text for us to reach some meaning. We think about our own dreams so much that the fictional dream is an irresistible lure to enter the poetic landscape. The poem invites us to enter Propertius's text, to rearrange the pieces of the puzzle, and to interpret the dream. But what is the danger of entering the poetic world? What is the price that we pay? As I showed in Section 1, Lacan teaches that paintings allow us the chance to put down the gaze like our weapons before it. He argues that there is always some point in a painting that we are both invited and expected to occupy. We orient ourselves in the painting with respect to this point, and from this point we begin to take in and comprehend the objects of the painting. Although this space in the painting is offered to us, we do not have to imagine ourselves in it; we can resist imagining ourselves in it. Recall the child when he looks into the mirror. She sees her body in the mirror and identifies with her: she imagines himself occupying the position of the child in the mirror.

It is easy to enter the world of representation – the world in a painting, in a literary work, in a mirror – precisely because the line between the realms of 'reality' and 'representation' is indistinct and lacks all definition. Represented characters seem to interact with us: the man in the mirror looks into my eyes, meets my gaze as if he had a will of his own. Similarly, Lacan says

---

<sup>35</sup> On the 'partial existence' of microbes and whether or not they existed before Pasteur 'discovered' them Latour 2000: 247-269.

that when looking at a painting we always look first for the characters who gaze at us and at people or objects in their represented world (Scott 1990: 159-60). It is easy to think that the world of representation interacts with our reality, but it does not, at least not in the way that it appears to. The girl in the mirror is not looking out at the girl looking in; she is only a representation, a mirror image.

What happens if the girl in front of the mirror does not take up the position inside the mirror? What if the man in front of the painting does not take up the point in the painting he is expected to occupy? The girl would become aware that she is both the subject who sees and the object who is seen; the man would become aware that he is separate from the represented world of the painting, and that he is the subject looking in, and he is the one imagining that the character in the painting is looking at him. This girl and this man would be pacified, for they would affirm for themselves their position as subjects who see and objects who are seen, but they would not despair that they were split. They would not try to enter the painting or the mirror and become the object; they would leave the mirror and the painting more aware of their double nature and more at peace with it. They would have put down the gaze.

Viewed in this light, Propertius 2.26 offers us the opportunity to enter the dream and Propertius's poetry, but ultimately to leave it behind. In Section 2, we picked up the gaze by looking at the *puella* with Propertius, and finally looking at him before the dream ended. In Section 3, we realized more fully how Propertius saw his *puella*, his poetic instrument as much as his lover. Finally in Section 4 we took the plunge into his poetic universe by interpreting the dream for ourselves, treating it as if it were a dream that happened in our world. We momentarily confused his world of representation for our world of reality; but the confusion was necessary, for we always interpret literature as we interpret our own lives. Having identified similarities

between 1.17 and made conclusions about the function of this dream as an anxiety dream, I have taken us hook line and sinker into this dream and the poetry it sprang from.

This is the moment to extricate ourselves from the fiction. Now that I have led us through the world of the poem, I will take us outside of it. In Section 4, I argued that Propertius suffered a kind of anxiety dream, repeating the trauma of his earlier shipwreck. In the present section, I have brought the caveat that the speaker is fictional to the foreground. The speaker is a character made up by Propertius. I argue now that if we recognize our position as readers in a world outside of the poem, we can more fully enjoy its fiction. As I demonstrated in Section 4, Propertius invites us into his poetic world by encouraging us to interpret his dream. He is not a hostile captor who holds us hostage in his world. He allows us to leave. I argue that by understanding our position as interpreters who live outside of the poetic world we study, we begin to understand our identity as subjects looking into a represented, fictional world. With this knowledge, the reader can embrace his position in the real world. It still remains to examine whether or not we understand the real world in the same way as the Romans. In particular, how the language of reality affects our understanding of poetic voice must be explored further. I will explore this issue as it relates to a poem of Sulpicia in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: Says Who? Attributing the Voice in Sulpicia 3.13

‘Finally, love has come’: these are the first words of [Tib.] 3.13, the first poem in a small collection of epigrams thought to be written by the Roman poet Sulpicia. In this poem, Sulpicia equates the acts of making her love affair public and publishing her love-poem with the act of exposing her naked body for anyone to see. The baited and expectant reader, however, is denied her: he sees only a text in front of him – no woman awaits us beneath these words. He gets what he is promised – love poems, love stories made of paper and words – and nothing more.

Sulpicia’s small corpus of six poems is taken by most scholars as the lone female-authored literary voice of ancient Rome. A large part of these epigrams’ appeal is that they preserve a woman’s voice from a time and culture where male voices dominated public life and literary production. Six poems have kept alive for us the hope of finding the real Roman woman. As we saw in Chapter 1, an author such as Propertius does not give us a view of what a woman’s life or thoughts were like: the *puella* is just as much Propertius’s instrument and a figment of his imagination as she is his lover. The mistress of elegy is fashioned and fictive. Sulpicia, on the other hand, is self-fashioned; she makes her own representation. She is both a written woman and a writing woman, a woman who writes herself in her own voice: Keith titled her 1997 article “*Tandem Venit Amor: A Roman Woman Speaks of Love.*” Introducing Keith’s article, Skinner writes, ‘Keith advances the growing perception of Sulpicia as an original and unique voice in Latin literature’ (1997: 23). But whose is Sulpicia’s voice? Is it the author’s voice, or the voice of her poetic persona? To whom are we listening when we read Sulpicia’s poems?

If we want to listen to these poems, we must first question what exactly we mean by a poem’s voice. A voice always issues forth from a speaker. When Skinner calls Sulpicia ‘an

original and unique voice,' she makes our ears perk up. We listen to voices, so when Skinner calls Sulpicia a voice, we might imagine listening to her. I fear, however, that if we think about 'reading Sulpicia's poetry' as 'listening to Sulpicia,' we may act as if we can listen to her like a more contemporary author. We can hear our near contemporary authors' voices, even if we do not know them, and even if they are dead. But ancient readers had no such ability; the author's voice, I argue, was a much more textual phenomenon.

In this chapter, I want to interrogate an important contributing factor to our present-day assumptions about poetic voice: the ability to record it. In our time, people can record sound, play these recorded sounds back, and distribute these recordings. Inherent to the contemporary voice is the possibility of its capture and objectification. Voice no longer has to be heard 'live' to be heard at all; one need not be in the speaker's presence to hear his voice.<sup>36</sup> As a result, recording technology has changed connection between reader and author. Time and space have always necessarily separated the two; however, radio, television, and recordings have changed this distance. Many authors now read and record their own works in order to reach a broader audience. As a result, I argue that the reader who hears this recording or broadcast might imagine himself to be somewhat closer to the author than if he had not listened. My rationale for this belief is that the voice is always connected to a body. As the writer John Barth wrote, 'Where there's a voice there's a speaker.'<sup>37</sup> When we hear someone's voice, we think of the person speaking. In some way, we are in his presence. The broadcasting of an author's voice, then, makes it possible to have a kind of presence with an author, and in possessing a recording of an

---

<sup>36</sup> Consider the popularity of 'live recordings.' There is something about the live voice, the unedited voice, that entralls us; yet we still record it so we can replay it and listen to it over and over again. It is no longer live, but we prize it because it was once.

<sup>37</sup> From his story "Autobiography" in *Lost in the Funhouse*. I recommend this collection to any reader who wishes to appreciate the complications of the literary voice.

author's voice we have his voice made into an object. We possess something of the author; we approach her.

This possibility of recording and the ability to capture and replay an author's voice does not exist in ancient poetry, and I believe that a comparative study between a contemporary author and an ancient author would be instructive. In order to answer the question, 'whose voice is Sulpicia's?', I suggest that we first examine the case of a modern author whose voice we have reading her own work. David Wray has shown the fruitfulness of such a comparative approach for understanding ancient poetics in his 2001 book *Catullus and the Poetics of Roman Manhood*.<sup>38</sup> Wray believes that scholars have undervalued Catullus because his poetics does not meet their Romantic and modernist aesthetic expectations. Catullus 101, the famous lament for the poet's dead brother, sits ill at ease with many such scholars. The poem's opening lines playfully allude to the beginning of the *Odyssey*; Catullus's wit undercuts his sorrow and the poem's deep pathos. But, Wray argues, if we read Catullus as we would a postmodern poet, his work seems exemplary. Wray analyzes the style of the poet Louis Zukofsky and finds close parallels in Catullus's style. If we study our own understanding of what poetry is and should be before we study ancient poetry, we will approach ancient poetry with a keener eye.

In this chapter, I will study Sulpicia 3.13 side by side with Sylvia Plath's "Lady Lazarus." Poem 3.13 features heavy metapoetic play and metaphorically reveals Sulpicia's body to the reader. I have chosen "Lady Lazarus" because Plath uses similar imagery and metapoetics, but she also read her poem on the BBC and her recording has subsequently been released. Plath's voice is accessible to her readers in a way that Sulpicia's was not. I will first examine the case of Plath's "Lady Lazarus," analyzing how the speaker offers the reader glimpses of her body and equates herself with her poetry. I then argue that the manner in which this poem was 'published'

---

<sup>38</sup> I discuss here his chapter "A Postmodern Catullus?" pp. 36-63.

and the survival of her recording adds immediacy to “Lady Lazarus” and intensifies the contact between poet and reader. After analyzing Plath’s poetics, I turn to Sulpicia’s. Sulpicia offers her body to her readers in a way similar to Plath’s; however, her mode of publication was very different from Plath’s, as no audio could circulate with her text. Whereas Plath’s voice has been preserved and the sound of “Lady Lazarus” has become static and canonized, Sulpicia perhaps read her poetry to a group of people to whom she was connected. Her ‘voice’ was largely a textual phenomenon, a reimagining of her voice in her readers’ minds and in the mouths of professional readers. Sulpicia’s voice, I conclude, was never as important to her poetry as Plath’s. It is not Sulpicia’s voice that we hear, but the work’s voice. I conclude by examining how Sulpicia encourages us to take her voice and her poem as our own. If we view these poems only as an instance when “A Roman Woman Speaks of Love” (Keith 1997), we neglect that her voice comes from her work and that she gives it to the reader to take up as his own.

### 1. The Work’s Voice

In order to argue that Sulpicia’s voice is not hers but her work’s, I draw from Maurice Blanchot’s 1955 theoretical work *The Space of Literature* to refine the definition of the literary voice. As Blanchot explains, the author is dead once the work exists; the author as well as the literary voice is imagined by the reader. I lay out how the reader attributes the voice variously according to his own predilections and the genre of the work. For example, some poems have voices that are attributed to the author, whereas some have voices attributed to an object or to the reader. When analyzing Sylvia Plath’s poem, I argue that the work’s voice has become associated with Sylvia Plath’s voice because of her radio broadcasts and recordings that have been available to readers. Sulpicia’s poetry, I will argue, is different. Because neither ancient nor

contemporary readers had access to audio of Sulpicia's voice, it is even more clear that the voice we imagine in the poem's is our creation, not her voice. Moreover, I will argue that Sulpicia manipulates the work's voice giving her first-person voice to us so that we can share her loves and speak from the position of one to whom love has finally come. She attributes the work's voice to herself and offers it to her readers. But the voice is never the historical Sulpicia's, but always the work's.

For Maurice Blanchot, there is a fundamental distinction between the 'work' and the 'book.'<sup>39</sup> The author writes books, and these books belong to him; but the author belongs to the work. The work is his unceasing labor that he imagines himself writing. The work is propelled by the author's desire to grasp and describe something essential: perhaps an idea or belief he can never fully express, perhaps his inspiration, perhaps his vision of 'reality.' The author is always trying to express this essential something, and his efforts to do so result in his work. His work, however, is never complete because he cannot express this idea. All he ends up writing are books, that never express his work totally; and he writes more and more books, trying but failing to write the work.

The work, however, does come into being. Blanchot gives several accounts of when the work finally exists. His first explanation is that the work exists when the reader enters into the equation and says that the work exists. When the reader pronounces the work's being, he comes into contact with the author through the work. Blanchot's second explanation is that the work comes into being when the author dies. At the moment of his death, the author's work ceases and is finished. These two accounts express the same idea: the author is dead once the work exists, for the reader constructs the work.

---

<sup>39</sup> For the ideas I discuss in this subsection, see Blanchot 1982: 21-3, 198-204.

The reader is tantamount to the work's identity. 'The reading of a poem is the poem itself, affirming itself in the reading as a work' (Blanchot 1982: 198). The reader does not create a work but affirms it. He believes that the work is a work without him, but nothing could be farther from the truth. In the realization of the work through the act of reading, the work becomes a dialogue between the author and the reader and between writing and reading. If the author is dead as soon as the work exists, then how can reader and author come into being? The author believes that he shelters the reader and writes with the reader in mind; the author internalizes the reader and, as a result, writes from the position of the reader. But how does the reader encounter the author in the work? Blanchot quips that '[the reader] is close to the work to the degree that he recognizes it as a work regardless of him[self]' (201). When he considers and reads the work without a thought towards its maker or its creation, he gets closer to the work than the author ever does. The author, after all, cannot see the work without also seeing himself.

The reader, however, considers the work not divorced from its moment of creation but rather always holds its genesis in mind. He considers how the work came to be, and how the author wrote it. An example of this kind of questioning is the importance assigned to discovering or guessing at authorial intention. The critical reader who questions the work for these answers

becomes an author in reverse. The true reader does not rewrite the book, but he is apt to return, drawn by an imperceptible pull, toward the various prefigurations of the reader which have caused him to be present in advance at the hazardous experience of the book. (Blanchot 1982: 203)

The author writes from the position of the reader. As Blanchot makes clear, the critical reader reacts to the presence of the reader inscribed in the text and imagines how the text came to be that way.

I now suggest that the reader's experience of the literary work's voice – the one in a confessional poem he would attribute to the author, the one in a riddle he would attribute to a

speaking object, or the one in an epic he would attribute to the narrating author – is a reaction to the imagination of the author who wrote the text. He knows that the text in front of him was written by someone else; but whose voice is it? It is an attribution made without thinking; the clever author is one who exposes this attribution and manipulates it.

Shifting the emphasis from the speaker to the reader, we can say that the work's voice is always also the reader's voice. No matter whom the reader assigns the voice, it is his also because he reads the work in his mouth's or mind's voice. The story of Acontius and Cydippe sets an ancient precedent for this double determination of the voice. As Callimachus tells the story in fragments 67 and 75, the beautiful boy Acontius fell in love with the gorgeous girl Cydippe. Acontius then devised a plan to bind Cydippe to him in marriage by tricking her into swearing an oath. He wrote on an apple 'I swear by Artemis to marry Acontius' and threw it to Cydippe's nurse. The nurse, being illiterate, handed the apple to Cydippe to read aloud. In *Heroides* 21, Cydippe's letter replying to Acontius, she recounts the incident as follows:

mittitur ante pedes malum cum carmine tali –  
ei mihi, iuravi nunc quoque paene tibi!  
sustulit hoc nutrix mirataque 'perlege' dixit:  
insidias legi, magne poeta, tuas. (*Her.* 21. 107-10)

An apple is sent before our feet with such a poem – woe is me, even now I nearly swore to you! My nurse picked this apple up and marveling she said 'read it through': great poet, I read your treacherous devices.

About to repeat the apple's oath, Cydippe catches her near mistake and saves herself from swearing again. Acontius wrote the oath in the first-person so that Cydippe would become the apple's speaker. Cydippe writes that they are 'your words' (*tua uerba*, *Her.* 21.121), but she is their speaker and swears herself by them. The words are his, but the voice is hers. His ability to manipulate his reader with the work's voice is what makes Acontius a 'great poet' (*magne poeta*,

*Her.* 21.110). Cydippe imagines the voice, but she cannot attribute it to anyone but herself. The apple's voice is her voice.

Viewed in this light, the work's voice is a construction. From the words of a book, we imagine someone speaking them to us, whether it is a fictional speaker, human or object, or the text's author. Both speaker and author, however, are characters imagined by the reader. They are enabling fictions that we use in order to interpret literature. We imagine, correctly, that texts have been written by someone; but as we read, I argue, the voice that we hear in our heads we attribute to a character. The mental voice is ours, but we attribute it to someone else. Ultimately, this voice derives not from a character, whether author or speaker, but from the work that we imagine it belongs to. The voice is not the author's or the speaker's, but originates from the way that we make sense of what we read: we imagine that we are reading the words of another, and so the other is speaking to us. In the discussions of Plath and Sulpicia to follow, we will see the advantage of treating the literary voice as belonging to the work instead of to the author or speaker.

## 2. The Importance of Voice in "Lady Lazarus"

Sylvia Plath is one of the more widely recognized names in American twentieth-century poetry. She is well-known for her marriage to Ted Hughes, the British poet, her suicide attempts, her novel *The Bell Jar*, her suicide on February 11, 1963, and her posthumously published poetry collection, *Ariel*. The *Ariel* poems are remarkable for their terse style, their premium placed on sound, their grotesque imagery ("The Cut"), and their treatment of Plath's personal life ("Lady Lazarus," "Daddy"). Because they were published after Plath's suicide, their shocking content was read all too often as straight autobiography: the outpourings of a mad woman, left by her

cheating husband to raise their two children alone. It is impossible to read her poems and not consider the suicide that followed them.

Frieda Hughes was so frustrated by the reception of her mother's work and her life story that she released a new edition of *Ariel* in which she reinstated Plath's intended own ordering of her poems. In the introduction, Hughes discusses how critics and readers repossessed and refashioned her mother:

...the point of anguish at which my mother killed herself was taken over by strangers, possessed and reshaped by them. The collection of *Ariel* poems became symbolic to me of this possession of my mother and of the wider vilification of my father. It was as if the clay from her poetic energy was taken up and versions of my mother made out of it, invented to reflect only the inventors, as if they could possess my real, actual mother, now a woman who had ceased to resemble herself in those other minds. (Hughes 2004: xvii)

As Hughes puts it, both Plath's 'point of anguish' and 'poetic energy' created clay for anyone to fashion as he would. In turn, by creating impressions and likenesses with this clay, critics think that they have made Plath as she really was – or rather, faithfully represented her. Yet all Plath left behind was a manuscript, and to try to possess the 'real, actual mother' from her poems is a fantasy. In an interview and reading on 30 October 1962 with Peter Orr of the BBC, Plath stated that she thinks her poems come from her own experiences, but that poets manipulate these feelings and experiences as they spin them into poetry.<sup>40</sup> Her poems are not windows looking onto her personal life, but are molded from it. If we read her poems in order to discover her life, all that results is our own fiction about Plath; we learn about 'Plath,' not Plath. 'Plath' is the construction we make of the author. It is a necessary fiction, an enabling one that lets us make sense of what we read.

---

<sup>40</sup> This full recording is available as *Plath Reads Plath*, published by Credo Records in 1975. It was released on both cassette tape and vinyl.

“Lady Lazarus” is a poem that is frequently read autobiographically; however, such a reading is only one possible way to consider the poem.<sup>41</sup> The metapoetic *topoi* that Plath includes, such as calling herself an ‘opus,’ encourage us to focus on the work and speaker as a poetic text. However, the recording that Plath made of this poem means that for those who hear it, Lady Lazarus’s voice is, in some way, Plath’s voice. Because of this recording, we might feel an inclination or desire to read this poem autobiographically, listening to Plath the woman, instead of metapoetically, listening to the work’s voice.

*“Lady Lazarus”*

“Lady Lazarus” is one of Plath’s most well-known poems. Writing as the eponymous speaker Lady Lazarus, she talks about her reintroduction to the public world after her attempts at suicide.

The peanut-crunching crowd  
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot—  
The big strip tease.  
Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands  
My knees.  
I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman. (“Lady Lazarus,” 26-34)

---

<sup>41</sup> For an overview of the trends in interpreting Plath’s poetry and fiction, see Brennan 1999. The poem has been read autobiographically as an indicator of Plath’s impending suicide and demonstration of her inability to distance herself from her emotions with her art (Alvarez 1970). This poem makes the personal and the private public (Narbeshuber 2004); seen in another light, the figures of the psychoanalyst/doctor (‘Herr Doktor’ in the poem) coerces the speaker to reveal and expose her private life (Nelson 2006). The poem presents a self with the possibility for self-transformation and metamorphosis, but in a cyclical fashion, always returning to its starting point (Annas 1988: 95-167). The speaker is fragmented; however, each part signifies her wholeness by synecdoche. The violence involved in this procedure – e.g., a bit of blood signifies Lady Lazarus – enacts the violence of the Holocaust to which the poem alludes (Kenison 2007: 147-153). The paper imagery demonstrates how the speaker has become flat, lifeless, and devoid of reality (Annas 1988: 86-9).

The speaker here assumes the persona of a carnival entertainer or magician, removing the curtain with a flourish at the end of her magic trick: behold, her own, animate flesh: hands and knees, skin and bones. Plath invites her readers to identify with the crowd gazing upon the speaker; by directly addressing the gentlemen and ladies in the crowd, she simultaneously addresses the men and women reading her poem. The speaker then gestures to her hands and her knees, and we imagine the body of a reassembled woman. Here, however, we should push the poem and recognize the play Plath is engaging in: what I see with my mind's eye – a woman's body – is quite different from what I see with my eyes – a white sheet of paper printed with black ink. The three-dimensional woman she shows me is very different from the lifeless page in front of me. By gesturing towards and, indeed, showing off her hands and knees, the speaker erodes her own veracity; for the speaker's gesture is, fundamentally, empty: I see no hands, no knees, but only physical text.

The speaker continues her striptease, but instead of merely letting us look at her body, she offers us pieces of it to touch or hear or keep for ourselves. The smaller the distance between speaker/object and viewer, the higher the running price.

There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge

For the hearing of my heart—

It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge

For a word or a touch

Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my clothes. ("Lady Lazarus," 57-64)

The speaker's audience wants to hold bits of the speaker's body or her possessions. What seems especially interesting here is that the speaker associates a word with a touch or blood – the word

is associated with physical touch or body fluid; the speaker's word originates in her body and is rooted in it; her word is an extension of her body; her word is metonymy for her body.

Possessing a word seems to mean possessing the body.

Our study of Plath's striptease in "Lady Lazarus" can inform us as to techniques of literary revelation. Her strategy is to give us a glimpse of her grotesque body tainted with death. She gestures to her hands and knees (30-2) as we, the spectators, mindlessly enjoy her performance ("the peanut-crunching crowd," 26). Soon we are allowed to "eye" her scars and "hear" her heart (58-9) and can even touch and hold a part of her body or the clothes (61-4). By naming parts of her body, she seems to offer the reader, who is figured as a member of a crowd looking at her, a glimpse of her physical flesh. But as soon as the reader pushes this image, he realizes that he is merely gazing at a piece of paper decorated with words whose speaker promises more than her medium can give. This poem calls attention to itself as a text that can never give us the look at the woman that it promises. It is in this way that the text tricks and bests the reader, coyly promising a striptease it cannot offer; and the reader leaves the poem amazed at the literary sleight of hand that has been pulled on him.

In the building climax of the poem, the speaker's corporeality begins to break apart as her spirit frees itself from her body, both flesh and paper.

So, so, Herr Doktor.  
So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,  
I am your valuable,  
The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.  
I turn and burn. ("Lady Lazarus," 65-71)

It is at this point that the poem's conceit reveals itself in a glorious climax. 'Herr Doktor...Herr Enemy. I am your opus...' The speaker has fully revealed herself. She is the product of a resurrection, and a gruesome medical one at that. Herr Doktor, evoking the Nazis, has made her into his opus. Just as Nazis forced their will onto the bodies of their victims in medical experiments, so too has Herr Enemy done with the speaker whatever he likes. Her body is their opus; yet the 'opus' is simultaneously the poem that we read, the product and belonging of its maker, Sylvia Plath. This disconnect between appearance and reality – that "Lady Lazarus" does not ultimately present a woman's body to us but simply offers itself to our eyes as a physical/textual object – is brought to a point in the word 'opus.'

The speaker's parting lines seem to effect a metamorphosis of her body's ashes (70-72) after her cremation (66-8) into an airy spirit:

Herr God, Herr Lucifer  
Beware  
Beware.

Out of the ash  
I rise with my red hair  
And I eat men like air. ("Lady Lazarus," 80-5)

Just as the poem finishes and the speaker's voice disappears, the speaker's life continues on in the land of air. She can interact with the physical world, eating men just as she consumes the air that is now her medium. So too does the text end, black letters on the page seeming to fade away into the white space that lies beneath. Flesh-and-blood woman disappears along with textual woman, but both women, being constructions and imaginations of the reader, continue to live on in the insubstantial medium of memory and the air around us. Considered in this way, "Lady Lazarus" is an elegant meta-fiction that teaches us about how we create meaning as we read.

*The Importance of Plath's Voice to "Lady Lazarus"*

What we have not considered yet about "Lady Lazarus" is the connection between it and Sylvia Plath's own voice. According to Plath's journals, the poem was written during 23-29 October, 1962.<sup>42</sup> On October 30, Peter Orr from the British Council interviewed Plath and she read "Lady Lazarus" and several other poems that would be collected in the posthumously published *Ariel* (McCullough 1975) On December 14, Plath wrote to her mother telling her that she had finished a script for a broadcast for her new work on the BBC.<sup>43</sup> She wrote the following introductory remarks before introducing and reading eight of her poems: "...If they [these new poems] have anything else in common, perhaps it is that they are written for the ear, not the eye: they are poems written out loud" (Plath 2004: 195). These new poems were finally published by Ted Hughes in 1965 in London and in 1966 in the United States.

Considering this publication history as the 'life' of "Lady Lazarus," we can see how incredibly important not just voice but Sylvia Plath's voice is to the poem. "Lady Lazarus" was first heard, not read, by listeners tuned-in to the radio broadcast. Credo Records published this recording in 1975; a contemporary reader need only search for the poem on the Internet to hear Plath's voice and recording streaming on-line. After hearing Plath reading, it is impossible to forget the timbre, cadence, and confidence of her voice reciting "Lady Lazarus." When I now read "Lady Lazarus" silently to myself, I hear Plath's own voice in my own. When I read the poem aloud, I sometimes slip into imitating Plath's own pronunciation, lengthening the a's and dropping the r's, for example, in "large charge" at the poem's end. The author's voice is so intimately associated with "Lady Lazarus" that I am unable to forget it, and her reading has become my paradigm.

---

<sup>42</sup> Plath 2004: 208.

<sup>43</sup> Plath 2004: 195.

The survival of Sylvia Plath's recording of "Lady Lazarus" gives vigor to an autobiographical reading of the poem. The speaker of "Lady Lazarus" has the voice of Sylvia Plath. It is easy and natural to make an association between speaker and author in this poem, if not a logical jump that the author is the speaker. The speaker of the poem offers me the chance to see her body for a charge, and though I am denied this glimpse, I do come away with what seems to be a real bit of Sylvia Plath: her recorded voice. I will never see the speaker's body, but I do have her voice.

If we recall the formula from Section 1 – the work's voice is the reader's voice and the voice attributed by the reader to a speaker – then we can reach some interesting results about the voice of "Lady Lazarus" and the voice of Sylvia Plath. When I first read "Lady Lazarus," I attributed the voice to a female speaker whom I imagined to be like Plath. The voice was the speaker's, but only because I did not recognize it to be my own. I then, at a later date, heard Plath read the poem in the recording. Plath took the role of the speaker; the speaker's voice was hers. Listening to the recording, I had no role in creating the voice. Now when I read the poem, however, I have a hard time attributing the voice to any speaker. The voice is mine, for I am recreating and imitating Plath's voice; the voice is Plath's, for I can hear her voice when I read; but the voice is a speaker, for Plath is not the speaker. I can no longer attribute the voice to any one source: it is polytonic, a harmony of many voices. It is in the voice that the speaker, the author, and the reader meet. The voice, it would seem, does not belong to the reader after all; the voice belongs most to the work, where Blanchot says the reader and author meet. Not Plath's voice, not my voice, not the speaker's voice: the work's voice.

### 3. Metapoetic Play in Sulpicia 3.13

My motive in studying this voice of Sylvia Plath has been to demonstrate that the voice of a poem does not come from the author or some speaker or the reader, but from the work itself. Plath plays with the way that her poem's voice interacts with the physical text: the voice seems to come from a woman promising to show off her scars, but it is actually the work's voice, and the work is only able to show the reader the paper and ink that compose it. So too, I will argue, does the ancient poet Sulpicia play with voice. The work's voice seems to belong to a woman who will expose her body and her love life to her readers, but it is always the work's voice, playing with its own origin in its material medium of papyrus or wax. Scholars who talk about the Roman woman's voice in this poem both gloss over the voice's fictiveness and emphasize 'woman' where they should emphasize 'work.' Although this change in terminology obscures the author, it reasserts that we are reading words first and listening to authors second.

In this section, I will first give a précis on critical assessments of Sulpicia's poetry and the question of her poems' authorship. Second, I will examine how she places herself within her poetic tradition in her programmatic elegy [Tib.] 3.13. I then focus on her play with the materiality of her text and her covert allusion to weaving, arguing that she encourages the reader to look beyond her text for the woman he desires at the same time as the work can give nothing beyond voice and a material text.

#### *Who is Sulpicia?*

The critical appreciation for the epigrammatic elegies attributed to Sulpicia in the *Corpus Tibullianum* has undergone a large reevaluation. Kirby Flower Smith's commentary on Tibullus represents the autobiographical criticism dominant in early twentieth-century scholarship. He

presents us with the image of a young girl pouring forth her private feelings to an audience of one: "...with the possible exception of the first [elegy] (4, 7), which reads like an entry in her diary, these pieces are in the form of brief notes addressed to Cerinthus himself, and it seems evident that none of them was ever intended for publication" (Smith 1913: 79). She has "the gift of straightforward simplicity; and...she shows no trace of self-consciousness and no sign of affectation" (80). According to Smith, the pleasure of reading Sulpicia is that of eavesdropping into the private mind of a real woman.

A turn in scholarly opinion began with Santirocco's 1979 article, "Sulpicia Reconsidered," in which he argues that Sulpicia is writing literature, not simple autobiography. He demonstrated how Sulpicia described her events with literary interest (Santirocco 1979: 232), dealt with her public reputation as much as her private love (234-5), ordered her poems with narrative intent (235), and even gave her beloved a literary name, Cerinthus (236-7). Many articles have been written since that run in this vein. Sulpicia is now often read as a woman who writes both within and against her masculine genre as a specifically female subject.<sup>44</sup> However, only Milnor (2002) pays significant attention to Sulpicia's play with the corporeality of her text, the interplay between text and body, and the publication of her poetry. Much attention has been placed on Sulpicia's metaphorical striptease that she performs by publishing her *amor*. Instead of focusing on Sulpicia's body and emphasizing its presence, which Sulpicia alludes to, I insist instead on her absence from her text.

Sulpicia's poems have been transmitted to us in the *Corpus Tibullianum*, a collection of poems by unknown authors that are appended to the two books of Tibullus's elegies. Scholars disagree over whether a woman named Sulpicia wrote these poems or if she was a character made up by a man. Although these poems are no longer labeled as examples of 'feminine Latin'

---

<sup>44</sup> See Flaschenriem (1999); Keith (1997; 2006); Milnor (2002); Percy (2006); Roessel (1990).

from an unpracticed girl's hand,<sup>45</sup> Hubbard (2001; 2004-5) has recently argued that the poems were written as a dedication to Sulpicia by Tibullus on the occasion of her wedding. Scholars disagree even as to whether women were allowed access to or participated in the literary scene.<sup>46</sup> Many scholars, however, evaluate these poems as if they were written by a woman. I work in this study on the level of representation. I am not seeking to offer information about a 'real Sulpicia.' I study how the author of this poem plays with the idea of her voice and her poem's voice. The author is presented as a woman, so I will treat her as one.

### *Sulpicia's Literary Authority*

The programmatic elegy that Sulpicia writes to introduce her collection of poems reads as follows.

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,  
dicteur 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. (Sulpicia 3.13)

Finally love has come, a love of such a sort that it would shame me more to have covered it up than to have uncovered it for everyone. Cytherea, begged through my Muses, brought and set it in my embrace. Venus carried out her promises: if anyone is said not to have had his own delights, let him tell of mine. I would not wish to entrust anything to sealed wax tablets so that no one should read me before my love, but also it is pleasing to have sinned, and I loathe assuming a mask for reputation's sake: may I be said to be a worthy woman with a worthy man.

---

<sup>45</sup> As in O. F. Gruppe's 1838 study *Die römische Elegie*; for discussion, see Lowe 1988: 194-5.

<sup>46</sup> For the controversy, see Keith 2006: 5-8; although *Vita Vergilii* 32 does recount Octavia's presence at Vergil's reading of books of the *Aeneid* to Augustus.

The *amor* of line 1 is both the source of Sulpicia's love, the man whom Venus has brought to her, and her love poem that Venus has brought to her. The man whom, seduced by Sulpicia's love poems Venus drops into Sulpicia's embrace is also a love poem that is brought to her by the goddess of love. *Tandem uenit amor*, she says: the love-poem has finally come. Lee Pearcy (2006) argues that Sulpicia silences the man in her poem: his name is not mentioned, he does not speak, and he is referred to always as *amor* or *meus*. I strengthen Pearcey's argument by adding that her man is not even fully a man: he is also just her poem. Although Sulpicia leaves her lover unnamed in the poem, both earlier poems in the *Corpus Tibullianum* (3.9, 3.10, 3.11) and subsequent poems by Sulpicia (3.14, 3.17) give him the name Cerinthus. As Roessel (1990) has shown, this name was carefully chosen for its associations with bee-bread (κήρινος), which is both a honey substitute and a food for bee larvae, and wax (κηρός in Greek, *cera* in Latin), which was poured onto tablets to provide a medium for writing. He points out that when Venus brings Sulpicia an *amor* whose name is Cerinthus, Sulpicia plays with similarity of the sound between *cera* and *Cerinthus* to allude that Venus brought a wax-tablet, or *tabella*, into her lap (Roessel 1990: 248-9). Sulpicia equates her man with the material base of her poetry: she requires him to be able to write, but once she has him, she can manipulate him however she likes.

Sulpicia's metapoetic concern extends to the ways she imagines the circulation of her *amor* in both spoken and written communication. On the one hand, there are the spoken words of other people that make up the rumors about Sulpicia: *fama*, line 2, and *digna fuisse ferar*, line 10. Conversely, Sulpicia describes Venus as 'exorata meis...Camenis,' 'begged through my Camenae.' In one gesture Sulpicia imparts herself as a poet with a double authority. First, her love has come by the agency of the divine. It was not her own doing but Venus's that has brought this love about; Sulpicia prayed, but Venus responded. Second, Sulpicia writes herself as

a worthy, learned poet into the tradition of Greco-Roman poetry. Her poem alludes to Sappho 1, the famous<sup>47</sup> prayer to Aphrodite to change the heart of her unrequiting lover. Sulpicia's word *exorata* condenses Sappho's prayer into one word and cleverly alludes to Sappho's Venus.<sup>48</sup> Sulpicia prays to a goddess that she knows has responded before to a similar type of prayer; and because Venus carries out her wish, Sulpicia receives implicit confirmation that she has performed a prayer on par with Sappho's, and that therefore she herself is a great poet.

There is another layer of poetic allusion going on in this line. Sulpicia prayed to Venus 'through my Camenae' (*exorata meis...Camenis*). The Camenae were native Italian water-goddesses who were associated with song and poetry. Livius Andronicus, who translated the *Odyssey* into Latin, rendered Homer's Μοῦσα (*Od.* 1.1) as *Camena* (*Odusia* fr.1). The poet Ennius Hellenized Roman verse by introducing the dactylic hexameter and employing the word *poemata*, a transliteration from Greek, instead of *carmina* for 'poems' (Ross 2010: 147). Additionally, he preferred the name *Musa* over *Camena* and thereby declared his allegiance to Greek verse.<sup>49</sup> Horace, a poet contemporary to Sulpicia, pays significant homage to the *Camenae* in his *Odes*. He declares that he is 'yours, Camenae, yours' (*uester, Camenae, uester*, 3.4.21). Ross argues that the *Camenae* gather into one sign Italian heritage, Roman values, the translation of the Greek 'Muse' into Latin, and more generally the Greek influence on Latin verse (Ross 2010: 149). By praying through the Camenae, Sulpicia locates herself in this movement of writing specifically Roman verse. She is a Roman woman and Latin poet. Her prayer is not a translation or imitation of Sappho but an adaptation. Sulpicia draws on Sappho for authority and

---

<sup>47</sup> This poem was famous in antiquity, excerpted in its entirety by Dionysius of Halicarnassus to serve as an example of the polished style that he describes in chapter 23 of his essay 'On the Composition of Words' or 'On Literary Composition' (Περὶ Συνθέσεως Ὀνομάτων).

<sup>48</sup> For Sulpicia's use of *Cytherea* as a name for Venus that parallels Sappho's use, see Flaschenriem (1999: 40).

<sup>49</sup> See Hinds 1998: 52-63 for a discussion of the 'Hellenization' modern readers identify in shifting between *Camenae* and *Musae*.

implicitly compares herself to the Greek poet, but pointedly marks her difference from her model.

*The Sulpician Striptease and the Glimpse of Weaving*

Whereas Sulpicia compares herself favorably with Sappho, she sets herself apart from women of chastity. There are several euphemisms for sex. The line *attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum* ('[Cytheria] brought [him] and set it in my embrace,' 3.13.4) has a sexual overtone. More explicitly, the idiom *cum esse* in 3.13.10 means not only 'to be with,' but also 'to have sex with' (Miller 2002: 161). These two overt references to sex are foregrounded by an elegant description of the kind of love that has come to Sulpicia: 'a love of such a sort that it would shame me more to have covered it up than to have uncovered it for everyone' ('*qualem texisse pudori / quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis*,' 3.13.1-2). The perfect infinitive *nudasse* comes from the verb *nudo*, whose basic meaning is to make naked or uncover.<sup>50</sup> It is used most literally to describe the action of exposing or denuding some part of the body: for example, the *nudatum caput* ('his head made naked,' *Aen.* 12.312) of Aeneas when he addresses his frantic troops. By using *nudasse* in the metaphorical sense of revealing her love or publishing her love-poem, Sulpicia activates the image of stripping a body. She strengthens this sense of *nudasse* by contrasting it with *texisse*, which is often the verb used for the action of putting on clothing.<sup>51</sup> Sulpicia calls to mind the image of stripping her body with the phrase 'to uncover my love.'<sup>52</sup> This racy wordplay befits a woman without regard for the chastity she should keep.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> OLD s.v. *nudo* 1a.

<sup>51</sup> OLD s.v. *tego* 3

<sup>52</sup> Although she nominally denudes herself in 3.13.1-2, Flaschenriem argues that Sulpicia actually conceals herself and makes herself less conspicuous by the personal pronoun *mihi* on the two short syllables of a dactyl in the middle of the line (Flaschenriem 1999: 37). Her point is interesting, but I believe

Staying covered up, which Sulpicia refuses to do, is one of the characteristics of a chaste woman. Women conferred honor upon their husbands, fathers, and household by guarding their chastity; the paradigm of this woman in Roman literature is Lucretia, the wife of Collatinus. In Livy Book 1, the sons of the king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, and Collatinus have a contest among themselves to see whose wife is most virtuous. Whereas the group finds the king's sons' wives feasting, they then find Lucretia sitting in the middle of the house weaving with her maids.

Quo cum primis se intendentibus tenebris peruenissent, pergunt inde Collatiam, ubi Lucretiam haudquaquam ut regias nurus, quas in conuiuio lusuque cum aequalibus uiderant tempus terentes, sed nocte sera deditam lanae inter lucubrantes ancillas in medio aedium sedentem inueniunt. Muliebris certaminis laus penes Lucretiam fuit.... Ibi Sex. Tarquinius mala libido Lucretiae per uim stuprandae capit; cum forma tum spectata castitas incitat. (Livy 1.57)

After they had arrived there when the first dark was spreading, they proceed thenceforth to Collatia, where they find Lucretia not at all like the king's daughters-in-law, whom they had seen wasting time at a dinner party and in play with their companions, but given to the wool late at night among the slave-girls on the night shift, seated in the middle of the household. Among the vying women, the glory belonged to Lucretia. ...There (sc. later, at table) a wicked lust to rape Lucretia by force seizes Sextus Tarquinius; along with her beauty, the chastity that he saw earlier arouses him.

In this passage, there is a clear separation of men and women as well as their activities. The men, being the property owners, have the right to enter the house; yet they intrude upon the women working in the middle of the house. Lucretia's location illustrates woman's symbolic status as the household's center. She weaves wool, which is the quintessentially feminine task, and thereby proves her chastity.

Sextus Tarquinius, one of the king's sons, is violently seized (*capit*) by his lust for her, which flared up not only because of her beauty (*forma*) but also because of her proven purity (*tum spectata castitas*). Her purity, made manifest in her tireless weaving, is what incites the desire that seizes Tarquinius. Joshel argues that the chaste woman's beauty threatens men's

discipline; as such, the beautiful chaste woman must be killed so that men can remain steadfast (1992: 117-21). Lucretia is a threat to men's discipline; but why does her proven chastity stir up desire? Joplin, drawing on Girard's idea of mimetic desire, demonstrates that Lucretia's proven chastity represents her husband Collatinus's honor and the strength of his house. Tarquin, as Collatinus's rival, rapes Lucretia not because of sexual but political desire in order to penetrate, expose, and destroy Collatinus's excellence. His political violence has become eroticized and expressed in erotic violence (1990: 56-64).

By refusing to keep her chastity and to conceal her affair, Sulpicia rejects the model behavior of Lucretia and takes up instead the role of the king's sons' daughters who spent their time feasting and acting immodestly. Because Sulpicia participates in this discourse on chastity by discussing covering, she also activates the image of the chaste woman weaving. Given the connection between chastity and weaving, I believe it interesting and significant that Sulpicia chooses the word *texisse*, 'to have covered,' which sounds so similar to *texuisse*, 'to have woven.' Roessel has already shown how Sulpicia engages in word play, creating a web of relations between *cera*, *cura*, and *Cerinthus* in her poems (Roessel 1990: 248). Given her demonstrated affinity for sound, I believe we should plumb this particular wordplay for meaning rather than dismiss it as an instance of two words sounding alike. These two verbs, *tego* and *texo*, are quite important. The verb *tego* is common in the Tibullan corpus. The verb often is used with a roof that covers the head or a burial mound that covers one's bones.<sup>53</sup> This usage implies an enclosure for the safekeeping of something precious. The verb is also used to describe the action of covering an unkempt, shaggy body with a garment (*horrida uillosa corpora ueste tegant*, 2.3.76). In this case, what is to be covered is something that it is preferable to hide from sight. An author in the *Corpus Tibullianum* associates the word with deception: 'or if anyone rejects a

---

<sup>53</sup> See Tibullus 1.4.1 and 3.7.204, for example.

soft contest of wine, the beloved girl would deceive him with a hidden trick' (*aut si quis uini certamen mite recusat, / fallat eum tecto cara puella dolo*, 3.6.11-2).

When Sulpicia evokes the verb 'to have woven' but does not use it – drawing near it but rejecting it – she sets herself apart from the paradigm of the chaste weaving woman, Lucretia. Instead of staying within the home, she rather has affairs and publishes them for everyone to know. She is Lucretia's antithesis; she does not weave because she is not chaste. In a later poem, Sulpicia derides her boyfriend's other lover by calling her a *pressumque quasillo scortum* ('prostitute weighed down by a little basket,' 3.16.3-4). The *quasillum* was a basket used to carry the wool that a *quasillaria*, or 'spinning woman,' would weave for her mistress (Miller 2002: 163). Sulpicia avoids weaving in 3.13 and passes the activity that would demonstrate her piety off onto a woman of low social status in 3.16 so as to disgrace her and put her in her social place.

### *Sulpicia's Physical Text*

Rejoicing that her lover and poem have come to her, Sulpicia publishes her own love. In doing so, however, she promises the reader the impossible: access to the woman who wrote the poem. Sulpicia is doing what we have already seen Plath do: paint of a picture of a woman to bait the reader, then force upon him the reality that he possesses a physical text, not a woman's body. Sulpicia is an expert at this metapoetic play. We have noted above the play on the word *amor* so that it refers to a love poem. Sulpicia also mentions sealed wax tablets

(*insignatis...tabellis*, line 8) on which she writes her love letters or poems to Cerinthus.

Sulpicia's frequent references to physical texts and the naming of her lover after the writing medium, wax, compel the reader to pay close attention to the poem he is reading as a physical text. The first three words of the poem, *tandem uenit amor*, belong to both Sulpicia (finally, love

has come!) and the reader's thoughts upon getting this new poem (finally, a love poem has come!). This feeling is what the text aims to instill, for the reader's love of her poem will make him tell it to his friends. She publishes her *gaudia* precisely so that people can talk about them if they lack joys of their own. Let them all read her poems, and declare the poem's first three joyous words: finally, a new love poem has come.

Sulpicia makes the reader think that he can possess her by possessing her tablets. When we continue reading, Sulpicia says that she wishes everyone to read her (*legat me*) before her love does: 'I should not wish to entrust anything to sealed tablets, so that nobody should read me before my man' (*non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis, / me legat ut nemo quam meus ante, uelim*, 3.13.7-8). The phrase *me legat* suggests to us readers that when we have read Sulpicia's personal communication with her lover, we have gained an unmediated access to her private thoughts and inner life: namely, to her real self. It is specifically these sealed wax tablets that enclose Sulpicia and not this poem about her: 3.13 is not a sealed letter, but a published poem. Referencing these sealed tablets, Sulpicia gives the reader a glimpse of the real Sulpicia that he could possess, if only we could get hold of her wax tablets. To read her private letters is to have her.

This interpretation of line 8, however, cannot stand completely firm, for the text is corrupt. Miller quips that "[a]ll solutions require surgery of one sort or another" (Miller 2002: 161). Postgate, in his OCT edition, prints *me legat ut nemo quam meus ante, uelim*, the reading that I have followed above. The oldest manuscript, which dates from the fourteenth-century, prints *me legat id uenio quam meus ante uelim*; this, however, is a syntactical jumble. A later fifteenth-century manuscript (g) prints *ne* instead of *me* (A); another fifteenth-century manuscript (Cui) prints *ut* instead of *id* (A); (g) and (Cui) have *nemo* instead of *uenio* (A). Postgate has thus

chosen the reading *me legat ut nemo*, ‘so that nobody should read me before my beloved,’ instead of the other possible reading, *ne legat id nemo*, ‘so that nobody should not read it before my beloved.’ This latter reading lacks common sense, for sealing something in a letter is a measure to make sure that the intended recipient will read the letter first. Moreover, the sense of the former reading adopted by Postgate agrees with what Sulpicia says in lines 1-2: she wants to publish her love and let people read it instead of keeping it under wraps. The latter reading reverses this sense and does not make sense contextually. For this reason I too accept Postgate’s reading.

The last two lines, however, shatter the illusion that this poem contains the real Sulpicia and reveals this poem as just another persona she assumes. She says with an air of finality that ‘it is pleasing to have sinned, and I loathe assuming a mask for reputation’s sake: may I be said to be a worthy woman with a worthy man’ (*sed peccasse iuuat, uultus componere famae / taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar*, 9-10). Her phrase *componere uultus* deserves attention for its multivalence. By the metaphor of ‘composing a face,’ or ‘writing a face,’ Sulpicia means putting on an appearance that is different from her real feeling.<sup>54</sup> Sulpicia says that she loathes putting on a show for others for reputation’s sake; but this poem is a self-conscious exercise in doing exactly that. This poem is just an appearance, a mask of words that dress her up but conceal her. She has not published herself as she told us. Her ‘real self’ would be contained in the private communications she would send to her *amor*, if she were to send them. If we possessed those, we would be able to ‘read [her]’ as she says in 3.13.8; or would we? This poem dissimulates, and her love letter would be just another mask that she wears, that time of the loving mistress. Sulpicia has tricked us: we cannot and will not possess her.

---

<sup>54</sup> See Milnor 2002: 263-4

#### 4. Sulpicia's Voice Compared with Plath's

Having compared the thematic concerns of Plath's "Lady Lazarus" and Sulpicia 3.13, it is clear that both works have a voice that manipulates the reader. In each poem, the reader is drawn to attribute the work's voice to the author with the hope that he will look through the poem at the woman who speaks and reveals herself to him. The trick of each poem is that there is only a text to see. With Plath's poem, I argued that the availability of the author's voice reading "Lady Lazarus" in a recording makes an even stronger association between the work's voice and the author's voice; the reader hears Plath speaking to him, and wants even more to see the woman whose voice he hears. But is the same effect operative in Sulpicia's poem? Twenty-first century readers cannot hear Sulpicia's voice as they can Plath's; however, could ancient Roman readers have heard Sulpicia as 1962 readers heard Plath? In this section, I make a sketch of publication and the circulation of texts in ancient Rome and argue that Sulpicia's voice was probably not nearly as associated with her poem as Plath's was with hers.

##### *Publication in Ancient Rome*

The very word 'publication' glosses the differences and complexities of the movement of Roman texts from author to listener and reader. The model that I now describe is detailed by Starr (1987).<sup>55</sup> The crucial point is that the author maintained possession of her work until she decided to send copies to her patrons and select group of first readers. Until then, she could send copies to a trusted acquaintance for editing or offer a reading of her work to a small audience of social relations. Once she released the work, the late republican/early imperial author lost control over her work, and the text became available to readers.

---

<sup>55</sup> So also Hemelrijk 1999: 148

Before the text is released in physical form, it is given a public recitation, or *recitatio*. The most famous account of such a presentation is Vergil's reading of Books 2, 4, and 6 of the *Aeneid* to Augustus and Octavia.<sup>56</sup> The *recitatio* was a way for the author to broadcast his work and test out a nearly final draft on an audience before publication.<sup>57</sup> Tacitus writes about this in his *Dialogus*: interlocutors go looking for the dramatist Curiatus Maternus, whose recent recitation they supremely enjoyed, and find him with the text in hand, intending to publish it (Harris 1989: 225-6). Johnson (2012), having examined Pliny's *Letters*, concludes that the ideal recitation for Pliny allows the author to begin to circulate his text orally, to propose its written publication, to judge its merits from his audience's reaction to it, and to gain public recognition and validation for his endeavor. Public reading also solidifies the group of dedicated literary *amici* who gather together to listen.<sup>58</sup> The author often read his own work, as in the case of Vergil's poems or Pliny's orations; yet we do have some evidence for readings performed by another in the presence of the author in unusual circumstances. In letter 9.34 to Suetonius, Pliny asks for advice on how to proceed now that he knows he reads his poetry poorly. He considers having one of his freedmen who is new to reciting but better than Pliny. However, he is not sure what to do during the reading.

Ipse nescio, quid illo legente interim faciam, sedeam defixus et mutus et similis otioso an, ut quidam, quae pronuntiabit, murmure oculis manu prosequare. Sed puto me non minus male saltare quam legere. (9.34.2)

I myself do not know what I should do in the meantime while he is reading. Should I sit still and silent, akin to a man full of leisure or, as an audience member, should I accompany the words he will pronounce with a murmur, with my eyes, and my hand? But I think that I dance no better than I read.

---

<sup>56</sup> *Vita Vergilii* 32. This passage famously describes how Octavia, Augustus's sister and mother of Marcellus, fainted when Vergil read his description of Marcellus in the underworld. Octavia reportedly paid Vergil 10,000 sesterces for the verses he read.

<sup>57</sup> See Pliny *Epistulae* 7.17 on his practice of recitation for revision. See also Parker 2009: 208.

<sup>58</sup> See Johnson 2012: 55-56.

It was not unheard of to Pliny that the author, if he were not up to the task, should ask another to read for him while he sat in the audience; the motions that he contemplates are not, in Parker's opinion, that of a performer but of an engaged audience member (2009: 203 n.62). These *lectores*, who read to masters, their guests, and company at dinner parties, were essential instruments for reading.<sup>59</sup> Literary reading was entertainment, and provided a way for listeners to encounter a work, both before it had been released by the author and after the text was present.

Parker (2009) rightly stresses that contemporary studies have placed too much emphasis on these public readings – to the extent that the book is seen as a poor substitute for the truly prized performance. He argues against the view that “Literature was appreciated primarily through the ears rather than the eyes” (Starr 1991: 338) and concludes that if you wanted to learn a poem, re-experience one, see polished, final text, or get to know the work of a foreign or dead author, you needed to get a copy of the book (Parker 2009: 212). And another aphorism: ‘Horace’s *monumentum aere perennius* (*Odes* 3.30.1) is not a voice reciting a poem. It is a book’ (Parker 2009: 221). The book is what ensures the longevity of a piece of literature, and the poets themselves address themselves to readers, not listeners.<sup>60</sup> The voice does not spread, but the book does. In letter 2.3, Pliny describes a man who traveled from Cadiz to Rome just to gaze upon Livy, the man whom he had read back home (Habinek 1998: 104-5). In letter 9.23, Pliny describes an encounter Tacitus had with a man who was in Rome for the first time. After they converse, the man asks him, ‘Are you Tacitus or are you Pliny?’ (*Tacitus es an Plinius?*,’ 9.23.3). Books traveled far and wide; the author’s recitation of a text, by contrast, happened only once.

---

<sup>59</sup> See Starr 1991 for an excellent summary of the function and use of *lectores*.

<sup>60</sup> See Parker 2009: 218-25 for specific examples.

Works also seem to have been made available to a larger audience of readers during the reign of Augustus, the time when Sulpicia was writing, through their inclusion in new public libraries at Rome. These public collections included the library in the Atrium Libertatis, the collections at the Temple of Palatine Apollo dedicated in 28 BC, and the Porticus of Octavia (Dix 1994: 283). Both Horace and Ovid mention their desire for their works to be included in libraries so that readers might access them.<sup>61</sup> One of the main functions of these libraries, however, was not to provide books for the general public but to provide a space for literary recitations; the Augustan program of creating libraries may have been more an ideological program of encouraging the arts rather than actual providing access to them.<sup>62</sup> In any case, public spaces were built for texts, and those with the money could presumably have had slaves make copies of the texts.

We can judge the Roman readers' appreciation for the physical medium of a text with the evidence of luxurious book-rolls that have survived from antiquity. Johnson (2000) describes the aesthetics of one such object, arguing that the large margins, beautiful, even script, and expensive papyrus that compose the roll make manifest the owner's sense of aesthetics and enthusiasm for literature as high culture (612-5). Such objects attest also, however, to the importance of literature as a material possession. The poem's physical appearance influences one's reception of the work and one's delight in consuming it.

This brief study of ancient circulation of texts reveals that an author's recitation of his text happened before the final text was established, before he gave copies to a dedicatee and friends, and the text entered a library. Acquiring a book or copy of a text was the only way to experience a text one had not heard at a recitation. Book rolls could also be quite ornate, showing

---

<sup>61</sup> Horace *Epistles* 1.3.15-20, 2.1.214-8, and Ovid *Tr.* 3.1; see Dix 1994: 283-5 for discussion of these passages.

<sup>62</sup> For which argument, see Dix 1994.

aesthetic taste for luxury books and the opulence and cultural prestige they symbolized. While elite Romans had *lectores* to read favorite texts to them, this was not the same as the author's voice. The physical book, not the author's voice, was most associated with a Roman text.

### *Comparing Sulpicia with Plath*

The starting point of a comparison between Sulpicia and Plath, as it seems to me, ought to begin with the discussion of voice. If the model I have outlined above was the norm, then Sulpicia may have read a draft version of her poem to a small group of social relations, but that could very well have been the extent of her recitation. The way that people experienced Sulpicia's poem was by obtaining a physical book, not by hearing her read. Plath, on the other hand, read "Lady Lazarus" along with several other poems over a BBC interview. She did not know her audience, and intended for her poem to be heard by as many people as possible. When Plath committed suicide several months later, those listeners must have thought back to that haunting and now tragic voice they heard. Later released as a recording on vinyl, "Lady Lazarus" was a recorded poem as much as it was a written one. The author's own voice is tantamount to "Lady Lazarus," but not to Sulpicia 3.13.

Although Sulpicia's voice was not connected to the poem, the idea of a voice certainly was. As I have noted, elite Romans had *lectores*; Sulpicia 3.13 may have been recited aloud by those readers who wished to hear it as entertainment. Indeed, Sulpicia wants her poem to be reread and her story retold. As she says in 3.13.5, *mea gaudia narret* ('let him relate my joys'). The verb *narro* emphasizes the act of speaking Sulpicia's *gaudia* aloud.<sup>63</sup> If someone else reads her poem aloud or talks about the poem in this way, I argue that the voice is supposed to be, if just for a moment, the reader's voice. When the reader without *gaudia* assumes the work's voice,

---

<sup>63</sup> OLD s.v. *narro* 1

then he becomes, even if for a moment, the one to whom love has finally come. If he attributes the work's voice not to Sulpicia but to himself, then he will be satisfied. What is more, Sulpicia invites the reader to take up her role as happy lover. When she uses the verb *nudasse* in 3.13.2, she draws on the word's associations not only on uncovering a body but also of stripping a place or body of spoils.<sup>64</sup> She will strip her own love so that another might take it as his own by reading and assuming her work's voice.

Sulpicia encourages us to make the work's voice ours; by contrast, Plath in "Lady Lazarus" keeps the reader at a distance. She takes care to place the reader in the position of spectator, addressing the 'gentleman, ladies' to whom she shows her scars. She puts us into the position of one who gazes upon her, the speaker, from the peanut-crunching crowd. Of course, the reader can take up Plath's voice, imagining himself as Lady Lazarus; but as I discussed in Section 2, the voice of "Lady Lazarus" is canonized as Sylvia Plath's voice by virtue of her recording.<sup>65</sup> Whereas Sulpicia offers the work's voice to the reader, Plath claims the voice as her own. Sulpicia conspires with the reader, whereas Plath sets up a distance between herself and the spectators and doctors whom she hates.

## 5. Letting Go of Sulpicia's Voice

What we have in Sulpicia 3.13 is a poem about receiving love and making it known to others. The speaker tells us that love has finally come, a love that is both a lover and a poem. We become aware, then, of the poem that has come into our hands, and the tale its speaker purports to tell us. We imagine a Roman woman speaking to us, telling us that Venus listened to her prayers, and that it would be more shameful for her to keep her love affair or her poem to herself than to denude it for anyone to look at. But here, I argue, we have overlooked this poem's trick.

---

<sup>64</sup> OLD s.v. *nudo* 5a,b

<sup>65</sup> For those who have heard it.

The voice is not the author's or the speaker's, but ours, a result of reading the work. The work's voice is our voice that we attribute. Sulpicia tells us that we should make the voice ours by recounting her joys if we do not have them. We have permission to make the work's voice our voice. Why, then, do we persist in talking about the Roman woman who speaks of love?

I chose to discuss Sylvia Plath before Sulpicia because I learned how to approach poetry by studying hers. Drama, passion, anger, love, betrayal, climax, weeping, and death filled her life and fuel her poetry. When I read "Daddy" in school, my teacher lectured my class on not hunting down parallels between Plath's biography and the speaker's complaints. Returning home, however, I listened to Plath's recording of her poem, and I latched on to her voice. Sylvia Plath spoke to me; I latched onto her voice; we connected. I cannot shake this formative experience. I listen to authors' voices; I search for interviews of twentieth-century writers long dead. I and countless other listeners have canonized Plath's voice; like Orpheus's head, Plath's voice continues to speak long after its maker's death.

Recording technology has taught me the following paradigm: reading is listening for the author's voice. But how did people read before Edison and the phonograph? No Roman held an audio recorder up to Sulpicia's mouth; no one except her small audience of listeners could have heard her voice reading the poem. Sulpicia herself gave permission for anyone to retell her *gaudia* and take them as his own. Instead of labeling the poem as 'a Roman woman speaks of love,' why not 'the Roman people speak of love'? Anyone who wishes can take up the work's voice and have love; surely this poem can tell us as much about the reading community this poem addresses as it does about the author. Scholars have treated this poem as a woman's account of love; but why not attribute the voice to the work and focus on the social community that nurtured it?

## Conclusion

Sketched broadly, this thesis has been an attempt to read ancient literature with an awareness of my position as a modern reader. I think differently about interpreting dreams, reading fiction, and writers' voices than ancient readers did. Instead of pretending that I read as an ancient reader, why not confront my differences, take account of them, and incorporate them into my readings?

In each of the two chapters, I have identified some 'reality' that has served as the critical foundation and stopping point for my analyses. In the first chapter, we left behind the realist dream-world of Propertius for our own reality; our world, we said, is more real than the dream text. In the second chapter, we took up the author's voice, and realized that when a historical author could not have been recorded, her 'voice' is really different from a modern author's. Instead of listening for Sulpicia's voice, we attended to the work's voice and saw how Sulpicia gave her voice to her readers. Both of my studies have fallen into the pattern that Kennedy describes (1992: 6-10): we have designated some reality that can always be subjected to further scrutiny. For example, isn't the 'real world' from chapter one shaped and fashioned by the novels that I have read and films I have seen? Having shown in the second chapter that voice entails the possibility of hearing, doesn't my term 'the work's voice' fail to capture that the work does not have a voice of its own, and that we couldn't listen to it if it did?

My two chapters have worked together to suggest general paths for literary interpretation. The first chapter showed the importance of reading both with and against the grain in realist texts. A fictional dream purports to be a real dream; therefore, we should interpret it as it asks us to be interpreted; but we should always be able to step back from reading and recognize that we

are dealing with a carefully fashioned text, not real life. I did not stop, however, to interrogate this slippery term, ‘real life.’ I assumed for the sake of this study that the Romans viewed their relationship to reality in the same way that I do. In the second chapter, however, I questioned the adequacy of the term ‘Sulpicia’s voice’ in scholarship on the grounds that a Roman voice differs from a contemporary voice with respect to recordability. When taken together, my analyses have suggested that it is important to read generously, ‘believing’ what a poem has to tell us while keeping our fingers crossed behind our backs. We should be aware that we are removed from these texts, removed from the authors who wrote them, the people who read them, and the culture in which these texts were written.

I believe that my analysis of reality, especially in Chapter 1, pertains to the study of the dynamics of ekphrasis. Catullus 64, the poet’s longest poem, contains one of the most famous ekphrases of all Latin literature. The description of and meditation on Peleus’s marriage bed is a paradigm of this blurring between real and represented worlds that I illustrated in the process of interpreting Propertius 2.26.<sup>66</sup> Catullus begins the ekphrasis as he switches from describing Peleus’s bedroom to the world depicted on the coverlet:

puluinar uero diuae geniale locatur  
 sedibus in mediis, Indo quod dente politum  
 tincta tegit roseo conchyli purpura fuco.  
 haec uestis priscis hominum uariata figuris  
 heroum mira uirtutes indicat arte.  
 namque fluentisono prospectans litore Diae,  
 Thesea cedentem celeri cum classe tuetur  
 indomitos in corde gerens Ariadna furores... (Cat. 64.47-54)

In truth the marriage couch of the goddess [Thetis] is located in the middle of the home; polished with Indian ivory it covers purple cloths died with the red dye of the shellfish. This bed-cloth, variegated with the ancient figures of men, shows the excellences of heroes with wondrous art. For in fact looking out from the shore of Naxos resounding with rushing water, Ariadne watches Theseus going away with his swift fleet, bearing unconquerable furies in her chest...

---

<sup>66</sup> On this ekphrasis, see Laird 1993.

Catullus modulates from nuptial couch and sheets (47-9) to the figures on the coverlet (50-1) to Ariadne on the shore of Naxos (52-4). The passage sets up expectations of what we are going to see and overturns them. For example, we might think that after reading about the *uirtutes* of heroes that we will read more about heroes; in fact, the passage focuses on Ariadne, abandoned by the hero Theseus on Naxos. On another level, Catullus plays with our expectations when he shifts between the worlds of ‘reality’ and ‘representation.’ After dwelling on the beauty of Peleus’s house and the riches therein, Catullus begins his ekphrasis in 64.50-1. But he does not leave the world of the here and now to enter fully into a digression upon what the bed-cloth depicts. The participle *prospectans* (52), agreeing with Ariadne, blends the worlds of Peleus’s room and Naxos. She is ‘looking out’ towards the sea where Theseus sails; but she also looks out from the sheet into the marriage room. The ekphrasis has just begun, and we have not yet fully plunged into the world represented on the sheet; rather, we, the readers, have one foot still in the wedding chamber. Ariadne blurs the boundary between the two spaces, looking out into each. She is a fictional character, yet she appears to look directly into our world.

We cannot escape our assumptions and preconceptions when we interpret; only by exposing, questioning, and understanding our underlying beliefs will we begin to see how our readings of ancient literature are specific to our time, our culture, our personal histories, and ourselves. Reading and interpreting a dream without relying on Freudian ideas is nearly impossible for a contemporary reader because of how far ideas from and about Freud have reached into our culture. Although Freud postdates the elegists, his psychoanalytic theories have influenced our society, our fiction, and our ‘reality.’ Similarly, we live in an age of recorded voices that speak from televisions, speakers, radios, and computers; the ability to record and replay a voice is so central to our idea about voice that we must imagine what ‘voice’ meant to

people before it could be captured. Dreams and voices existed in antiquity when the love elegists were writing, but we must think very differently about these seemingly stable concepts than our Roman forebears did. Instead of risking equivocating on ‘voice’ or thoughtlessly treating a dream as real experience, I have shown the importance of examining our assumptions. If we take the interpretive path I have suggested in this thesis, we will make more nuanced and self-aware interpretations of ancient literature that stand on firm foundations.

## Bibliography

- Acosta-Hughes, Benjamin, and Stephens, Susan A. (2012). *Callimachus in Context: From Plato to the Augustan Poets*. Cambridge.
- Alvarez, A. (1970). "Sylvia Plath." *The Art of :Sylvia Plath: A Symposium*. Ed. Charles Newman. Indiana: 56-68.
- Annas, Pamela J. (1988). *A Disturbance in Mirrors*. Greenwood Press: New York.
- Bailey, C., ed. (1947). *Lucreti, De Rerum Natura, Libri Sex*. Oxford.
- Barth, John (1968). *Lost in the Funhouse: Fiction for Print, Tape, Live Voice*. Doubleday: New York.
- Beard, Mary (2007). *The Roman Triumph*. Harvard
- Benediktson, D. Thomas (1989). *Propertius: Modernist Poet of Antiquity*. Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale.
- Bersani, Leo (1986). *The Freudian Body*. Columbia.
- Blanchot, Maurice (1982). *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Ann Smock. Nebraska.
- Brennan, Claire (1999). *The Poetry of Sylvia Plath*. Columbia.
- Butrica, James (1984). *The Manuscript Tradition of Propertius*. Toronto.
- Dix, T. Keith (1994). "'Public Libraries' in Ancient Rome: Ideology and Reality." *Libraries Culture* 29(3): 282-96.
- Flaschenriem, Barbara L. (1999). "Sulpicia and the Rhetoric of Disclosure." *CP* 94(1): 36-54.
- (2010). "Rescuing Cynthia: Dream and Commemoration in Propertius 2.26." *CP* 105: 189-201.

- Frederick, David (1997). "Reading Broken Skin: Violence in Roman Elegy." *Roman Sexualities*. Eds. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner. Princeton: 172-93
- Freud, S. (1953). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. IV. Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd.
- (1955). *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XVIII. Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd.
- Goold, G. P. (1992). "The Voice of Virgil: The Pageant of Rome in *Aeneid* 6." *Author and Audience in Latin Literature*. Eds. Tony Woodman and Jonathan Powell. Cambridge: 110-23.
- Greene, Ellen (1998). *The Erotics of Domination: Male Desire and the Mistress in Latin Love Poetry*. Johns Hopkins.
- Habinek, Thomas N. (1998). *The Politics of Latin Literature: Writing, Identity, and Empire in Ancient Rome*. Princeton.
- Hallett, Judith P. (1973). "The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism." *Arethusa* 6(1): 103-24.
- Harris, William V. (1989). *Ancient Literacy*. Harvard.
- Hemelrijk, Emily A. (1999). *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*. Routledge: New York.
- Heyworth, S. J. (2007). *Sexti Properti Elegos*. Oxford.
- (2009). *Cynthia: A Companion to the Text of Propertius*. Oxford.
- Hinds, Stephen (1998). *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry*. Cambridge.
- Hubbard, Margaret (2001). *Propertius*. Bristol Classical Press.

- Hubbard, Thomas K. (2001). "The Sulpicia Cycle as Epithalamic Dedication." APA Abstracts.  
 <<http://apaclassics.org/images/uploads/documents/abstracts/hubbard.pdf>>
- (2004-5). "The Invention of Sulpicia." *CJ* 100: 177-94.
- Hughes, Frieda (2004). "Foreword." In *Ariel: The Restored Edition*: xi-xxi.
- Hunter, Richard (2006). *The Shadow of Callimachus: Studies in the Reception of Hellenistic Poetry at Rome*. Cambridge.
- Irigaray, Luce (1985). "This Sex Which Is Not One." *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cornell: 23-33.
- Jacobson, H. (1984). "Propertius 2,26A: The Poet as Lifesaver." *QUCC* 45: 137-140.
- James, Sharon (2003). *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion: Gender and Reading in Roman Love Elegy*. Berkeley.
- Janan, Micaela (1994). "*When the Lamp is Shattered*": *Desire and Narrative in Catullus*. Southern Illinois.
- (2001). *The Politics of Desire: Propertius IV*. California.
- Johnson, William A. (2000). "Toward a Sociology of Reading in Classical Antiquity." *AJP* 121(4): 593-627.
- Joplin, Patricia Klindienst (1990). "Ritual Work on Human Flesh: Livy's Lucretia and the Rape of the Body Politic." *Helios* 17(1): 51-70.
- Joshel, Sandra R. (1992). "The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy's Lucretia and Verginia." *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*. Ed. Amy Richlin. Oxford: 112-30.
- Keith, Alison (1997). "*Tandem Venit Amor*: A Roman Woman Speaks of Love." *Roman Sexualities*. Eds. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner. Princeton: 295-309.

- Kenison, Ann (2007). "The Holocaust Again: Sylvia Plath, Belatedness, and the Limits of Lyric Figure." *The Unraveling Archive: Essays on Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Anita Helle. Michigan.
- Kennedy, Duncan. F. (1992). *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy*. Cambridge.
- Kenney, E. J., ed. (1996). *Heroides XVI-XXI*. Cambridge.
- Lacan, Jacques (1998). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- (2006). *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Laird, Andrew (1993). "Sounding Out Ekphrasis: Art and Text in Catullus 64." *JRS* 83: 18-30.
- Latour, Bruno (2000). "On the Partial Existence of Existing and Non-existing Objects." *Biographies of Scientific Objects*. Ed. Lorraine Daston. Chicago: 247-69.
- Lee, Jonathan Scott (1990). *Jacques Lacan*. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Lingenberg, Wilfried H. (2004). Rev. of *Readers and Writers in Ovid's Heroides: Transgressions of Genre and Gender* by Efrossini Spentzou. *BMCR*. <<http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2004/2004-05-05.html>>
- Lowe, N. J. (1988). "Sulpicia's Syntax." *CQ* 38(1): 193-205.
- Lyne, R. O. A. M. (1980). *The Latin Love Poets: From Catullus to Horace*. Oxford.
- MacCannell, Juliet Flower (1986). *Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious*. Nebraska.
- McCullough, Frances (1975). "Notes." *Plath Reads Plath*. Credo Records: Cambridge, MA.
- Miller, Paul Allen (2002). *Latin Erotic Elegy: An Anthology and Reader*. Routledge: New York.
- (2004). *Subjecting Verses: Latin Love Elegy and the Emergence of the Real*. Princeton.
- Mynors, R. A., ed. (1966). *C. Plini Caecili Secundi, Epistularum Libri Decem*. Oxford.

- Narbeshuber, Lisa (2004). "The Politics of Torture: The Spectacle of Sylvia Plath's Poetry." *Canadian Review of American Studies* 34(2): 185-203.
- Nelson, Deborah (2006). "Plath, History, and Politics." *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*. Ed. Jo Gill. Cambridge: 21-35.
- O'Neill, Kerill (2005). "The Lover's Gaze and Cynthia's Glance." *Gendered Dynamics in Latin Love Poetry*. Eds. Ronnie Ancona and Ellen Greene. Johns Hopkins: 243-268.
- Ogilvie, R. M., ed. (1974). *Titi Liui, Ab Urbe Condita: Volume I: Books I-V*. Oxford.
- Owen, S. G., ed. (1922). *P. Ouidi Nasonis, Tristium Libri Quinque, Ibis, Ex Ponto Libri Quattuor, Halieutica, Fragmenta*. Oxford.
- Papanghelis, Theodore D. (1987). *Propertius: A Hellenistic Poet on Love and Death*. Cambridge.
- Parker, Holt N. (2009). "Books and Reading Latin Poetry." *Ancient Literacies*. Eds. William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker. Oxford: 186-229.
- Pearcy, Lee T. (2006). "Erasing Cerinthus: Sulpicia and her Audience." *CW* 100(1): 31-6.
- Plath, Sylvia (1975). *Plath Reads Plath. An Interview: Sylvia Plath Talks with Peter Orr of the British Council*. Vinyl. Credo Records: Cambridge, MA.
- (2004). *Ariel: The Restored Edition*. HarperCollins Publishers: New York.
- Postgate, J. P., ed. (1924). *Tibulli Aliorumque, Carminum Libri Tres*. Oxford.
- Putnam, Michael C. J. (1998). *Virgil's Epic Designs: Ekphrasis in the Aeneid*. Yale.
- Roessel, David (1990). "The Significance of the Name Cerinthus in the Poems of Sulpicia." *TAPA* 120: 243-50.
- Ross, David O., Jr. (2010). *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy and Rome*. Cambridge.

- Santirocco, Matthew S. (1979). "Sulpicia Reconsidered." *CJ* 74(3): 229-39
- Semanki, David (2004). "Notes." In *Ariel: The Restored Edition*: 199-211.
- Skinner, Marilyn B. "Introduction: *Quod Multo Fit In Aliter Graecia...*" *Roman Sexualities*. Eds. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner. Princeton: 3-25.
- Smith, Kirby Flower (1913). *Tibullus: The Elegies*. American Book Company: New York.
- Spentzou, Efrossini (2003). *Readers and Writers in Ovid's Heroides: Transgressions of Genre and Gender*. Oxford.
- Starr, Raymond J. (1987). "The Circulation of Literary Texts in the Roman World." *CQ* 37(1): 213-23.
- (1991). "Reading Aloud: *Lectores* and Roman Reading." *CJ* 86(4): 337-43.
- Sullivan, J. P. (1976). *Propertius: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge.
- Tiffany, Daniel (2009). *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance*. Chicago.
- Volk, Katharina (2010). *Ovid*. Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, UK.
- White, Peter (2007). "Friendship, Patronage, and Horatian Socio-poetics." *The Cambridge Companion to Horace*. Ed. Stephen Harrison. Cambridge: 195-206.
- Wiggers, Nancy (1980). "Variations on a Theme: Nightmare and Daydream in Propertius II.26." *Latomus* 39: 121-8.
- Wray, David (2001). *Catullus and the Poetics of Roman Manhood*. Cambridge.
- Wyke, Maria (1989). "Mistress and Metaphor in Augustan Elegy." *Helios* 16(1): 25-47.
- (2002). *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations*. Oxford.
- Zanker, Paul (1990). *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. Trans. Alan Shapiro. Michigan.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso.