

Realism and Reality: The Elegiac Epistolography of Sulpicia

Thesis: Sulpicia borrows tropes commonly seen in Roman letters to increase the realism of her poetry. She adopts the language of the physical transmission of letters, occasions of birthday celebrations, and ill health, but subverts expectations that exist surrounding these epistolary situations. In doing so, Sulpicia creates something entirely new in her poetry. Her poems also emphasize the realistic nature of elegy, while revealing the purposefully constructed nature of letters.

1.	<p><i>non ego signatis quicquam mandere tabellis, me legat ut nemo quam meus ante, velim,</i> ([Tibullus] 3.13.6-7)</p>	<p>I would not want to entrust anything to sealed tablets, so that no one would read me before my man does.</p>
2.	<p><i>Κύρνε, σοφιζομένων μὲν ἐμοὶ σφηγιῶν ἐπικείσθω τοῖσδ' ἔπεσιν· λήσει δ' οὐποτε κλεπτόμενα, οὐδὲ τις ἀλλάξει κάκιον τοῦσθλοῦ παρεόντος, ὧδε δὲ πᾶς τις ἐρεῖ· “Θεόγγιδός ἐστὶν ἔπη τοῦ Μεγαρέως· πάντας δὲ κατ' ἀνθρώπους ὀνομαστός”·</i> (Theognis 1. 19-23)</p>	<p>For me, a skilled and wise poet, let a seal, Cynrus, be placed on these verses. Their theft will never pass unnoticed, or will anyone take something worse in exchange when that which is good is at hand, but everyone will say, “They are the verses of Theognis of Megara, and he is famous among all men.”</p>
3.	<p><i>quas quidem cum expectassem iam diu, admiratus sum, ut vidi obsignatam epistulam...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 123.1)</p> <p><i>obsignata iam ista epistula quam de nocte daturus eram...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 154.1)</p> <p><i>obsignata iam epistula superiore non placuit ei dari cui constitueram quod erat alienus...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 202.1)</p> <p><i>accepi a te signatum libellum quem Anteros attulerat...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 211.1)</p> <p><i>obsignata epistula accepit tuas...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 249.1)</p>	<p>Having waited for one a long time I was surprised when I saw the sealed letter...</p> <p>I had already sealed the letter I was going to dispatch to you before daybreak...</p> <p>After I had sealed my last letter I decided not to give it to the man I had intended because he was not one of our own people...</p> <p>I have received your sealed communication, conveyed by Anteros...</p> <p>After sealing my letter I received yours...</p>
4.	<p><i>invisus natalis adest, qui rure molesto et sine Cerintho tristis agendus erit. dulcius urbe quid est? an villa sit apta puellae atque Arretino frigidus amnis agro? iam, nimium Messalla mei studiose, quiescas: non tempestivae saepe, propinque, viae. hic animum sensusque meos abducta relinquo, arbitrio quam vis non sinit esse meo.</i> ([Tibullus] 3.14)</p>	<p>My awful birthday is here, which has to be spent, sad, in the vexing countryside, and without Cerinthus. What is sweeter than the city? Is a barn the right place for a girl, or the freezing river Arretinus and its fields? Relax now, Messalla, you're doing too much for me. Travel is often inconvenient, friends. Even taken away, I leave behind here my heart and my wits, since I am forced and have no choice.</p>

5.	<p><i>scis iter ex animo sublatum triste puellae? natali Romae iam licet esse meo. omnibus ille dies nobis natalis agatur, qui nec opinata nunc tibi sorte venit.</i> ([Tibullus] 3.15)</p>	<p>Are you aware that the trip has been removed from the sad heart of your girlfriend? Now I can have my birthday in Rome. Let's all celebrate my birthday now, an unexpected stroke of luck for you.</p>
6.	<p><i>ita ad urbem III Non., natali meo.</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 128.3)</p> <p><i>[natali] die tuo scripsisti epistulam ad me...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 171.1)</p> <p><i>nam die tuo natali victoria nuntiata...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Familiares</i> 413.3)</p> <p><i>ego enim D. Bruto liberato, cum laetissimus ille civitati dies illuxisset idemque casu Bruti natalis esset...</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Brutum</i> 23.8)</p> <p><i>nocte quoque ista proxima superiore, cum librum epistularum divi Augusti, quas ad Gaium nepotem suum scripsit [...] "spero laetum et bene valentem celebrasse quartum et sexagesimum natalem meum."</i> (Gellius <i>Noctes Atticae</i> 15.7.3)</p>	<p>...thus reaching Rome on my birthday, 3 January.</p> <p>On your birthday you wrote a letter to me...</p> <p>When the victory was announced on your birthday...</p> <p>There came that most that most joyful day of D. Brutus' liberation, which happened also to be his birthday.</p> <p>Night before last, too, when I was reading a volume of letters of the deified Augustus, written to his grandson Gaius [...] "I hope you have celebrated my sixty-fourth birthday in health and happiness."</p>
7.	<p><i>haec ad te die natali meo scripsi; quo utinam susceptus non essem, aut ne quid ex eadem matre postea natum esset! plura scribere fletu prohibeor.</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Atticum</i> 220.3)</p>	<p>I write this on my birthday. I wish I had never been let live that day, or else that my mother had never borne another child! Tears prevent me from writing more.</p>
8.	<p><i>estne tibi, Cerinthi, tuae pia cura puellae, quod mea nunc vexat corpora fessa calor? a ego non aliter tristes evincere morbos optarim, quam te si quoque velle putem. at mihi quid prosit morbos evincere, si tu nostra potes lento pectore ferre mala?</i> ([Tibullus] 3.17)</p>	<p>Is there, Cerinthus, a holy care in your for your girl, when fever now wracks my tired body? I would not want to overcome pitiful sickness for just anything, unless you wanted me to recover, too. But what good does it do me to overcome illnesses, if you can bear my danger with an unconcerned heart?</p>
9.	<p><i>ego vero cupio te ad me venire, sed viam timeo. gravissime aegrotasti, inedia et purgationibus et vi ipsius morbi consumptus es. graves solent offensiones esse ex gravibus morbis si quae culpa commissa est. iam ad id biduum quod fueris in via, dum in Cumanum venis, accedent continuo ad reditum dies quinque. ego in Formiano a.d. III Kal. esse volo. ibi te ut firmum offendam, mi Tiro, effice.</i> (Cicero <i>Ad Familiares</i> 43.1)</p>	<p>I truly want you to be with me, but I worry about the journey; you have been most severely sick, and you have been consumed by fasting and cleaning and the strength of the illness itself. Serious problems usually come from serious illnesses is any mistake is made. Already with this two-day journey you'll be on the road, and when you come to Cumae, the return will add up 5 days right after. Make sure that I will meet you healthy in that place, my Tiro.</p>

Translations of Sulpicia and Cicero *Ad Familiares 43* are my own.

Text of Sulpicia [Tibullus] 3.13 from Miller 2002.

Text of Sulpicia [Tibullus] 3.14, 3.15, 3.17 from Goold 1913.

Text and translation of Theognis from Gerber 1999.

Text and translation of Cicero from Shackleton Bailey 1999, 2001, 2002.

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