

“*Fuisse Ferar*”: The Temporal Nature of *Fama* in [Tibullus] 3.13

Found in Tibullus Book 3 are six love elegies, commonly credited to a poet who calls herself Sulpicia. Writing amidst the growing restrictions on feminine sexuality and speech imposed by Augustus’ legislation in the late 1st century BCE (Keith 1997), she engages in the counter-cultural genre of Roman elegy, whose conventions are defined by masculine experiences (Wyke 2007). This paper concentrates on the first of these poems, [Tibullus] 3.13, in which she celebrates the start of her romantic relationship with a man whom she calls Cerinthus. Yet as suggested by the syntax’s persistent use of indirect discourse, Sulpicia is primarily concerned with *fama*. Appearing twice, *fama* is often taken to mean ‘report’ in 3.13.2 and ‘reputation’ in 3.13.9, demonstrating the multiple meanings of this word (Hallett 2006). Syntactically connected to the infinitives *texisse* and *componere*, both senses of *fama* require Sulpicia to ‘cover up’ and ‘arrange’ herself for the sake of preserving her modesty, a societal demand that she rejects (Flaschenriem 1999). Instead, she manipulates generic tropes and expectations by fully claiming the active role of the poet, rather than the typically feminine role of the passive beloved (Milnor 2002). In this paper, I closely examine the poem’s morphological and syntactic structures highlighted by Lowe (1988) and Santirocco (1979) to argue that her use of aspect and voice relates to her shaping of *fama*, demonstrating another way in which she claims an active role.

In 3.13’s opening, Sulpicia contrasts two perfect infinitives while connecting them both to the possibility of report-*fama* (*texisse...nudasse*; 3.13.1–2). In 3.13’s final couplet, a present infinitive is similarly linked to reputation-*fama* (*componere*; 3.13.9). I posit that *fama*’s two translations in 3.13 point to a temporal discrepancy wherein a report is the result of a completed action while reputation is the product of continuous action. In this way, report-*fama* becomes

linked to perfect infinitives, rendering the report finalized and thus inalterable. Reputation-*fama*, on the other hand, is associated with a present infinitive, morphologically conveying the continuous effort that must be made for the sake of public opinion. These temporal connections are first applied to an unnamed ‘anyone’ through the introduction of a future passive verb in the third-person, which is complemented by another perfect infinitive (*dicetur...habuisse*; 3.13.6). Its passive voice highlights the loss of agency on the part of the subject who ‘will be spoken about,’ presumably by a nonspecific third-party. Moreover, the inalterable nature of a perfect infinitive further removes control from the subject, who cannot change the substance of the report as it is repeatedly ‘said,’ as conveyed by the future continuous aspect of *dicetur*. These aspect and voicing elements come to a head in 3.13.10, the syntactic parallel of 3.13.6, though the person shifts from third to first-person, capturing Sulpicia’s unfiltered perspective. In this final line, she asserts a report about herself, made in the future passive (*ferar*; 3.13.10), about how she ‘has been’ (*fuisse*; 3.13.10). In doing so, she compacts the future’s version of the past into one final judgment while also remaining the creator, rather than subject, of this report, which, again, will be continuously ‘reported’ for an indefinite period. By positioning *fama* into this temporal equation of perfect infinitives and future passives, Sulpicia then enables herself to fulfill this equation of compressed report-*fama* and reputation-*fama* with a single statement—an impossibility made possible in the fictional space of Roman elegy.

Works Cited

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