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## OVID'S LETTER TO SULPICTIA?

*Abstract.* – Ovid addressed one of his poetical letters (*Tristia* III 7) to a Roman poetess, calling her “Perilla”. He introduced this Greek pseudonym for one specific reason. The proper name of Perilla was earlier used by the neoteric poets as a literary pseudonym of Caecilia Metella, the Roman woman poet, who was active in the Ciceronian Age (see *Tristia* II, v. 433–438). It is finally suggested that Ovid used the same pseudonym to denote Sulpicia, the young talented poet, who wrote six short elegies during the Augustan Age.

The Augustan poet Publius Ovidius Naso (43 BC – ca. 18 AD), exiled in 8 AD from Rome to the town of Tomis in Pontus (now Constanța, Romania), sent a set of poems addressed to his wife, friends or other significant individuals in Rome, including the emperor Augustus and his great-nephew Germanicus Caesar. His poems from exile, written in elegiac couplets, are placed into two different collections: the *Tristia* (“Sorrows” or “Lamentations”) in five books and *Epistulae ex Ponto* (“Letters from the Black Sea”) in four books. Generally, we can observe one substantial difference between Ovid’s elegies included in the two (as if epistolographical) collections. None of the individuals in Ovid’s *Tristia* is mentioned by name except for Perilla, an unknown Roman woman poet (*Tristia* III 7). Ovid’s poetical letters entitled *Epistulae ex Ponto* differ from *Tristia* by being addressed to individuals by name.

In my paper I would like to review anew the problem of Perilla’s identity. Who was the mysterious Roman poet<sup>1</sup>, to whom Ovid wrote an elegiac epistle from Tomis? What role did she play in Ovid’s life? Was Perilla Ovid’s own daughter or stepdaughter? Was she Ovid’s student or only a friend from Rome? Why was she known under this particular Greek pseudonym?

<sup>1</sup> I cannot agree with Ingleheart (2012: 237–239), that Perilla represents a fictitious person. Note that Stevenson (2006: 36) expresses a similar opinion: “Whatever the precise relationship of Ovid and Perilla, the poem speaks of the fostering of a young protégée’s talent by an established poet. It would be perverse to see this relationship as imaginary; Ovid speaks to and of actual people in the poems written from Pontus”.

## 1. Ovid and Perilla: was there a relationship between them?

Let us begin to answer these questions by examining the first words of Ovid's letter to Perilla (*Tristia* III 7, v. 1–8). The first two elegiac couplets the banished poet orders his own letter to pay a visit to Perilla's house, where she lives with her sweet mother (*dulci cum matre*).

Vade salutatum, subito perarata, Perillam,  
 littera, sermonis fida ministra mei.  
 aut illam invenies dulci cum matre sedente  
 aut inter libros Pieridasque suas.  
 quidquid aget, cum te scierit venisse, relinquet,  
 nec mora, quid venias quidve, requiret, agam.  
 vivere me dices, sed sic, ut vivere nolim,  
 nec mala tam longa nostra levata mora;  
 et tamen ad Musas, quamvis nocuere, reverti,  
 aptaque in alternos cogere verba pedes.

(“Go, greet Perilla, quickly written letter, and be the trusty servant of my speech. You will find her sitting in the company of her sweet mother or amid books and the Pierian maidens she loves. Whatever she be doing she will leave it when she knows of your coming and ask at once why you come or how I fare. Say that I live, but in such wise that I would not live; that my misfortunes have not been lightened by the lapse of so long a time, that nevertheless I am returning to the Muses despite their injury, forcing words to fit alternating measures”; translated into English by Wheeler 1996: 127).

Scholars of numerous articles and monographs identify Perilla as Ovid's daughter or stepdaughter (cf. Wheeler 1925: 26; Della Corte 1976: 169–174; Nagle 1980: 180; Stabryła 1989: 34, 289; Cytowska, Szelest 1990: 541; Hemelrijk 1999: 149–151, 320–321; Hollis 2007: 426; Babnis 2017: 39–51; Weiden Boyd 2017: 176)<sup>2</sup>; many translators accept this identification as well<sup>3</sup>. But are they correct to do so? Was Perilla the poet actually a daughter or stepdaughter of Ovid?

In lines 11–20 of the *Tristia* III,7 certain scholars find allusions to a familiar relationship between Ovid and his addressee. To quote Ovid himself:

Tu quoque, dic, studiis communibus ecquid inhaeres,  
 doctaque non patrio carmina more canis?

<sup>2</sup> A different identification with Ovid's Greek freedwoman (named Perilla) is also suggested by scholars (Courtney 1993: 229). See additionally Witczak (1996: 118–134); Heil (2012: 310–325).

<sup>3</sup> It is worth emphasizing that Wójtowicz (1962: 192), renders Ovid's words *Pone, Perilla, metum!* as “Porzuć bojaźń, córeczko” (“Lay aside your fear, little daughter!”). The Polish translator of *Tristia* III 7 treats Perilla as a “little daughter, baby”, i.e. Ovid's daughter or stepdaughter.

Nam tibi cum facie mores natura pudicos  
 et raras dotes ingeniumque dedit.  
 Hoc ego Pegasidas deduxi primus ad undas,  
 ne male fecundae uena periret aquae;  
 primus id aspexi teneris in uirginis annis,  
 utque pater natae duxque comesque fui.  
 Ergo si remanent ignes tibi pectoris idem,  
 sola tuum uates Lesbia uincet opus.

(“Say to her, Art thou too still devoted to our common pursuit of singing learned verse, though not in thy father’s fashion? For as well as beauty nature has given thee modest ways and a rare dower of native wit. This I was the first to guide to the stream of Pegasus lest the rill of fertile water unhappily be lost. I was the first to discern this in the tender years of thy girlhood when, as a father to his daughter, I was thy guide and comrade. So if the same fire still abides in thy breast, only the Lesbian bard [i.e. Sappho] will surpass thy work”; translated by Wheeler 1996: 129).

In the first elegiac couplet (line 11) the attention is drawn to the common interests of Ovid and Perilla (*Tu quoque [...] studiis communibus [...] inhaeres*). The poet explicitly mentions that the female addressee of his elegiac letter sings learned songs “not in your father’s fashion” (line 12: *non patrio [...] more*). The interpretation of the latter phrase depends on the correct understanding of the Latin adjective *patrius*, which can be translated not only as ‘belonging to the father, paternal’, but also ‘ancestral, inherited, native, belonging to the native country or the native home’ (OLD 1310–1311). Depending on the translation accepted, Ovid’s statement can be interpreted in several ways:

(1) Perilla created learned Latin songs not according to the “native” or Roman manner, but imitated foreign Greek patterns, hence the subsequent comparison with Sappho (*Tristia* III 7, v. 20).

(2) Perilla wrote her poetical works in Ancient Greek, ignoring her “native” tradition. The comparison with Sappho would therefore be justified by actual rivalry for the palm of preference among women poets writing in Greek.

(3) Perilla practised poetry in a completely different way from her father. Of course, it necessarily means that her father was also a recognized Roman poet.

(4) Perilla was Ovid’s Greek freedwoman, who wrote poetry in Latin, ignoring her “native” (i.e. Greek) manner.

The options (1), (2) and (4) assume that *patrio* means inherited, traditionally Roman. The third option assumes that it means “your father’s”, and Perilla was Ovid’s actual daughter or stepdaughter. However, it is not impossible that Perilla’s father was a Roman poet different

than Ovid. Most modern researchers favour the third option, viewing Ovid as the biological father or stepfather of Perilla. But this option still remains a conjecture, owing to the ambiguity of the term *patrius*.

To be sure, Ovid uses the phrase *utque pater natae* ('and like a father to his daughter') in line 18. But here, too, the language is ambiguous. Ovid merely says that he first led Perilla to the waters of Pegasus so that her poetic talent (Lat. *vēna*) would not be wasted. He first saw these abilities when Perilla was still in her teens (v. 17: *teneris in virginis annis* "in the tender years of your girlhood"). In this way he likens his role to that of a father, guide and companion (v. 18: *utque pater natae duxque comesque fui*).

The interpretation of *natae* also poses problems. Should it be understood as a noun for daughter (Lat. *nāta* f., gen. sg. *nātae*) or an adjective (Lat. *nātus*, -a, -um 'born') modifying *vēna* ('talent')? Complicating matters further, certain manuscripts of the *Tristia*, for the most part of later date, feature the alternative reading *venae* rather than *natae*. Whatever the part of speech represented by *natae*, the literary context may not offer a literary statement about the relationship between Ovid and Perilla. If we view *natae* as a self-standing noun, it is merely part of a simile likening his role to that of Perilla's father, leader and companion; if we view it as an adjective, it describes him in a highly metaphoric way as part of a simile likening his role to that of the father of a newly born talent.

Can we read *Tristia* III 7 as addressed to Ovid's biological daughter Ovidia? Personally, I doubt it. Ovidia, the daughter of the poet, had already been married three times and had two children during Ovid's exile. Although he mentions her several times on various occasions (e.g. *Tristia* IV 10, v. 75–76), he never informs us about her poetic interests, which seems to exclude the possibility of identifying Ovidia with Perilla. In fact, the poet was Ovidia's father, therefore he would not have used the phrase "like a father" (*utque pater*).

Let us look at the other possibility. We know that Ovid's third wife brought up a daughter from her earlier marriage, but the banished poet, writing to his stepdaughter's husband Publius Suillius Rufus (*Epistulae ex Ponto* IV 8), does not mention her any poetic activity on her part, although he carefully emphasizes his family connections and relationships with the adoptive daughter<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, if we omit the elegy in question (*Tristia* III 7), then in Ovid's entire poetic output we can find no testimony that would justify the opinion that either Ovidia, the poet's biological daughter, or Ovid's adoptive daughter, wrote poetry<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Ovid says as follows: *Nam tibi quae coniunx, eadem mihi filia paene est, / Et quae te generum, me vocat illa virum* "For she who is your wife is almost my daughter, she who calls you son-in-law, calls me husband" (Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* IV 8, v. 11–12; translated by Wheeler 1996: 449).

<sup>5</sup> According to Bonvicini (1991: 328), "L'ipotesi che Perilla sia una figliastra di Ovidio è ancora *sub iudice*". See also the discussion in Witzczak (1996: 118–134).

This poem itself does not provide indisputable testimony, either, because of its ambiguous use of the terms *patrius* and *pater*. In other words, Ovid's elegy does not explicitly state the alleged kinship between our poet and Perilla<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Perilla as a Greek pseudonym.

If the addressee of *Tristia* III 7 was not Ovid's daughter or step-daughter, who else might she have been? The name *Perilla* may provide a clue. Again various scholars emphasize that this woman is the only person called by her name in the *Tristia* (Cytowska, Szelest 1990: 541); so, too, in this group of poems, Ovid does not refer to individuals by their first names (Lat. *praenomina*), family names (Lat. *nomina gentilicia*), or third names (nicknames) (Lat. *cognomina*), even though these poems feature numerous addressees.

Once exiled, Ovid had good reasons to refrain from using any names in the *Tristia*, among them a fear that he might harm his friends or relatives if he identified them. He did not even disclose the name of his former friend (Titus Labienus), who in Rome slandered Ovid and who even persecuted the poet's wife and his family<sup>7</sup>. Did he want to convict the addressee of a letter of persecution from the Roman authorities? Such an eventuality must be rejected in advance. So how to can we explain the double occurrence (*Tristia* III 7, v. 1 and 29) of the name of Perilla?

Researchers do not take into account the fact that Perilla could not be the actual name of a Roman woman (cf. Bright 1981: 357; Witczak 1996: 124; Babinis 2017: 40). Roman women were assigned the feminine forms of their family's *nomen gentilicium*: hence the daughter of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43) was called Tullia (after *gens Tullia*); the sister of the plebeian tribune Publius Clodius Pulcher (93–42), depicted by the poet Catullus under the literarily-charged pseudonym Lesbia, was named Clodia (the female name derived from *gens Clōdia vel Claudia*); the sister of the poet Gaius Cornificius, herself a writer of epigrams (according to Saint Jerome<sup>8</sup>), Cornificia was a representative of the family of Cornificii.

<sup>6</sup> “Some commentators have supposed that Perilla was the daughter of Ovid. There does not appear any indication of such a fact in this Elegy; and he seems rather to speak of her in the terms of admiration than of the affection of a parent for his daughter. He would hardly be content with a mere allusion to his wife, as being her ‘dulcis mater,’ and then saying no more about her. The name of his daughter is nowhere to be found” (Riley 2017: 307).

<sup>7</sup> Ovid introduced a double acrostic *TITUS IBIS* to his poem *Ibis* (v. 584). This acrostic evidently indicates Titus Labienus, one of the first professional delators (Witczak 2004: 79–82; 2006: 157–159; 2014: 123–131).

<sup>8</sup> Hieronymus, *Chronica*, p. 159 H: *huius* [i.e. Cornificii poetae] *soror Cornificia*, *cuius insignia exstant epigrammata* “his [i.e. Cornificius’] sister was Cornificia, whose epigrams appear to be notable”.

Roman women from families identified by both *nomina gentilicia* and nicknames (*cognomina*), such as the Caecilii Metelli, bore both names: Caecilia Metella, beloved of the neoteric poet Ticidas and a poet in her own right, is but one example. The third wife of the Roman Emperor Nero has used two Roman names: Statilia Messalina, because she was from the family of Statilii (Lat. *gens Statilia*), and by the side she was the granddaughter of Messalinus, the elder son of M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus.

There is no evidence for a family known as the Perilli (*gens Perilla*) in Rome, which makes it clear that Perilla is not an elite Roman woman's actual name. It appears to be Greek, and – by Ovid's own account – not invented by Ovid himself. Both Ovid himself, at *Tristia* II 437, and the later Latin writer Apuleius, in his *Apology* (10), relate that it was used as a pseudonym for Caecilia Metella, the female poet just mentioned.

Eadem igitur opera accusent C. Catullum, quod Lesbia pro Clodia nominarit, et Ticidam similiter, quod quae Metella erat Perillam scripserit, et Propertius, qui Cynthiam dicat, Hostiam dissimuleat, et Tibullum, quod ei sit Plania in animo, Delia in versu.

(“For that reason, therefore, let them accuse Catullus, because he supposedly used the name Lesbia for Clodia, and likewise Ticidas, because he wrote his girlfriend as Perilla, who was actually called Metella, and Propertius, who told Cynthia to conceal Hostia will conceal it, and Tibullus, because he had a Plania in his mind, Delia in his verse”).

Apuleius provides several examples of Roman women identified in the poems of their male lovers by metrically equivalent, literally resonant pseudonyms (Skinner 2011: 92). Three of these women's pseudonyms can as dactyls, like their actual names: for his beloved Clōdia (— ∪ ∘), Catullus uses Lesbia (— ∪ ∘), also a dactylically-scanned name that associates her with the Greek poet Sappho; Sextus Propertius uses the pseudonym Cynthia (— ∘ ∘), linked with Apollo as a god of poetry, for his beloved Hostia (— ∘ ∘)<sup>9</sup>; Tibullus' Dēlia (— ∘ ∘), also connected with Apollo, stays for Plānia (— ∘ ∘)<sup>10</sup>. Only Ticidas' Metella (∘ — ∘) under the pseudonym of Perilla (∘ — ∘), has a name with a different metrical pattern (amphibrachus). There are other possible pseudonyms created on the basis of the metrical equivalence, including also male lovers (Luck 1969: 110)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Wyke (1987: 47–61).

<sup>10</sup> It is highly probable that the second mistress of Tibullus, called Nemesis (∘ ∘ —) in the second book of his elegies, should be identified with Glycerā (∘ ∘ —), a Greek courtesan, who was mentioned in Horace's poem (*Carm.* I, 33) devoted to Albius Tibullus (Witzak 1993b: 135–143).

<sup>11</sup> Sulpicia calls her Roman lover Cērinthus (— — ∘) in her elegies (*Corpus Tibullianum* IV 7–12) and the same Greek pseudonym for Sulpicia's lover is used in other

In the second book of the *Tristia* (II 433–438), Ovid says the following words to his friend Metellus:

Quid referam Ticidae, quid Memmi carmen, apud quos  
rebus adest nomen nominibusque pudor?  
Cinna quoque his comes est Cinnaque procacior Anser,  
et lene Cornifici parquet Catonis opus,  
et quorum libris modo dissimulata Perilla est  
nomine nunc legitur dicta, Metelle, tuo.

(“Why allude to the verse of Ticidas or of Memmius, in whom things are named – with names devoid of shame? With them Cinna too belongs and Anser, more wanton than Cinna, and light poems of Cornificius and of Cato, and those in whose books Metella is now disguised beneath the name of Perilla and now referred to with her own”; translated into English by Wheeler 1996: 87).

Ovid's statement is extremely important not only because it agrees with Apuleius' message on the identity of Metella and Perilla, but also because Metella was praised both by Ticidas and by other poets of the neoteric circle (see Ovid's phrase *quorum libris*), i.e. by Gaius Memmius, Helvius Cinna, Anser, Gaius Cornificius and Valerius Cato (see Courtney 1993: 228–229; Hemelrijk 1999: 143; Heil 2012: 311; Babinis 2017: 40–41). Some editors of the second book of the *Tristia* assume text alignment by putting verses 435–436 before verse 433 or by placing them after verse 438.<sup>12</sup> I do not see any reason for such an amendment of Ovid's text, since the poet clearly points to the numerous hosts of Metella's singers, using gen. sg. *quorum* (*Tristia* II 437). But even if we accept of the replacement of lines 435–436 in the second book of the *Tristia* Metella-Perilla must have appeared in works of at least two neoteric poets, namely Ticidas and Memmius.

Who was Metella-Perilla among the Neoterics? In his book on the Latin love elegy George Luck explains the double status of Metella:

“We know that they [i.e. the Neoterics or *poetae novi* – K.T.W.] were roughly contemporaries and that some of them were personal friends of Catullus. There was a lady among them, who was celebrated in the poems of her friends under a pseudonym, Perilla, and wrote verse under her real name, Metella” (Luck 1969: 50).

poems by the *auctor de Sulpicia* (IV 2–6), whereas Albius Tibullus addresses two elegies (II 2, II 3) to his friend under the third name / nickname (*cognomen*) Cornutus (— — ♂). One of Tibullus' friends was “Cornutus, addressed in two poems, and plausibly identified with the Cerinthus to whom Sulpicia sent her love-letters” (Duff 1960: 405). The suggested identification of Cerinthus / Cornutus is not secure, but highly probable (Smith 1971: 86–87; Witczak 1993a: 44–47).

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Hall (1995: 78); Ciccarelli (2003: 23, 244).

Gaius Valerius Catullus, the great poet from Verona, does not mention Perilla in his poems, nor any poetess functioning in his neoteric circle. However, it cannot be excluded that Catullus mentions Metella (though only once) as a beloved friend of Caecilius, the talented poet from the neoteric circle. In two other papers, published earlier, I suggested that the family name Caecilius was a *nomen gentilicium* of Tidas, the neoteric poet (Witczak 1998: 591–601; Pawłowska 2001: 146; Borovsky, Witczak 2002: 109–114). It is necessary to quote Catullus' poem XXXV:

Poeta tenero, meo sodali.  
 velim Caecilio, papyre, dicas  
 Veronam veniat, Novi relinquens  
 Comi moenia Lariumque litus.  
 nam quasdam volo cogitationes  
 amici accipiat sui meique.  
 quare, si sapiet, viam vorabit,  
 quamvis candida milies puella  
 euntem revocet, manusque collo  
 ambas iniciens roget morari.  
 quae nunc, si mihi vera nuntiantur,  
 illum deperit impotente amore.  
 nam quo tempore legit incohatham  
 Dindymi dominam, ex eo Metellae<sup>13</sup>  
 ignes interiorem edunt medullam.  
 ignosco tibi, Sapphica puella  
 musa doctior; est enim venuste  
 Magna Caecilio incohata Mater.

(“I ask you, papyrus page, to tell the gentle poet, my friend Caecilius, to come to Verona, leaving the walls of Novum Comum and the shore of Larius: for I wish him to receive certain thoughts of a friend of his and yours. Wherefore if he is wise he will devour the way with haste, though his fair lady should call him back a thousand times, and throwing both her arms round his neck beg him to delay. She now, if a true tale is brought to me, dotes on him with passionate love. For since she read the beginning of his «Lady of Dindymus», ever since then the fires have been wasting Metella’s inmost marrow.. I can feel for you, maiden more scholarly than the Sapphic Muse; for Caecilius has indeed made a lovely beginning to his «Magna Mater»”; translated into English by Cornish 1995: 41–43; revised by the author)

<sup>13</sup> I accept the view expressed by some scholars (cf. Witczak 1998: 599–600; Pawłowska 2001: 144; Borovsky, Witczak 2002: 112) that the word *misellae* (‘of poor girl’), attested in the Catullan codices, stands for *Metellae* (‘of Metella’).

It is commonly agreed that Clodia-Lesbia, Catullus' beloved, was the second wife of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer (died in 59 BC), the governor of Cisalpine Gaul (Lat. *Gallia Cisalpina*) and consul in 60 BC<sup>14</sup>. Metella, the girl-friend of the poet Caecilius Tidas, was probably a relative (or perhaps a daughter) of Metellus Celer<sup>15</sup>. If this suggestion is correct, then the famous Clodia could be familiar to the poetess Metella. It is believed that Gaius Valerius Catullus (ca.87–ca.54 BC) met Clodia about 62 BC, when her husband was a proconsul and governor of Cisalpine Gaul. Probably in this period the poetic circle of the Neoterics was established in Rome. *Poetae novi* originated from towns of Cisalpine Gaul (i.e. Northern Italy), e.g. Catullus from Verona, Caecilius Tidas from Novum Comum. It is highly probable that the circle of the Latin Neoterics (or *poetae novi*) has originally functioned in Cisalpine Gaul. It is not surprising, therefore, that, according to the testimony of Ovid, numerous neoteric poets were celebrating Caecilia Metella, a close relative to Metellus Celer, the governor of Cisalpine Gaul.

Gaius Valerius Catullus certainly knew Metella-Perilla, and if she was not praised by him officially, maybe he was doing it deliberately. We do not know what the relationship was between Metella and Clodia. Certainly Metella could not accept the affair of Clodia, Metellus' wife, with Catullus and perhaps she treated Catullus as a *persona non grata*. Catullus as an impulsive man could also ignore Metella. It should be emphasized that Ovid does not mention Catullus among the neoterics, who praised Metella-Perilla.

In his poem XXXV Catullus praised his friend Caecilius and Caecilius' unnamed girl. He called her “a maiden more scholarly than Sapphic Musa” (Lat. *Sapphica puella / Musa doctior*). It seems probable than Catullus praises not only Caecilius Tidas, but also Caecilia Metella in the poem XXXV, though not officially, agreeing with the rest of the Neoterics that Metella-Perilla represents an exceptional *puella docta*.

Sulpicia, the female poet of the Augustan Age, is the author of six short elegies addressed to Cerinthus (one of them to Messalla)<sup>16</sup>. Her erotic elegies are preserved in the so-called *Corpus Tibullianum* (IV,7–12), i.e. an ancient collection of poems, created in Messalla's literary

<sup>14</sup> The identification of Catullus' Lesbia with Clodia Metelli seems well founded and secure (cf. Bright 1981: 362; Hejduk 2008: 3–9).

<sup>15</sup> Hallett (2009: 3) believes (with no strong arguments) that the female poet “Metella appears to have been [Caecilia] Metella, a daughter of Clodia Metelli, the woman whom Catullus called Lesbia in his poetry”. The same opinion is expressed by Wiseman (1974: 188–191) and Hallett (2006: 77–78).

<sup>16</sup> Sulpicia (the elegist) is a poet who was active in the Augustean Age (31 BC–14 AD). She should be distinguished from Sulpicia (Calenus' wife), who wrote erotic (and political) poems in the times of the emperor Domitian (81–96 AD) (Jędrzejczak 2004: 83–96; 2009: 695–697).

circle. In the light of the latest research, it is necessary to verify the claims as to the secondary value of her poetry (cf. Santirocco 1979: 229–239; Tschiedel 1992: 87–102). Her short elegies are pearls of high poetry and a sense of beauty that Ovid himself would not be ashamed of. In one of her elegies the poetess calls herself *Servi filia Sulpicia* (IV, 10). Her grandfather was Servius Sulpicius Rufus (died in 43 BC), a jurist and friend of Marcus Tullius Cicero. His son Servius Sulpicius Rufus, who might be identified with the poet, mentioned by Horace, Ovid, and Pliny the Younger (Witczak 1994: 77–82), was probably Sulpicia's father. Horace mentions Servius Sulpicius among the best experts in poetry of the Augustan Age (ca. 30 BC or later). In that case, it would be easy to assume that Ovid's phrase (*Tristia* III 7, v. 12) *doctaque non patro carmina more canis* ("you sing the learned songs not in your father's fashion") was about relations between Sulpicia's work and her father's poetry. Unfortunately, no poetical fragments by Servius Sulpicius are preserved, though Ovid's and Pliny's testimonies suggest that he wrote erotic poems<sup>17</sup>.

Sulpicia's mother was Valeria, sister of Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus (64 BC–8 AD), the famous patron of poets. In one of her elegies (*Corpus Tibullianum* IV 8) Sulpicia herself admits that Messalla has taken care of her. We do not know details of our poet's life, but we can guess that she was more or less the same age as the two sons of Messalla, who had been in the poetic circle since childhood and even tried their hand at the literary field. Marcus Valerius Messallinus, the older son of Messalla, was born in 39 BC, the younger son Marcus Aurelius Cotta Maximus Messallinus was born 16 years later (i.e. in 23 BC). They were younger than Publius Ovidius Naso (born in 43 BC), so their cousin Sulpicia was in fact still a little child when Ovid first came to Rome (ca. 30 BC) and joined the poetic circle of Messalla.

### 3. Ovid, Messalla's family and Sulpicia.

What were Ovid's relationships with Messalla's house and the literary circle patronized by Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus? This question was answered comprehensively by Lidia Winniczuk (1962: 194–206, 239–251)<sup>18</sup>. From the letters of Ovid, written in exile, we know that the poet was a frequent guest at Messalla's house, that he was a friend of his sons, especially the younger Cotta Maximus, and that Messalla paid attention to the young poet's talent from an early period. The support of Messalla may have saved Ovid from punishment immediately after the publication of the *Ars Amatoria* (2 BC). Only after Messalla's death (8 AD), and ten years after the publication

<sup>17</sup> According to Ovid, „nec sunt minus improba Servi carmina” (*Tristia* II 441). See also Pliny's words in *Epistulae* V 3, 5.

<sup>18</sup> See also Witczak (1996: 129–131).

of this “badly judged” work, was Ovid sentenced to relegation. The poet was at the funeral of his Patron; he even wrote an occasional, mournful song (*Epistulae ex Ponto* I 7, v. 29–30):

cui nos et lacrimas, supremum in funere munus.  
et dedimus medio scripta canenda foro.

(“For him [i.e. Messalla] I gave tears which are the final meed of death, and I wrote verses to be chanted in the midst of the forum”; translated by Wheeler 1995: 303).

Being in exile Ovid talks about himself in one of the letters to Messallinus (*Epistulae ex Ponto* II 2, v. 1–4):

Ille domus vestrae primis venerator ab annis,  
pulsus ad Euxini Naso sinistra freti,  
mittit ab indomitis hanc, Messaline, salutem,  
quam solitus praesens est tibi ferre, Getis.

(“He who revered your house from his earliest years, Naso, the exile on Euxine’s left-hand shore, sends to you, Messallinus, from the land of the unconquered Getae this greeting which he used to offer face to face”; translated by Wheeler 1995: 323).

In another letter to the elder son of Messalla, the banished poet emphasizes (*Epistulae ex Ponto* I 7, v. 29–30):

et tuus est genitor nos infitiatus amicos,  
hortatur studii causaque faxque mei.

(“Your father [i.e. Messalla] did not deny my friendship, he who was at once the encourager, the cause, and the guiding light of my pursuit”; translated by Wheeler 1995: 303).

Ovid repeats the same sentiments in his poetical letter (*Tristia* IV 4, v. 27–30), which is probably addressed to Messalinus:

nam tuus est primis cultus mihi semper ab annis –  
hoc certe noli dissimulare – pater,  
ingeniumque meum (potes hos meminisse) probabat  
plus etiam quam me iudice dingus eram.

(“For from my earliest years I honoured your father [i.e. Messalla] – this at least desire not to conceal – and my talent, you may remember, was approved by him even more than in my own judgment I deserved”; translated by Wheeler 1995: 179).

Ovid wrote the following words to Cotta Maximus, Messalla’s younger son (*Epistulae ex Ponto* II 3, v. 69–78):

movit amicitiae tum te Constantia longae,  
ante tuos ortus quae mihi natus amicus,  
et quod eras aliis factus, mihi natus amicus,

quodque tibi in cunis oscula prima dedi.  
 quod, cum vestra domus teneris mihi semper ab annis  
     culta sit, esse vetus me tibi cogit onus.  
 me tuus ille pater, Latiae facundia linguae  
     cui non inferior nobilitate fuit,  
 primus, ut auderem committere carmina famae,  
     impulit: ingenii dux fuit ille mei.

(“Then you were stirred by the constancy of long friendship that began before your birth, because for others you had become, for me you had been born, a friend, because I gave you the first kisses in your cradle. This, since I have constantly revered your house from my earliest years, makes me perforce a burden of long standing upon you. That famed father of yours [i.e. Messalla], who enjoyed an eloquence in Latin as lofty as his birth, first urged me to venture upon the publication of my verse: he was the guide of my genius”; translated by Wheeler 1995: 337).

Cotta Maximus, who himself tried his hand in the poetic field (see *Epistulae ex Ponto* III 5, v. 39–40; IV 16, v. 41–42), became Ovid’s close friend, for a long time he corresponded with the exiled poet and sent him news of what was going on in Rome. Ovid sends him the most poetic letters from Tomis (*Epistulae ex Ponto* I 5, I 9, II 3, III 2, III 5, probably *Tristia*, IV 5, V 9, V 10).

It is clear from the analysis of the poems from exile (*Tristia*, *Epistulae ex Ponto*) that Ovid, who came to Rome as a thirteen-year-old boy, quickly entered the literary circle of Messalla. Ovid not only acted in Messalla’s circle, but also was a regular visitor at Messalla’s house. He maintained a friendly relationship with Messalla’s immediate family (including two sons of Messalla), to which Sulpicia, Messalla’s niece, belonged as well. Sulpicia, the daughter of Servius Sulpicius and Valeria, Messalla’s sister, was, like Messalinus (born 39 BC), at least a few years younger than Ovid (born 43 BC). It is possible that Ovid first recognized her poetic talent and motivated her to write elegies of her own. Nothing, therefore, precludes the recognition of Sulpicia as the addressee of Ovid’s letter (*Tristia* III 7).

#### 4. Perilla as a literary pseudonym.

Ovid’s decision to use the Greek name *Perilla* in the *Tristia* III 7 seems to result from a long, careful creative process. The receiver of Ovid’s elegiac epistle was such a poetess, who, for a long time, had not practiced poetry anymore, but who nevertheless deserves to be compared with Sappho. We know only one woman poet who was active in the Augustan Age, namely Sulpicia, who acted in Messalla’s literary circle. She wrote erotic poetry, showing, like Sappho, the directness of

depicting emotions. Thus, Ovid could easily compare her to Sappho, the Lesbian bard (*Tristia* III 7, v. 20: *sola tuum vates Lesbia vincet opus*).

At the same time, Sulpicia had much in common with what we know of Metella, the female poet of an earlier generation known as Perilla. Both poetesses became the most distinguished poets of their time, both belonged to innovative poetic circles, both poetesses wrote verses under their own name and both are the subject of love poetry. We do not know if Sulpicia had received a literary pseudonym in Messalla's elegiac circle, but we can say with conviction that the literary name of Perilla would fit into the talented daughter of Servius Sulpicius Rufus.

Here we briefly summarize our reflections and highlight the basic similarities between the two women poets: Metella and Sulpicia (the elegist), the daughter of Servius Sulpicius Rufus and Valeria. Below we enumerate the similarities in a parallel statement (Tab. 1).

Similarities	Metella	Sulpicia
1. puella docta	<i>puella docta</i> in the literary circle of the neoteric poets ( <i>poetae novi</i> )	<i>puella docta</i> in Messalla's literary circle
2. Roman poet	female poet writing Latin poems under her own name	female poet writing short erotic elegies under his own name
3. relation	a relative or daughter of Quintus Caecilius Metellus Celer, the consul 60 BC and the governor of Cisalpine Gaul	the niece of Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus, the patron of poets
4. beloved	beloved girl of Caecilius Tidas, the neoteric poet	beloved girl of Cerinthus, a Roman man, who should be identified with Cornutus, Tibullus's friend ( <i>Corpus Tibullianum</i> II 2, II 3).
5. girl and poetess praised by Roman poets	a girl and poetess praised under the Greek pseudonym of Perilla in the poetic works of Tidas and Memmius, as well as other neoteric poets (including Helvius Cinna, Anser, Cornificius and Valerius Cato) (Ovid <i>Tristia</i> II 433–438)	a young girl praised by the so-called Sulpicia's Singer, an unknown poet of Messalla's circle ( <i>Corpus Tibullianum</i> IV 2–6); a female poet, earlier a young girl writing poems as early as "in the tender years", praised by Ovid ( <i>Tristia</i> III 7)
6. female counterpart to Sappho in Rome	<i>Sapphica puella / Musa doctor</i> "girl more learned than Sapphic Musa" (according to Catullus, <i>Carm. XXXV</i> 16–17)	<i>sola tuum vates Lesbia uincet opus</i> "only the Lesbian bard, Sappho, will surpass your work" (according to Ovid, <i>Tristia</i> III 7, 20)

Tab. 1. Two Roman women poets in comparison.

Source: own compilation.

## 5. Conclusions.

The analysis of the available sources clearly argues that Sulpicia the elegist was a *puella docta* in her uncle's poetic circle, and her role was parallel to that of Metella-Perilla in the neoteric circle several decades earlier. Sulpicia as a mirror image of Metella could easily be considered the "other Perilla" and referred to by this nickname by her contemporaries, who belonged to Messalla's circle, including e.g. Albius Tibullus and young Ovid. The Roman recipients of Ovid's elegiac epistles from the five-book collection of the *Tristia* probably had no problem identifying unnamed addressees. They could easily find out who corresponded to the stereotype of Perilla.

The final conclusion is that Sulpicia, the Roman woman poet of the Augustan Age, was the addressee of Ovid's poem (*Tristia* III 7). The exiled poet hid her under the Greek pseudonym of Perilla.

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