

In this paper, I argue that the elegiac *puella* is best understood as a fantasy of artistic, social and erotic fulfillment. She is neither an actual person, though she can never be separated from the historical conditions that make the fantasy possible and appealing, nor is she a mere literary fiction, although she has no poetic reality outside the text and its conventions of usage. The *puella* thus exists simultaneously within concrete historical and material constraints, as James has demonstrated, but she is always also a *scripta puella* as shown by Wyke and Veyne. My position goes beyond previous readings (Luck, Griffin, Lyne, James, Arkins): offering a way to understand how the term *puella* can include both an adulterous *matrona* like Lesbia and a courtesan like Cynthia while still performing the same essential function within the text (cf. Miller, Gardner). For reasons of time, I will illustrate this thesis by reading select poems by Catullus and Propertius. Ovid and Tibullus, however, conform to the type.

In Catullus, the *puella* functions as a fantasy of masculine fulfillment. Lesbia is the sophisticated and beautiful *Sapphica puella* who excites the envy and admiration of others. She is neither a traditional *matrona*, although married, nor the common man's *amica* (cf. 72.3). At the same time, she demonstrates the fantasy's fundamental impossibility. She is at once aristocratic and a violation of social expectations. She is associated with marriage, but cannot be integrated into a family structure (68b). She is sexually omnivorous and associated with death (11). She is precisely this contradictory pattern of substitutions.

In Book 1 of Propertius, Cynthia stands at the nexus of a complex series of substitutive relations. On one level, she *is* the *Monobiblos*, for ancient poetry books took their titles from their first words: "Cynthia prima" This play on words, in which the declaration that "Cynthia was the first" also serves the opening words of the collection, shows a high degree of poetic self-consciousness. It reveals a split between narrative content (Cynthia was the first woman with whom I fell in love) and metapoetic commentary (Cynthia was the beginning of the book and hence its title). Thus, from the first words of the first poem, we are involved in a substitutive series in which "Cynthia" has two different values. This split within the poetic subject and the *puella* as the object of his desire is more explicit and more concentrated than in Catullus. There is also another level of substitution present in these opening words: the first four lines of the poem are a translation of Meleager. Thus Cynthia substitutes for a self-conscious act of literary appropriation, indicating that the poetry to come will be literate, allusive, and modeled on Propertius's Hellenistic. All of these themes in turn find fuller expression throughout the *Monobiblos*, where Cynthia stands both for a fantasy of erotic fulfillment and for elegiac poetry and its intertextual relations with competing genres of iambic and epic, the latter being associated with narratives of political legitimacy and social recognition. Thus the figure of Cynthia substitutes for a very complex and contradictory series of relations—literary, personal, erotic, social, and political—in the same fashion as does the *matrona-puella*, Lesbia. Each presents both an ideal fantasy and its impossibility.