



## Reading and Writing the Heroides

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*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 98 (1998), 307-338.

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*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*

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## READING AND WRITING THE *HEROIDES*\*

JOSEPH FARRELL

A more accurate title for this paper might have been “Reading, Writing, Editing, and Translating the *Heroides*” because it will treat not only of the polar relationship between reader and writer but also of the mediating roles represented by those sometimes troublesome interpreters who stand between them. Accordingly, I will be drawing attention to certain more or less traditional literary issues as well as to a set of philological problems that have tended to inhibit the appreciation of these poems as literature—namely, those problems that crop up in the debate over the authenticity of certain poems and parts of poems in the collection.

There are no doubt many reasons why the *Heroides* have in modern times tended until recently to suffer from low critical esteem and to be studied comparatively little as literature,<sup>1</sup> but one reason is surely lack of consensus about the form that Ovid intended for the collection as a whole and for the individual poems it comprises.<sup>2</sup> Most Latinists, I

\*Versions of this paper were presented before audiences at Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Chicago, and Bryn Mawr. I would like to thank all of those present on these occasions both for their hospitality and for stimulating and challenging discussion, particularly Richard Thomas, Charles Segal, Richard Tarrant, Gregory Nagy, William Levitan, Susan Stephens, Daniel Selden, Marsh McCall, Laura Slatkin, Peter White, and Mark Possanza. None of those mentioned bears any responsibility for whatever faults the paper may contain.

<sup>1</sup> Until quite recently the *Heroides* were long held in low esteem by Anglo-American critics in particular: see for example L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955) 83–117; Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge 1970) 16–18. An important exception is W. S. Anderson, “The ‘*Heroides*’” in *Ovid*, ed. J. W. Binns (London 1973) 49–83.

<sup>2</sup> The question of authenticity involves at least three distinct issues: (1) interpolations within poems; (2) whole poems written by someone other than Ovid; (3) the relationship of poems 16–21 (the “double epistles”) to the single *Heroides* (are they part of the same collection as the single epistles? are they even by Ovid?). It is not my purpose to pronounce on any of these issues, but rather to attempt to develop some reading strategies

believe, have been unwilling to address as literature a collection or a poem of suspect authenticity—except with the intention of exposing poor literary quality in order to impugn authenticity. This situation might be expected to persist, since there is really no unanimity on which of the *Heroides* are Ovidian and which the spurious additions of later hands. Lately, however, there has been a notable increase in work on the *Heroides* as literature, most of it all but ignoring the still important issue of authenticity, either by confining its scope to poems that have not been impugned or in some cases perhaps tacitly advancing arguments based on the high literary quality of a particular poem as evidence in itself of Ovidian authorship.<sup>3</sup> And, of course, it appears that to some scholars the question of authenticity simply doesn't matter, either because they don't find it intrinsically interesting, because they feel they lack the expertise to address such questions, or because they despair, in the prevailing state of evidence, of ever settling the matter one way or the other.

I have no illusions about the possibility of finally solving the authenticity issue, which no doubt will, and should, remain a ζήτημα. On the other hand, I would like to offer some ideas on how best to proceed in circumstances when authenticity is in question. Far from suggesting that it is not an issue with which the literary critic need be concerned, or else accepting the notion that the philological challenge to authenticity undermines the legitimacy of any literary-critical reading of the collection, I would argue that the *Heroides*, in virtue of the ways in which they represent the production, transmission, and reception of texts, thematize both the philological and hermeneutic issues to which I have

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that will be useful under such conditions. I will address the issue of authenticity mainly in connection with the *epistula Sapphus*.

<sup>3</sup> To speak of the most comprehensive studies, Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton 1974) is little concerned with the issue of authorship because he regards earlier efforts to impugn the authenticity of individual poems basically as opportunistic displays of misguided philological acumen. Florence Verducci, *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart: Epistulae Heroidum* (Princeton 1985), perhaps pointedly includes chapters on the letters of Medea and Sappho in her study of selected *Heroides* but otherwise totally avoids the question of authorship, devoting instead some very interesting pages (288–306) to the question of literary evaluation. One reviewer (Duncan F. Kennedy in *JRS* 78 [1988] 238) rightly notes that her analysis restores a considerable measure of respect for these poems' literary qualities, which are often denigrated by those who wish to disprove Ovidian authorship, but he intelligently avoids the converse claim that whatever interest or excellence one might find in the poem guarantees that Ovid wrote it. On this point see further below, n. 42.

referred and that they do so in such a way as to draw the two types of interpretation together. What I am saying is arguably true, I believe, of any text, but in the *Heroides* this thematization is especially important. These poems in particular, along with a number of collateral texts that bear upon them, comment on the business of reading and writing, of editing and translating—in short, of interpreting in all its forms—in ways that are at times quite stunning. My topic, then, will be the ways in which our collection of *Heroides* celebrates the multiplicity of roles that all readers, all writers, and all texts must play in the production of literary meaning.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. THE GENDER OF LOVE LETTERS

As we know, the collection of *Epistulae Heroidum* transmitted under Ovid's name comprises a number of elegiac poems in the form of letters written by various women of heroic legend to the men they love.<sup>5</sup> The collection has been faulted for its homogeneity, but is by no means as homogeneous as is widely believed.<sup>6</sup> It is true that all the heroines

<sup>4</sup> Although the focus of this paper is the *Heroides*, I plan to follow a procedure of *Ovidium ex Ovidio explicare* and so to begin with will have quite a lot to say about certain passages in the *Ars amatoria* and the *Metamorphoses*. But the relevance of these texts will, I think, be sufficiently clear.

<sup>5</sup> The arguments presented here specifically concern the collection of single epistles only (i.e., *Heroides* 1–15) and not the double epistles (16–21). Though I am not unwilling to believe that the latter are the work of Ovid I regard the two collections as distinct entities; see W. Kraus, "Die Briefpaare in Ovids *Heroides*" *WS* 65 (1950) 54–77 = *Wege der Forschung* 92 (Darmstadt 1968; 1982) 461–494; Cornelia M. Hintermeier, *Die Briefpaare in Ovids Heroides* (Stuttgart 1993 [Palingenesia 41]). A study of the relationship between the two collections along the lines employed here for the single epistles might prove rewarding.

<sup>6</sup> Wilkinson's bluff assessment is notorious but not atypical: "The heroines are little differentiated except to the extent that their situations differ. . . . It is not surprising that we feel a certain relief when we come upon a piece in the *Heroides* which is not one more version of the now familiar complaint," and "To me the single *Heroides* (I–XV) are a uniform plum pudding with a fair admixture of glittering rings and sixpences. The first slice is appetising enough, but each further slice becomes colder and less digestible, until the only incentive for going on is the prospect of coming across an occasional ring or sixpence" (*Ovid Recalled* 97, 105–106). E. J. Kenney concurs noting that "it is difficult to rescue them, especially if they are read sequentially, from the charge of monotony" (*Ovid, Heroides XVI–XXI* [Cambridge 1996] 1, contrasting letters 1–15 with the later collection of double epistles). The homogeneity topos appears in sympathetic accounts of the *Heroides* as well: even their most recent translator (Daryl Hine, *Ovid's Heroines: A Verse*

write the letters because they are separated from the men they love, but this situation has persisted for varying amounts of time in the different cases, and may be either temporary, as it is for Penelope and Hermione (epistles 1 and 8), or permanent, as for all the others. The reasons for the separations are equally various. Some of the heroines are “abandoned women” like Dido (7), Ariadne (10), Medea (12), or Deianira (9). Others endure a separation imposed by outside forces, like the aforementioned Penelope and Hermione and like Briseis (3) and Laodamia (13) as well. Some, like Phaedra (4), are kept from their beloved by social convention, while others, like Canace (11), have already flouted convention and face the consequences; and each woman’s understanding of and response to her situation is distinct. The range of perception extends on the one hand from the pathetic irony by which Laodamia writes to a Protesilaus who is already dead to Deianira’s discovery that her own stratagem has destroyed all hope of reunion with her husband. In reality, all sorts of factors vary the collection, and this diversity renders the actual similarities all the more striking.

In addition to being separated from the men they desire, these women share an additional, equally important trait: they are all writers. Here too, we may argue, all write for different reasons and in different ways. Their writing expresses a range of personalities, motives, and fantasies. But they all write. I stress this simple fact first because it tends to get overlooked and second because it is crucial to remember that the *Heroides* is presented as a collection of texts produced by writing women.<sup>7</sup>

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*Translation of the Heroides* [New Haven 1991] ix) speaks of “the unity, not to say the monotony of the *Heroides*.” One might raise similar objections to such acknowledged masterpieces as Schubert’s *Die Winterreise*, a cycle of twenty-four meditations on the despair that follows unrequited love—representing, however, a male point of view. Is this difference in gender at least partly responsible for the differences in critical acclaim that the two works have enjoyed in modern times? The monotony topos is addressed by Jacobson (*Ovid’s Heroides* 381–404), who not implausibly connects the perception of monotony to a desire to demonstrate authenticity by distinguishing irregular (i.e., non-Ovidian) poems and passages from regular (i.e., Ovidian) ones. See also the brief but useful remarks of G. B. Conte, *Latin Literature: A History*, tr. Joseph B. Solodow, rev. Don Fowler and Glenn W. Most (Baltimore 1994) 348–349.

<sup>7</sup> Wilkinson opines that “The choice of epistolary form for *what are really tragic soliloquies* was not entirely happy” (*Ovid Recalled* 86; emphasis mine). The generic character of the *Heroides* as a collection of fictive epistles was definitively established by E.-A. Kirfel, *Untersuchungen zur Briefform der Heroides Ovids* (Bern/Stuttgart 1969 [Noctes Romanae 11]) 11–36. A decisive advance in understanding the poetic significance of

In order to make sense of this fact, we must first realize how strange it is. Of course, real women in Ovid's day obviously did write letters and some even wrote poetry; but the woman writer was not a very widespread phenomenon in ancient literary culture, certainly not one that we could regard as normative or paradigmatic.<sup>8</sup> And so it is worth asking: What did it mean to Ovid for a woman to write and, especially, to write of her desire? Is her writing the same as that of a man? Should we regard it as strange, knowing that behind these female writers lurks a male author? How can we answer such questions?

When needing instruction one naturally turns first to Ovid's didactic masterpiece, the *Ars amatoria*. The first two books of this poem are, of course, addressed to men. Book 3, which is addressed to women, develops much of its material by mere inversion of the advice given to men in the earlier books, but there are also passages that speak distinctly to the situation of women. Both strategies inform Ovid's treatments of the love letter, a genre concerning which the *praeceptor amoris* has some similar and some pointedly different things to tell members of each sex.

In Book 1, Ovid advises his male pupils to study rhetoric with a view to success not only in politics and at the bar, but at the singles' bar as well:

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form in the *Heroides* was achieved by Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's *Heroides*," *CQ* 34 (1984) 413–422. See also Wilfried Stroh, "Heroides Ovidianae cur epistulas scribant," in *Ovidio: poeta della memoria*, ed. Giuseppe Papponetti (Rome 1991) 201–244. For the collection's elegiac character see Friedrich Spoth, *Ovids Heroides als Elegien* (Munich 1992 [Zetemata 89]).

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting in passing, however, that Ovid is something of an exception in this regard. Unlike previous Roman love elegists, he gave his fictitious mistress the name of an actual Greek poet, Corinna (*Am.* 1.5.9 and *passim*); he acknowledges Sappho as a model (*Tr.* 2.3.61–66) and recommends her as such to others (*Ars* 3.330–331 with its opposite number *Rem.* 761, *Tr.* 3.7.19–20); he imparts what he has learned in the Muse's service to a rising young female poet whom he calls Perilla (*Tr.* 3.7); and throughout the exile poetry he likens himself and his condition to that of many different sorts of women, not least the women of the *Heroides* (see below, nn. 62 and 63). On Ovid and Sappho see Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* 277–299, 409; Linda S. Kaufman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca 1986) ch. 1 "Ovid's *Heroides*: 'Genesis' and Genre" 29–61; and, for a less benign view, Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho* 1546–1937 (Chicago 1989) ch. 1 "Female Desire and the Foundation of the Novelistic Order (1612–1694)" 43–115, esp. 60–78. See also Elizabeth D. Harvey, "Ventriloquizing Sappho: Ovid, Donne, and the Erotics of the Feminine Voice," *Criticism* 31 (1989) 115–138 and Perrine Galand-Hallyn, "Corinne et Sappho (*elocutio et inventio* dans les *Amours* et les *Héroïdes* d'Ovide)," *BAGB* (1991) 336–358.

disce bonas artes moneo, Romana iuuentus,  
 non tantum trepidos ut tueare reos:  
 quam populus iudexque grauis lectusque senatus,  
 tam dabit eloquio uicta puella manus. Ars 1.459–462

“Take my advice, o youth of Rome: Get a good education, but not merely to protect nervous defendants; just like the voters, the sober judge, and the chosen senate, a girl will give in, conquered by your eloquence.” Erotic eloquence, Ovid goes on to say, must take certain definite forms. The first approach should be made through a letter, which must make use of *blanditiae* and promise absolutely anything—without, of course, any intent to deliver (1.437–486). Indeed, we are told that the purpose of the letter is to take the place of a gift that would actually cost something (443–454). But thrift aside, the letter is characterized chiefly as a weapon of deceit. Thus Ovid refers to the story of how Acontius tricked Cydippe into marrying him, despite her engagement to another, by inscribing on a quince the words, “By Artemis, I will marry Acontius.”<sup>9</sup> When Acontius rolled the quince in the girl’s way, she picked it up, read it out loud, and so was bound by the oath. Ovid’s way of summarizing the tale is significant:

littera Cydippen pomo perlata fefellit,  
 insciaque est uerbis capta puella suis. Ars 1.457–458

“Cydippe was deceived by a letter written on a fruit, and was made the unwitting prisoner of *her own words*.” Without dwelling on the obvious ironies of his phrasing, Ovid goes on to advocate the pursuit of eloquence as an aid to courtship, but underlines the necessity that this eloquence disguise itself as plain speaking, to produce the effect of sincerity:

sit tibi credibilis sermo consuetaque uerba,  
 blanda tamen, praesens ut uideare loqui. Ars 1.467–468

<sup>9</sup> The most influential treatment of the story was undoubtedly the now fragmentary version of Callimachus in *Aetia* 3 (fr. 67–75 Pf.). The detail concerning the oath is given by the epistolographer Aristaenetus (1.10). The story is mentioned or alluded to constantly in Latin poetry, to which it was probably introduced by Cornelius Gallus: see Ralph M. Rosen and Joseph Farrell, “Acontius, Milanion, and Gallus: Vergil, *Ecl.* 10.52–61,” *TAPA* 116 (1986) 241–254, with further references.

“Make your style believable and your diction plain, though charming, so that you will seem to be speaking in person.” In short, the ultimate purpose in writing is deception, and the letter’s immediate goal is to produce the illusion that the writer himself is present and that the letter is not really there.

This is writing from the masculine point of view. In his advice to women, Ovid repeats some of the same advice. For instance, women, too, should use a plain style:

munda sed e medio consuetaque uerba, puellae,  
 scribite: sermonis publica forma placet.  
 a, quotiens dubius scriptis exarsit amator  
 et nocuit formae barbara lingua bonae! Ars 3.479–482

“Use decent but ordinary language, ladies: everyday speech works well. Oh, how many times an uncertain lover has caught fire because of a letter, while a barbarous tongue has ruined a good figure!” All love letters, then, men’s and women’s, should be written in the plain style. Beneath the apparently similar advice given to both sexes, however, lurks an important difference. For men, attaining the “sincerity effect” involves reining in their formidable rhetorical powers and confining their language to the most unpretentious level. For women the *genus tenue dicendi* is contrasted not with forensic orotundity, but with outlandish and unattractive barbarism. Here we must remember that in elegy difference in gender regularly corresponds to a difference in social status based in large part on nationality: the men whom Ovid addresses are the *Romana iuventus* (Ars 1.459), while the women are *meretrices* (1.435) of libertine status (3.615) and thus probably of foreign descent or even foreign-born.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, men and women approach the ideal of good, plain latinity from very different perspectives—men from that of a linguistic and rhetorical mastery of their native tongue, women from one of strangeness and unfamiliarity that can only aspire to mere functionalism.

The motif of women’s linguistic foreignness is one to which I shall return.<sup>11</sup> For the moment it is enough to observe that their unfamiliarity

<sup>10</sup> For a convenient discussion of these issues see A. S. Hollis, *Ovid, Ars Amatoria Book I* (Oxford 1977) xv–xvii. The contrast between Roman men and foreign women is analogically maintained in the introductory lines to Book 3, where men are Greeks and women Amazons.

<sup>11</sup> See below, nn. 13 and 54.



with Latin makes it difficult for Ovid to recommend to women anything other than a plain style. Consequently he gives his female pupils almost no advice about style, but concentrates instead on more practical matters, such as methods of eluding a watchful husband or guardian (3.611–666). When all else fails, he says, one possibility remains:

tot licet observent, adsit modo certa uoluntas,  
 quot fuerant Argo lumina, uerba dabis. Ars 3.617–618

“If determination is there, though guarded by as many eyes as Argus had, you can send a message.” The image of Argus, which turns Ovid’s female pupil into a type of Io, is an obvious one to use in such a context, but it is arresting for this reason: in the rehearsal of this myth in the *Metamorphoses* (1.568–750), the real Io in a sense takes Ovid’s advice. Encased in her bovine form and guarded by Argus himself, she comes upon her father Inachus and her sister nymphs, and tries to communicate to them her real identity. She gets nowhere—Ovid mentions her pathetic attempts to speak, one of the many examples of feminine voicelessness in the *Metamorphoses*<sup>12</sup>—until finally it occurs to her to scratch her name in the ground with her hoof:

littera pro uerbis, quam pes in pulvere duxit,  
 corporis indicium mutati triste peregit. *Metamorphoses* 1.649–650

“Rather than speech, the writing that her hoof traced in the dust provided bitter evidence of her bodily transformation.” Thus on this occasion too writing “letters” deceives the Argus-eyed guardian.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Io’s story in fact occurs in a cluster of tales in which sexual predators impose voicelessness on their victims. In the immediately preceding story Daphne’s loss of voice permits Apollo to interpret the ambiguous shaking of her head as the laurel’s agreement to serve as his emblem (1.452–567). In a story that forms a digression to Io’s the nymph Syrinx flees from Mercury and turns into a reed, exchanging her voice for the sound of Pan pipes (1.689–712). The most explicit linkage of these themes occurs when Tereus rapes Philomela and cuts out her tongue to prevent her from talking about his crime (6.424–674). See also n. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Presumably she writes the characters “I” and “O”; though it would be an evident anachronism for her to write in Roman characters and to write at all before Cadmus had brought the alphabet to Greece (though this episode does not figure in Ovid’s rendition of the Cadmus saga). On the thematization of linguistic difference see below, n. 54. The writing of Io’s name is evidently an Ovidian innovation in the story: Franz Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen* 1 (Heidelberg 1969) 199 credits Ovid with the basic idea while blaming him for its tastelessness.

At any rate, in Book 3 of the *Ars* Ovid goes on to describe the best opportunities for a woman to write unobserved and then smuggle a letter out of the house. A good place to write is in the bath (619–620) and the letters should be given to a maidservant (the indispensable *conscia* 621) who may hide them on some of the more intimate parts of her body: Ovid mentions for instance the broad *fascia* about her warm bosom (621–622). The letters could also be bound to the faithful servant's feet or ankles (623–624); or she might even submit to having them written directly on her back in new milk, which, Ovid informs us, becomes legible when treated with coal dust (625–628).<sup>14</sup>

Obviously, then, for women too writing love letters is a duplicitous art. But when a woman writes, it is not the letter's addressee who is viewed as the target of delusion; rather it is that officious lot that stand between the writer and the intended reader, her beloved, that must be fooled.<sup>15</sup> I want to note here in passing the ironic relevance of this situation to our own as readers of the *Heroides*, which present themselves quite clearly as love letters from Penelope to Ulysses, from Briseis to Achilles, and so on. This aspect of the collection places us as readers in a position analogous on the one hand to that of the addressee; but the letters are not addressed to us. Should we imagine ourselves as reading the letters after the gentlemen to whom they are addressed? Or is our position more analogous to that of the various others hinted at in the *Ars* who threaten to intercept the letter before it reaches its destination? I will return to this point.<sup>16</sup> For now I merely note that interception is a

<sup>14</sup> It was this measure that captured the imagination of later erotic poets (Goethe, *Römische Elegien* 5.15–17) and fictional epistolographers (Laclos, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, letter 47). For the female body as a metaphor of the medium on which a text is written see Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1981) 243–263.

<sup>15</sup> Obviously the phrase that Ovid uses in raising the topic of women's love letters—*uerba dabis* (3.618)—is extremely unstable in its reference (see OLD *s.v.* *uerbum* 6) and could be taken to hint at a categorical and constitutive feminine duplicity. The orthodox position holds that the women of the *Ars amatoria* are inherently deceitful (see, e.g., Molly Myerowitz, *Ovid's Games of Love* [Detroit 1985] 117–118), and I would not argue that either sex as depicted in this poem presents a paradigm of candor. But the advice given about love letters shows that the kinds of duplicity that Ovid considers characteristic of each sex are not perfectly symmetrical.

<sup>16</sup> For work on this problem, see Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus 1983) 87–115; Christina Marsden Gillis, *The Paradox of Privacy: Epistolarity Form in Clarissa* (Gainesville 1984); Peter V. Conroy, Jr., *Intimate, Intrusive, and Triumphant: Readers in the Liaisons dangereuses* (Amsterdam 1987).

constant danger. For this reason Ovid presents women's writing not as a public act but as an extremely intimate one, something to be done in private. Further, the style of the woman's letter is hardly addressed at all; rather the concrete issues of where and on what to write it, where to hide it, what types of invisible ink to use and how to make them legible, dominate Ovid's account. It is not the illusion of an absent party's presence, but the tangible fact of the letter itself that Ovid stresses. It is perhaps worth noting the recommendation given elsewhere in the *Ars* where the *praeceptor* advises against a go-between who is too comely: often, he observes, in his own experience has such a one played her mistress' role (3.665–666). The principle that the messenger should herself not be too attractive seems sound enough in general, but especially so if one imagines the ardent and unprincipled lover dusting and peering intently at the marks of invisible ink traced out on the maidservant's naked back. Here the letter's materiality refuses to be denied, nor will it be the writer's presence that it conjures up.

The woman who commits her feelings to a love letter runs considerably greater risks than a man. The worst that can happen to the young, well-born Roman gentleman is that he will be found to be indulging in what Ovid, after all, calls *concessa furta* (*Ars* 1.33). The *puella*, however, enjoys no protection by virtue of her social status and runs the risk of punishment if she is caught. We have several elegies on the theme of the *puella* battered in a fit of jealous rage (notably *Am.* 1.7),<sup>17</sup> and at one point Ovid dwells on the danger into which a woman puts herself by taking anyone into her confidence: an unscrupulous go-between, in this case (not incidentally) male, has practically unlimited opportunities for blackmail (*Ars* 3.485–490). But without an accomplice a woman can do little, since she is usually under surveillance and is thus rendered powerless without external assistance. For Ovid's female pupil duplicity is a means of gaining some freedom of action. To conceal her activities Ovid recommends that the *puella* refer to her lover as *illa* rather than *ille* (3.498), that she dictate the letter to a scribe (485) or learn several different scripts (493) to conceal her own handwriting and that she be very careful to erase tablets that she has received from her lover (495–496). This last warning is extremely telling. At first glance, it might be taken as concerning the deception of the addressee, who

<sup>17</sup> But the motif appears in Propertius (2.5.20, 2.15.17–20) and Tibullus (1.1.73–74, 1.10.53–58) as well.

might glimpse beneath the letter addressed to him the traces of one addressed to another. Just this warning, in fact, is given in passing to men:

et, quotiens scribes, totas prius ipse tabellas  
inspice: plus multae, quam sibi missa, legunt.     *Ars* 2.395–396

“And whenever you write, first inspect the entire tablet yourself: many girls read more than was intended for them!” This passage occurs in a section on keeping one’s girlfriends unaware of each other, so its message is clear: do not send one girl a message that is in effect a legible palimpsest containing a communication from a different girl. When women receive the same advice, however, the situation is different:

nec nisi deletis tutum rescribere ceris,  
ne teneat geminas una tabella manus.     *Ars* 3.495–496

“Nor is it safe to reply except on tablets that have been erased, lest a single page contain two hands.” The point of this advice is that a woman must not let her guardians discover her replying to a love letter: the tablet on which her lover wrote must be thoroughly erased before any reply—which will use such stratagems as referring to the *amator* as a woman—can be made. This example as well as anything else illustrates the great gulf separating men’s love letters from those written by women. In speaking of these two epistolary types, the fact is that we are practically speaking of altogether different genres.

## 2. THE RHETORIC OF SINCERITY AND THE RHETORIC OF PASSION

This general contrast between men’s and women’s writing and many of its details are extremely relevant to a proper estimate of Ovid’s epistolary mode. Most modern critical assessments of the *Heroides* have found it necessary to fault, explain, or apologize for the highly rhetorical nature of these compositions as being somehow at odds with some hypothetical, normative conception of what love letters should be like.<sup>18</sup> But critics who are embarrassed by the frequent rhetorical flour-

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., the remarks of Wilkinson quoted in n. 7 above. The artificiality topos is discussed by Verducci, *Toyshop* 288–306.

ishes of these letters are mistaking the rhetoric's significance. Remember Ovid's advice to men in the *Ars*: to affect an unaffected style, to employ a self-concealing art, for the purpose of deceiving the object of one's desire. This is not the strategy employed by most of Ovid's epistolary heroines. Phaedra is in my view the only notable exception—ironically, no doubt, in view of the important place that the Euripidean heroine seems to hold on Ovid's thinking about tragic love.<sup>19</sup> The others, no matter how rhetorically they express themselves, and even when they do not know it, are to be generally understood as speaking from the heart. If the lack of a narrative frame in the *Heroides* obscures this fact, it may become visible again if we examine another parallel passage, this one an example of the heroic epistle that is embedded in that encyclopedia of literary modes and genres, the *Metamorphoses*.

In Book 9 Ovid tells the story of Byblis, daughter of Miletus of Lycia, who fell passionately in love with her twin brother Caunus. Her story is dominated by three highly charged utterances. There are two soliloquies in which she first wrestles with the feelings that she has for her brother and then voices her despair at his rejection of her love; and between these soliloquies there is a letter in which she discloses to Caunus her feelings towards him. All three passages are highly rhetorical, of course, and have been faulted for being so.<sup>20</sup> Soliloquies as a form are a particularly easy target, since they are so elaborate in their rhetoric; but there can be no question of duplicitous suasion here, since the form expresses the passionate turbulence of the speaker's inner emotions as shame strives with lust to determine her actions or depict her state of mind. The letter by contrast has a frankly suasive goal:

<sup>19</sup> The idea that the "rhetorical" nature of the letters marks them as insincere is of course a critical commonplace, and I would certainly not argue that all of the women of the *Heroides* write as guileless ingenues: Phaedra is perhaps the most extreme example of duplicity in the collection. My point is that a character like Phaedra should not be considered normative for the collection as a whole: rather she should be evaluated against the generic expectation that the written word of a woman in love is a truthful utterance. On Phaedra's letter in criticism of the *Heroides* see Verducci, *Toyshop* 294–296; Sergio Casali, "Strategies of Tension (Ovid, *Heroides* 4)," *PCPS* 41 (1995) 1–15. Euripides' Phaedra is of course a letter writer and a highly duplicitous one at that; on this problem see Charles Segal, "Signs, Magic, and Letters in Euripides' *Hippolytus*," in *Innovations of Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Hexter and Daniel Selden (New York 1992) 420–455.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* 206–207 and, more favorably, 226–228. Otis, *Ovid* 217–225 emphasizes the rhetorical element in the soliloquies and the letter, but finds in this characteristic evidence of subtle character rendering rather than misplaced Ovidian cleverness.

Byblis wants her brother to return her love. It is noteworthy that she deliberates whether she should speak to him directly or make her confession in written form, and decides for the latter course—exactly what Ovid had advised his *male* pupils to do in Book 1 of the *Ars*. This reversal of gender roles signals that something is amiss.<sup>21</sup> Ovid depicts a Byblis who devotes great care to her exordium:

incipit et dubitat; scribit damnatque tabellas;  
et notat et delet; mutat culpatque probatque;  
inque uicem sumptas ponit positasque resumit.

*Metamorphoses* 9.523–525

“She begins, and hesitates; she writes, and curses her tablets; she makes a mark, and scratches it out; she makes changes, finds fault, then approves the original and by turns takes out what’s there and puts back what’s been removed.” So far, Byblis’ writing sounds like anything other than the spontaneous and genuine outpourings of an impassioned soul. She seems clearly to be striving for some measured effect. But the narration continues:

quid uelit ignorat; quidquid factura uidetur  
displicet. in uultu est audacia mixta pudorque.  
scripta “soror” fuerat; uisum est delere “sororem”  
uerbaque correptis incidere talia ceris. . . .

*Metamorphoses* 9.526–529

“What she means, she doesn’t know; whatever she tries to do displeases her; her face wears a mixed expression of reckless shame. She’d written ‘sister,’ but it seemed best to delete the ‘sister,’ catch up the tablets, and carve such words as these.” Byblis is, one might argue, sufficiently calculating to reflect on the rhetorical decorum of calling oneself

<sup>21</sup> Similarly Peter E. Knox, *Ovid, Heroides: Select Epistles* (Cambridge 1996) cites the advice that Ovid gives in *Ars* 1 and notes that “to a considerable extent the epistles that O. writes for his heroines in the *Heroides* adhere to these precepts” (25). Like Byblis, however, by following the advice that Ovid gives to male readers rather than that directed to *puellae* in Book 3, the women of the *Heroides* implicitly “misread” the *Ars*. Transgressing gender boundaries is of course a major preoccupation of Roman poetry and especially of Ovid, particularly in the *Metamorphoses*. Seldom if ever are such transgressions made without cost.

“sister” in a love letter. But we have already learned that she hated to hear Caunus address her thus (466–467), and the point seems more psychological than rhetorical: Caunus’ sister is precisely what she wishes she were not. The deletion of “sister” is what Gérard Genette would call an iterative act: by this one example we are informed about the nature of Byblis’ other false starts, hesitations, and erasures.<sup>22</sup> Far from exercising her *inventio* in casting about her store of exordium topoi for a suitable beginning, she is wrestling with the conflicting emotions that make speech impossible and writing difficult. But once she makes this final deletion of the significant word “sister,” she plunges into the letter and writes with abandon. We see this fact with great clarity in the splendidly gratuitous phrase *correptis ceris* (529), “grabbing the tablet.” She grabbed the tablet, Ovid tells us, and wrote as follows. But Byblis has of course been holding the tablet and writing all this time as we have already been told very carefully and might anyway have assumed.<sup>23</sup> The passage is worth quoting:

et meditata manu componit uerba trementi:  
dextra tenet ferrum, uacuum tenet altera ceram.

*Metamorphoses* 9.521–522

“. . . and with trembling hand she composes *meditata uerba*, words she has pondered: her right hand holds the steel, the other blank wax.” *meditata* can be taken to show that she wanted, as it were, to follow Ovid’s advice to male lovers by sending only well-chosen words to her beloved; her erasures seem at first to corroborate this interpretation. But the erasures lead only to indecision and illustrate that her passion was too great for meditated writing. When, therefore, she seizes anew the tablets that she is already holding, the reader is given a clear sign in the violent, impetuous word *correptis* that she has dispensed with calculation and, in what follows, writes with abandon.

In view of this narrative frame, we must resist any temptation to see

<sup>22</sup> *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, tr. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca 1980) 116.

<sup>23</sup> *correptis* is the generally attested reading, but several mss. contain the wonderful variant *correctis*—perhaps an easy error for the *lectio difficilior*, but possibly a deliberate “correction” of a perceived fault in the scribe’s exemplar. In the latter case, our scribe unwittingly (?) places himself in a position analogous to that of the character Byblis. On the ways in which the literary epistle anticipates thematically the circumstances of its own textual transmission see sections 4 and 5 below.

in Byblis' letter any insincerity on her part or discrediting irony on the part of the narrator. In this and in the entire letter that follows, just as in the soliloquy that precedes it, high rhetoric is but a figure for grand passion. We can apply this lesson directly to the *Heroides*. For instance, Byblis' letter begins with a highly sophisticated handling of the *salutatio*:

quam, nisi tu dederis, non est habitura, salutem,  
hanc tibi mittit amens. pudet, a! pudet edere nomen  
et, si quid cupiam quaeris, sine nomine uellem  
posset agi mea causa meo, nec cognita Byblis  
ante forem quam spes uotorum certa fuisset.

*Metamorphoses* 9.530–534

“What she won't have, unless you give it her, good health your lover bids you. Shame, oh! shame to divulge my name; and, if you ask what I desire, I wish that I could plead my case<sup>24</sup> anonymous, nor known as Byblis were before desire had been attained.” Several of the *Heroides* play rhetorically with the conventions of the *salutatio*—*Byblis Cauno suo salutem dicit*—in a very similar way. There of course the function of the game is more to tease the reader, who presumably did not have in the original version the titles found in our medieval manuscripts, as to the identity of the writer;<sup>25</sup> not, as in Byblis' letter, to express the writer's reluctance to disclose her identity to her addressee. But the rhetorical means are similar in both cases.

Byblis' letter, at thirty-four lines not even one-third the length of even the shortest of the *Heroides* (epistle 1, Penelope to Ulysses, 116 lines), is nevertheless characterized as long: in her heedlessness of all

<sup>24</sup> I note in passing Byblis' likening of her love letter to a forensic speech, a similitude that Ovid finds appropriate to the situation of male writers at *Ars* 1.459–462. By such means Ovid signals clearly to the reader who knows his previous work that Byblis is transgressing an important gender boundary—that she has, in effect, “misread” the *Ars amatoria*.

<sup>25</sup> The basic discussion of salutations in the *Heroides* is Kirfel, *Untersuchungen zur Breiiform* 114; on the relationship between the *Heroides* and Byblis' epistle, 19–20, with whose main conclusions I agree. E. J. Kenney (*CR* 20 [1970] 196, with further references), followed by Jacobson (*Ovid's Heroides* 404–406), has argued that at least some of the poems were originally accompanied by headings, though he makes his strongest case (*Gnomon* 33 [1961] 485) in regard to the double epistles, a different collection from the one under discussion here. See further below, n. 46.



but her passion, she crowds the very margins of her tablet (*talia nequam perarantem plena reliquit / cera manum, summusque in margine uersus adhaesit* 564–565). This emphasis on the materials of writing, which we have already seen at the beginning of the letter, “corrects” Byblis’ attempt to “write like a man” by recalling the orientation of the advice given to women in *Ars* 3 (although here, because Byblis and Caunus live in the same house, no extraordinary precautions need be taken to write in secret). In a similar vein, Byblis also employs a go-between (although here, as if aware of Ovid’s advice in *Ars* 3 not to use pretty *ancillae* for this job, she entrusts the letter to a manservant, 568–573). We are told in fact how she seals the tablets, how she moistens the seal with her tears, and how she drops them (an unlucky omen!) in handing them over to her messenger (566–572). Such details have close parallels in the *Heroides*, as we shall see. But in the second soliloquy, which follows Caunus’ shocked and disgusted reaction to the letter, Byblis reproves her rashness in confiding herself so completely. She should have spoken first, proceeding cautiously through *ambiguis dictis* (588); rather than trust waxen tablets she should have let her presence work its influence on Caunus, letting him see her face, her tears, giving herself opportunity to say more than a letter could hold, to embrace him, and do anything that might have changed his mind (601–609). Here, then, is another ironic reference to the *Ars* that points out the difference between men’s and women’s writing. In the *Ars*, as we have seen, Ovid advises men to make their first approach *per litteras* precisely because it provides them with greater opportunities to hide their true feelings behind a seductively sincere sounding persona. Byblis, by contrast, sees (too late) that the letter is too frank a medium, one that provides the addressee with too direct an access to her mind and heart, removing any possibility of using the feminine rhetoric of physical persuasion—tears, embraces, and the like—that are practically unavailable to the male writer. For Ovid, then, the love letter is a kind of psychosexual shibboleth. From the male point of view, it is nothing more than an especially good and comparatively safe medium for practicing the duplicity that seduction requires. The letters of Paris and Acontius in the double epistles that have been transmitted along with the *Heroides* are good examples of what I mean. For women, the situation is very different. Instead of deception and safety, the letter exacts from the female writer a more thorough disclosure of her soul even than she may wish, and can even become a document of incrimination serv-

ing only to prove, as in Byblis' case, the seriousness and depravity of her desire.<sup>26</sup>

Byblis' impulsive disclosure of her lust stands as an important model for readers of the *Heroides*. Her rhetoric is a sign of her passion, her use of writing both a circumvention of the shame that renders her mute and an instrument of unintended autoincrimination. Try as she might to follow Ovid's advice about the letter of seduction, she finds that this is an essentially masculine form, that the woman writer is not sufficiently duplicitous to carry it off; that her writerly gift is not persuasion, but rather exquisitely, evenly painfully accurate self-disclosure.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. THE FALSE SPEAKER AND THE FAITHFUL SCRIBE

In the *Heroides*, the dichotomy between male deceit and female self-revelation is maintained, but with an important difference: we repeatedly encounter this polarity in the form of a substantial opposition between speaking and writing. Here just as in the *Ars amatoria* men seem intent upon deception; but in contrast to the *Ars*, where seduction *per litteras* is a masculine art form, the *Heroides* represent male duplicity as effectively confined to speech while writing, which is almost invariably regarded as suited to telling the truth, is an activity from which men are virtually prohibited. The first poem of the collection as we have it, which most scholars agree would have stood first by Ovid's design,<sup>28</sup> is the letter from Penelope to Ulysses, and it is paradigmatic and programmatic in this respect.

<sup>26</sup> Complete disclosure of the writer's emotional state even to an extent unintended by the writer becomes such a fundamental constitutive element of later amorous epistolography that Laocles can even make his most cynical and predatory male character, the Vicomte de Valmont, speak of his attempt to *counterfeit* this effect in his own love letters (*Les Liaisons dangereuses*, letter 70).

<sup>27</sup> On this point see Verducci, *Toyshop* 29.

<sup>28</sup> For speculation as to the ordering principle (or principles) embodied in the collection as we have it see G. P. Goold, "*Amatoria Critica*," *HSCP* 69 (1965) 45; Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* 407–409; M. Pulbrook, "The Original Published Form of Ovid's *Heroides*," *Hermathena* 122 (1977) 29–45; Alessandro Barchiesi, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae Heroidum 1–3* (Florence 1992) 245–248. On Penelope's letter as the first in the collection see Stephen Hinds, "Booking the Return Trip: Ovid and *Tristia* 1," *PCPS* 211/31 (1985) 28; Barchiesi 15 n. 1, 51–52; Knox, *Select Epistles* 12.

hanc tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Vlixē;  
 nil mihi rescribas attinet: ipse veni. *Heroides* 1.1–2

“Your Penelope sends this letter to you, Ulysses, her tardy husband. There’s no point in your writing back to me; come in person.” The first lines of the *Heroides* both establish the epistolary form of the collection with a very close approximation of a prose *salutatio* and prescribe a very definite sexual poetics for what follows: women will do the writing; men may not. The man’s role is that of reader, who is then to act on what he has read. But he is not to usurp the female prerogative of writing. Such a categorical interpretation of these lines may seem forced. Penelope is, after all, simply telling her husband to return home at last instead of writing a letter. But in fact, both the immediate context and the overall shape of the *Heroides* support my interpretation. First, Penelope’s letter. Duncan Kennedy has arrived at a precise reading of this poem *qua* letter, a reading that I find very persuasive.<sup>29</sup> If with Kennedy we read the poem keeping the *Odyssey* always in our minds, as I believe we must, we find that Ovid “dates” Penelope’s letter very exactly. Telemachus has just returned from his trip to Pylos and Sparta. She has learned from him everything that Nestor and Menelaus had to say about the homecoming of Ulysses and the other Greeks. Telemachus gives her this information in Book 17 of the *Odyssey*, or, chronologically, on the day before Odysseus kills the suitors in the hall of his palace. Moreover, we remember from *Odyssey* 19 that a stranger has just arrived, claiming to know Ulysses; and the letter that she is writing and that we are reading, namely *Heroides* 1, is to be given to him, as she gives letters to all strangers, in the hope that one will reach her husband (59–62).

Here let us recall the connection between Penelope as sender of the letter and ourselves as readers. Penelope has certainly written this letter with a specific reader in mind: her husband, Ulysses. But her statement that she gives similar letters to all visitors reveals that she has no illusions about the likelihood of any single letter actually getting through. Penelope has sent who knows how many versions of this letter to be read by who knows what and how many readers? Here again we are invited to imagine ourselves as reading someone else’s mail,

<sup>29</sup> Kennedy, “Epistolary Mode.” Kennedy’s observations are accepted and developed by Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum* 15–19.

letters we have intercepted, even as the author, to the extent that he identifies himself with Penelope, comments on how little control he has over addressing himself to a particular readership. Each poem, in the parlance of the narratologists, may construct its own “implied” or “ideal reader”,<sup>30</sup> but it cannot construct or control the reactions of the many and various actual readers that it will eventually encounter.

At any rate, it is overwhelmingly probable that the stranger mentioned in the letter is Ulysses himself, who of course arrives in Ithaca disguised as a beggar. The letter is extremely ironic, then, in that it is written to a man who is already present under the same roof. In view of the generic rule that regards these letters as inherently truthful utterances, however, the irony is deepened. Penelope writes this truthful letter only because she has been deceived by her husband in person. There is nothing surprising in this: as Vergil puts it, *sic notus Vlixes*. We expect him to deceive: it is, throughout classical literature, the most important aspect of his character. On the other hand, we expect the same of Penelope. She is in the *Odyssey* a good match for her husband by virtue of her own well-developed talent for deception. We think of the ruse concerning Laertes’ burial shroud, of the testing to which she subjects Odysseus after his return, and so forth.<sup>31</sup> But here Ovid subjects the narrative of the *Odyssey* to pointed revision. Of the shroud, for example, Penelope exclaims,

o utinam tum, cum Lacedaemona classe petebat,  
 obrutus insanis esset adulter aquis!  
 non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto,  
 non quererer tardos ire relictas dies,  
 nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem  
 lassaret uiduas pendula tela manus.

*Heroides* 1.5–10

“Would that Paris had died on his way to Lacedaemon! I would not now be so utterly abandoned, nor seek to beguile the sluggish night with weaving.” The motif of deception is present here in the phrase *fallere noctem* (9), but in a denatured form: it is only the boredom of her lonely evenings that Penelope means to deceive or beguile, not the suitors who have agreed to let her finish weaving a shroud for Laertes

<sup>30</sup> For the concept see Gerald Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology* (Lincoln 1987) 43 s.v. “implied reader,” with references; cf. Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 259–260.

<sup>31</sup> For Penelope’s duplicity cf. (e.g.) Cicero *Luc.* 95, Seneca *Ep.* 88.8, Juvenal 2.56.

before deciding which one of them she will marry.<sup>32</sup> The motifs of weaving or spinning and deception are juxtaposed again later in the poem, when Penelope imagines Ulysses lying in the arms of some other woman, telling her how simple his wife is:

forsitan et narres quam sit tibi rustica coniunx,  
 quae tantum lanas non sinat esse rudes.  
 fallar et hoc crimen tenues uanescat in auras,  
 neuue reuertendi liber abesse uelis! *Heroides* 1.77–80

Penelope imagines her husband representing her as a bumpkin who has no art except spinning, but exclaims, “Oh, I hope I am mistaken (*fallar* 78) and this charge is vain, and that you would never willingly stay away when you could return!” Her spinning here is anything but duplicitous; rather it is the irreproachable, everyday task of the *materfamilias*, who actually hopes to be deceived in her anxiety over her husband’s extended absence. This Penelope then is different from the shrewder Homeric prototype; and this Ovidian revision of the character familiar from the *Odyssey* establishes the central dichotomy between deceptive male speech and guileless female writing in the opening poem of the *Epistulae Heroidum*.

From this line of argument it will be clear that I follow Kennedy’s interpretation only in part. Apropos of the letter’s deviations from the Homeric narrative, Kennedy notes that “within the epistolary context, deviation from an established source allows the reader to recognise and penetrate the subjectivity of the writer’s viewpoint, which is a central feature of the form”; thus when the letter contradicts Homer, “we should see this contradiction . . . as a clue planted by Ovid which will prompt us, with our superior knowledge through the *Odyssey* of what ‘objectively’ happened, to question Penelope’s state of mind and motives in writing this letter.”<sup>33</sup> On this reading, then, Homer’s narrative is to be regarded as objective and therefore true, Penelope’s as subjective and therefore false. Alessandro Barchiesi adopts a similar position sited in the generic context of elegy rather than the epistle, but once again accepting the canonicity of Homer’s account, according to which Penelope must be seen as duplicitous, and her duplicity must be

<sup>32</sup> I pass over the intergeneric interpretation of the weaving motif, which has been well handled by Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum* 23–25.

<sup>33</sup> Kennedy, “Epistolary Mode” 421.

seen as a characteristic that qualifies her to be the wife of the master deceiver, Ulysses.<sup>34</sup> These are important observations, fully in line with the positions held by most intertextual studies of classical literature. I believe, however, that a further point needs to be raised. The generic stance of the *Heroides* that presents female writing as inherently truthful and male speech as inherently false requires us at least to consider taking Penelope at her word. Our knowledge of the *Odyssey* requires us to find her less than candid, perhaps even guiltily so. One reaction to this state of affairs is to decide either for or against Penelope's account. Another is to suspend judgment on this point and to find rather that the text thematizes the interconnection between gender, genre, and truthfulness by posing the question in this way: Do we believe the story of Penelope, a woman writing as a witness and a participant about her own experiences in a personal, first-person narrative; or do we convict her of falsehood, finding in favor of the more authoritative, third-person, male-narrated account of Homer? Recognizing that the poem implicitly puts the question in just this way, we should at least hesitate to make the traditional judgment, and preferably suspend judgment altogether, raising our inquiry to the slightly higher level of not succumbing to, but rather coolly assessing, evaluating, and savoring the poem's acutely self-aware rhetorical strategies.

So much for challenging Homer. In more general terms, Penelope's instruction to Ulysses not to write back makes sense as a programmatic injunction against masculine epistolarity. It is a fact that men in this collection are simply not portrayed as writers. Exceptions to this rule are few, and of the sort that tend to prove the rule.<sup>35</sup> The only definite example of writing by a man in the single *Heroides* is I believe Oenone's report that Paris had carved her name on some beech trees as a token of his love and on a poplar had inscribed the following epigram:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Barchiesi, *Epistulae Heroidum* 15, 53, and passim. A similar position is taken by Knox, *Select Epistles* 19.

<sup>35</sup> Gianpiero Rosati, "Sabinus, the *Heroides* and the Poet-Nightingale. Some Observations on the Authenticity of the *Epistula Sapphus*," *CQ* 46 (1996) 207–216, has noted (211) the apparent balance between Penelope's letter, which begins by forbidding Ulysses to write in response, and Sappho's letter, which concludes with a plea for a letter of reply from Phaon, noting that if this contrast is part of Ovid's design for the collection it may also be seen as providing a segue from the unanswered epistles (1–15), which are written only by women, to the pairs (16–21) in which the men write and the women respond.

<sup>36</sup> The motif of carving declarations of love on trees is another element that may derive from the tale of Acontius and Cydippe (Callimachus *Aetia* 3 fr. 73 Pf.), though the motif

cum Paris Oenone poterit spirare relictā,  
ad fontem Xanthi uersa recurret aqua. *Heroides* 5.29–30

“When Paris shall draw breath after leaving Oenone, the waters of Xanthus will turn and run back to their source.” Paris like Ulysses is an archetypal deceiver; but his words contain the seeds of veracity. By writing down his insincere declaration of love for Oenone, Paris unwittingly proclaims an oracular truth; for by preferring Helen to Oenone he precipitates the Trojan War and makes possible, along with so much other woe, the memorable scene in *Iliad* 21 in which Achilles dams up the channel of the River Xanthus so that its waters actually do run back towards their source:

πλήθει γὰρ δὴ μοι νεκύων ἐρατεινὰ ῥέεθρα,  
οὐδέ τί πη δύναμαι προχέειν ῥόον εἰς ἄλα δῖαν  
στεινόμενος νεκύεσσι . . . *Iliad* 21.218–220

“My lovely channels are full of cadavers, I am all unable to roll my torrent down to the bright salt, being burdened with corpses,” the river complains to Achilles. Such, then, is the power of the written word in these poems that even Paris when writing cannot help but tell the truth.<sup>37</sup>

Because men are deceitful their natural medium is speech, which they use only to seduce by means of false promises. The women who write these letters dwell constantly on the deceptive speech of their perfidious lovers. Indeed, they regard deceptive speech no less than heroic deeds as the natural province of men, while regarding women themselves as the natural victim of both word and deed. But while deeds may be worthy of either praise or blame a lover’s words are almost inherently false. Thus Phyllis reproves Demophoon by equating his deceptive speech with a base deed:

fallere credentem non est operosa puellam  
gloria; simplicitas digna favore fuit. *Heroides* 2.63–64

“To fool a credulous girl is no glorious labor; my simplicity deserved kindness.” Phyllis goes on to pray that this deception may prove the

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is found in earlier texts as well: see P. J. Enk, *Sex. Propertii elegiarum liber I (Monobiblos)* (Leiden 1946) 159–161; David O. Ross, Jr., *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy, and Rome* (Cambridge 1975) 72–74.

<sup>37</sup> This argument is suggested by Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides* 183 n. 18.

most glorious of Demophoon's deeds and to contrast this trifling accomplishment with the magnificent deeds of his father, Theseus, imagining father and son memorialized by statues in the middle of Athens and taking up her prerogative as a writer to compose inscriptions for these monuments (65–74). Where Theseus glories in his victories over Sciron, Procrustes, the Minotaur, and similarly heroic foes, Demophoon will be embarrassed by a single line reading: "This is the man whose loving hostess was taken by guile" (*hic est cuius amans hospita capta dolo est* 74). The contrast between father and son is of course ironic: Phyllis complains bitterly that out of all Theseus' heroic deeds, the only one that Demophoon has emulated is the abandonment of Ariadne (75–76); and sure enough, Ariadne's letter to Theseus (10) complains just as bitterly of his false promises and deceptions.

I refer in passing to Deianira's similar disparagement of Hercules as a man of action (9), where the conceit that regards deceiving a lover as no great deed is extended into mockery of the hero's *servitium amoris*; but there is no need to multiply examples. The women of the *Heroides* delineate a clear polarity between men, speech, and deception on the one hand, and women, writing, and honesty on the other. This insight into the dichotomous nature of the epistles establishes one of the basic characteristics of the genre, an attitude of self-constitution. This interpretation is, I might point out, at odds with others that regard the rhetoric of the letters as itself duplicitous, deceptive, and self-serving, revealing the true character of the writer if at all only by way of ironic, unintentional disclosure.<sup>38</sup> Whatever truth may be contained in such interpretations must, in my opinion, be predicated on the more basic attitude pervading the *Heroides* that writing is an inherently truthful act and the letter a medium of honesty. As a rule, the women of the *Heroides* do not write to deceive. To the extent that they try to do so, they have already succeeded in deceiving themselves: their writing adheres to what they regard as the true story, and aims to use that truth, rather than a rhetoric of seduction, to persuade.

#### 4. CONSTRUCTING THE AUTHOR

The stress laid by these texts on the inherent truthfulness and femininity of writing itself raises certain questions and formulates them in

<sup>38</sup> See above, n. 19.



specific ways. One fruitful avenue of inquiry concerns the irony that behind the female writers of these letters stands a male author, an irony that presents itself most starkly in Sappho's letter to Phaon. Some of the implications of this remarkable letter have been traced in part by others.<sup>39</sup> I will therefore not attempt an exhaustive analysis of the poem from this point of view. Suffice it to say that the shift from frankly mythical to notionally biographical material is complicated by the fact that Sappho is herself a poet, indeed a model whom Ovid frequently acknowledges and recommends to others.<sup>40</sup> I hope to explore this area more fully on another occasion. But for the moment, I will focus on just two aspects of Sappho's letter that reflect even more directly on the poems that precede it.

First is the question of the text itself. The fifteenth epistle is one of the most intensively studied in the collection, its actual authorship being the most frequent object of investigation.<sup>41</sup> The issue is extremely complicated, and involves the genuineness of other letters in the collection; but the basic problem, apart from the fact that Sappho is a very different sort of personage from the other writers represented, is that her letter has come down to us in a textual tradition that appears to be independent of the rest.<sup>42</sup> This important piece of evidence is in conflict

<sup>39</sup> To the works cited in n. 8 above may be added Marina Scordilis Brownlee, *The Severed Word: Ovid's Heroides and the Novela Sentimental* (Princeton 1990).

<sup>40</sup> *Ars* 3.331 (with *Rem.* 761 *e contrario*), *Tr.* 2.365–366, 3.7.20.

<sup>41</sup> DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho* 61, 234, 333 n. 22, has some interesting observations on the cultural situation within which the scholarly debate over authenticity has taken place. For the early history of the dispute concerning the *epistula Sapphus* see H. Dörrie, *P. Ovidius Naso: Der Brief der Sappho an Phaon* (Munich 1975) 1–7, 203–207, whose comprehensive survey of the evidence closed a long period during which a consensus in favor of the poem's genuineness took shape. R. J. Tarrant, "The Authenticity of the Letter of Sappho to Phaon (*Heroides* xv)," *HSCP* 85 (1981) 133–153, has made the most forceful case against Ovidian authorship in recent times basing his argument on evidence concerning the transmission of the *Heroides* and the *Amores* as well as on stylistic analysis of the *epistula Sapphus*. His arguments have not gone totally unanswered (see below, nn. 42 and 44), but even if one hesitates to say with Knox ("Ovid's *Medea* and the Authenticity of *Heroides* 12," *HSCP* 90 [1986] 208) that Tarrant "has certainly shifted the burden of proof" to those who would support Ovidian authorship, doubts about the fifteenth epistle remain stronger than in any other case.

<sup>42</sup> For the transmission of the *epistula Sapphus* see Tarrant's article on Ovid in *Texts and Transmissions*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford 1983) 272–273, and the fuller accounts of Dörrie, *Brief der Sappho* 51–77, and *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae Heroidum* (Berlin 1971) 287–290. Tarrant, "Authenticity" 135, states that "the fact of separate transmission, although curious and remarkable, in itself gives no support to suspicions of the letter's authorship," and himself places more weight on stylistic analysis. But arguments con-

with another, equally important datum. In *Amores* 2.18 as elsewhere (e.g., *Ars* 3.345–346) Ovid boasts of his invention in the *Heroides* of a completely new genre. Here, however, Ovid actually names individual letters:

... aut quod Penelopes uerbis reddatur Vlix  
 scribimus et lacrimas, Phylli relicta, tuas,  
 quod Paris et Macareus et quod male gratus Iaso  
 Hippolytique parens Hippolytusque legant,  
 quodque tenens strictum Dido miserabilis ensem  
 dicat et Aoniae Lesbis amata lyrae. *Amores* 2.18.21–26

The letters in question are our epistles 1–7, 10, 11, and 15; i.e., those of Penelope, Phyllis, Oenone, Canace, Hypsipyle, Ariadne, Phaedra, Dido, and—Sappho. Of the letters not listed in this canon—including *argumenti causa* the letter of Medea to Jason<sup>43</sup>—I believe that only one, that of Briseis to Achilles, has universally evaded suspicion.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, of those that are indisputably listed only one has been seriously

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cerning style, however controlled by appeal to comparable passages of known date and authorship, often boil down to matters of taste; on this point see Stephen Hinds, “Medea in Ovid: Scenes from the Life of an Intertextual Heroine,” *MD* 30 (1993) 44. Finally, even in comparison to the judgment of such a connoisseur as Tarrant, I find the circumstances of the poem’s transmission the greatest source of doubt.

<sup>43</sup> The ambiguous wording of lines 23–24 and the fact that, uniquely in the collection as we have it, two different women (Hypsipyle and Medea) address letters to a single hero (Jason) has created some doubt about how many letters this list actually contains. The authenticity of *Heroides* 6 (Hypsipyle) has not, to my knowledge, been challenged, but Knox, “Authenticity” mounts a vigorous attack on epistle 12 (Medea). For a challenging critique of Knox’s methodology (which derives ultimately from Bertil Axelson, “Lygdamus und Ovid: Zur Methodik der literarischen Prioritätsbestimmung,” *Eranos* 58 [1960] 92–111) see Hinds, “Medea in Ovid.”

<sup>44</sup> Karl Lachmann in an 1848 lecture entitled “De Ouidii epistulis” (published in his *Kleinere Schriften zur classischen Philologie* 2, ed. J. Vahlen [Berlin 1876] 56–61), after categorically denying the authenticity of *Her.* 15, 16.39–142, and 21.13–248, singled out lines 3–10 of the third letter as the worst passage in what he felt were the four most non-Ovidian poems in the collection (3, 8, 9, and 13); but while he concluded on other grounds, primarily metrical, that six of the poems not included in the catalogue of *Amores* 2.18 (8, 9, 14, 16, 17, and 19) were not by Ovid, he felt that purely stylistic reservations about Briseis’ letter and four other non-canonical poems (12, 13, 18, and 20) were not sufficient grounds to deny Ovidian authorship. Since that time no one to my knowledge has questioned the authenticity of the third letter.

impugned—that of Sappho to Phaon.<sup>45</sup> I am not going to argue about the authenticity of any of these letters. What I mainly want to do is examine how the poems themselves thematize the question of authenticity in a way that anticipates and even presupposes much of the discussion to which they have been subjected.

I return to Sappho's letter. It begins with a question:

ecquid, ut adspecta est studiosae littera dextrae,  
 protinus est oculis cognita nostra tuis?  
 an, nisi legisses auctoris nomina Sapphus,  
 hoc breve nescires unde ueniret opus? *Heroides* 15.1–4

“Inspecting this letter, written with eager hand, did you recognize it immediately? Or, if you hadn't read the name of its author—Sappho—would you not know whence this brief work came?” The double entendre is extremely clear: as in several of the *Heroides* the opening of this epistle plays with the conventional *salutatio*, delaying the writer's name to tease the reader and thematizing this tease. *An, nisi legisses auctoris nomina Sapphus*: This line says in effect, “If I didn't tell you now that I am Sappho, who would you think I am?” It clearly hints at a possible answer as well; for the occurrence here of the important word *auctor*, “author,” can hardly be fortuitous.<sup>46</sup> The letter, too, is referred to not as an *epistula*, but as an *opus*—an *opus breue*, to be sure. But this is nevertheless a weighty word to use of a single poetic letter.<sup>47</sup> Add to this the fact that Ovid concludes practically all of his surviving works with variations of the *hoc opus exegi* topos,<sup>48</sup> and the word's occurrence

<sup>45</sup> I exclude the twelfth letter, to which the catalogue alludes teasingly if at all: see above, n. 41. Tarrant himself calls the catalogue “a powerful item of external evidence” for the authenticity of the *Heroides* 15 (“Authenticity” 135), but argues that both references to Sappho in *Amores* 2.18 (in lines 26 and 34) are interpolated (149–152). Charles E. Murgia, “Imitation and Authenticity in Ovid: *Metamorphoses* 1.477 and *Heroides* 15,” *AJP* 106 (1985) 456–474, while supporting and adding to Tarrant's stylistic arguments, rejects his deletion of the lines that refer to an *epistula Sapphus*.

<sup>46</sup> In my view the heading in the mss. identifying the sender and the addressee largely ruin this effect. For a different view see Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* 404–406.

<sup>47</sup> For the normal usage, which pertains to much larger literary works and to entire genres, see *TLL* 9.2, 849.65–850.20.

<sup>48</sup> The concluding poems of all three books of *Amores* are devoted to this theme and explicitly use the word *opus* to refer to an entire *liber* (1.15.2, 2.19.1, 3.15.20, where *opus* in the final word in the collection); cf. *Ars* 2.733, *Rem.* 811, *Metamorphoses* 15.871 (with Bömer's commentary *ad loc.*), *Tr.* 4.10.115–132, *Pont.* 3.9.46; and in general see E. Para-

here looks very much like a play on a formal coda spoken through the authorial persona. Thus we are encouraged to consider the final letter as one in which author and writer are the same person—presumably Ovid, whether he wrote the poem himself or it was written by somebody else, a Sabinus, for instance, in imitation of the authentic *Heroides*.<sup>49</sup> The appearance of Sappho's name corrects this impression; but if the author is not the writer, the writer nevertheless turns out to be an author—indeed, one of Ovid's most important authors, as he tells us repeatedly elsewhere in his work.<sup>50</sup>

Even after we read Sappho's name, however, the text dwells upon the issue of authorship, this time in connection with poetic style:

forsitan et quare mea sint alterna requires  
 carmina, cum lyricis sim magis apta modis.  
 flendus amor meus est, elegia flebile carmen:  
 non facit ad lacrimas barbitos illa meas. *Heroides* 15.5–8

“Perhaps you ask as well how it happens that this poem is in alternating couplets when I am more suited to lyric meters. My love wants mourning; elegy is a mourning song. That lyre of old does not suit my tears.” This preoccupation with the relation between form, especially the elegiac form, and thematic content is utterly characteristic of Ovid, whose voice seems to speak through the persona of Sappho much more clearly than in any of his other heroines.<sup>51</sup> But here, too, the issue of authenticity arises in another form. We happen to have ancient testimony, both in the *Suda* entry under Sappho's name and in a scrap of papyrus from Oxyrynchus, that Sappho did indeed write ἐπιγράμματα καὶ ἐλεγεία;

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tore, “L'evoluzione della σφραγίς dalle prime alle ultime opere di Ovidio.” *Atti del convegno internazionale ovidiano, Sulmone, maggio 1958* (Rome 1959) 1.173–203.

<sup>49</sup> Sabinus is the friend who, as Ovid informs us (*Am.* 2.18.27, *Pont.* 4.16.13–14), wrote replies to some or all of the single *Heroides*. His work has not survived, but Ovid's acknowledgement of this voluntary “collaborator” remarkably anticipates the tendency of editors to detect the work of other hands in the collection of *Heroides* that has come down to us. On the relationship between Sabinus and the question of authenticity see Rosati, “Sabinus.”

<sup>50</sup> See above, n. 8.

<sup>51</sup> For the relationship between elegiac form and thematic content see *Ars* 1.1–4, 19, 3.1.42, 3.9.3, *Rem.* 371–398, *Fast.* 2.119, *Metamorphoses* 1.1–2 (with Knox, *Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry* [Cambridge 1986] 9 and David Kovacs, “Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.2,” *CQ* 37 [1987] 458–465), *Fast.* 2.3–8, 19–26, *Tr.* 2.313–342, 5.1.5–8, *Pont.* 3.4.83–88.

and the Palatine Anthology actually preserves three specimens under her name, a total of twelve lines.<sup>52</sup> Of course, the *epistula Sapphus* doesn't explicitly deny that Sappho ever used the elegiac form; but in its presumption of a readerly expectation that the form is alien to Sappho, it is tempting to see another gesture in the direction of a thematization of philological and even editorial issues.<sup>53</sup>

However this may be, the poem is absolutely typical in calling attention to its form. In the other epistles too we see an emphasis on problems associated with form and with the physical appearance of the text. Our surprise at Sappho's chosen meter in this letter might easily have been paralleled by that fact that she seems to have written it in Latin. It is, of course, easy to overlook such matters and to treat Ovidian (or pseudo-Ovidian) Latin as virtual Sapphic Greek. But the poem's attention to formal considerations belies such easy assumptions; and if Sappho's letter implicitly raises the issue of translation, Briseis' letter does so in an overt way. It begins thus:

quam legis a rapta Briseide littera uenit  
uix bene barbarica Graeca notata manu. *Heroides* 3.1–2

"The letter you read comes from the hand of your stolen Briseis, written with difficulty in Greek by a barbarous hand." Again, of course, the letter we read is in Latin, as are all of the *epistulae Heroidum*; but Briseis alone mentions the fact that she has written in Greek because it is difficult for her, and she wants Achilles to appreciate her effort. Why should Penelope, or indeed Sappho, make this point? Yet, presumably, they too have "written in Greek," just as Briseis has.<sup>54</sup> What does this

<sup>52</sup> *Suda* Σ 4.323.9 Adler; *POxy.* 1800 fr. 1.2.5; *AP* 6.269, 7.489, 7.505.

<sup>53</sup> On poetic methods of participating in philological debates concerning previous literature see my summary in *Vergil's Georgics and the Traditions of Ancient Epic: The Art of Allusion in Literary History* (New York 1991) 13–17, with further references.

<sup>54</sup> The theme of translation receives special emphasis in Briseis' letter because two putative translations occur, that of Briseis' thoughts and emotions from her native language into alien Greek, and the subsequent translation of her makeshift Greek into the Latin that we read. Problems of translation become a basic constitutive generic element in the subsequent tradition of epistolary heroism. *Les Lettres portugaises*, published in 1669 in French but purporting to be a translation from the Portuguese, is a celebrated example of linguistic indeterminacy in the epistolary novel: see Kaufman, *Discourses of Desire* 91–117. Kennedy ("Epistolary Mode" 416 n. 8), following Vivienne Mylne, *The Eighteenth-Century French Novel: Techniques of Illusion*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge 1981) 154, cites what must be the extreme example: a series of seventeen letters "written" by a Peruvian

mean? That we must posit some intermediary—a translator, an interpreter, a *hermeneutes*—between the writer and ourselves. But there is more. Briseis continues:

quascumque aspicias lacrimae fecere lituras;  
sed tamen et lacrimae pondera uocis habent.      *Heroides* 3.3–4

“Tears have made whatever blots you see; but these tears carry the force of words.” We are evidently to imagine ourselves in the position of Achilles, the addressee, whose text is the writer’s autograph, traced out with difficulty in Greek script by a barbarian and obscured in places with blots caused by the writer’s teardrops. But the text of Briseis’ letter that we read is not disfigured by blots. What does this mean? That between the writer and the reader stands, along with the translator, another figure—an editor who has restored by divination or conjecture what these blots concealed before the translator rendered this edited text into Latin.

Briseis’ letter is no isolated example of this problem:<sup>55</sup> Canace (11.3–6) depicts herself as holding pen in one hand and sword in the other, writing on the verge of committing suicide, and she predicts that blood will stain the letter that she leaves behind. In a related passage Dido (7.183–186) writes with Aeneas’ sword clasped to her bosom: while she writes, she says, her tears bathe the sword, but once she stops writing, the tears will give way to her blood. In all these cases, the symbolism of these fluids, tears and blood, is manifold.<sup>56</sup> Tears and blood, like ink, stain the page and leave traces of the writer’s grief that are as eloquent as words but incompatible with them.<sup>57</sup> In the case of

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princess to her betrothed in the form of knotted cords of different colors and later translated by her into French after she learned the language.

<sup>55</sup> The same motif is found in Propertius 4.3.3–6. I leave aside the *Prioritätsfrage*. Like the theme of translation that of the putative materiality of the text—what we may call the “documentary fallacy”—appears to be a property of epistolary heroism, not of poetic epistolarity in general. The motif is certainly not prominent in Horace’s *Epistles*, where the epistolary form of the text receives occasional emphasis (for instance in the valediction of *Epist.* 1.10, where we find the epistolary imperfect *dictabam* 49 and a notice about the place where the letter was written), but its materiality generally goes unremarked.

<sup>56</sup> On writing in blood see Kaufman, *Discourses of Desire* 37, 58–59, 152, and Gubar, “‘The Blank Page’” 247–262.

<sup>57</sup> There is an interesting bit of dissonance in the epistles’ references to their own materiality, one that centers on these different fluids. When the writer speaks of holding iron in her hand, we think of her, like Byblis, as holding a stylus in one hand and a wax tablet

Dido and Canace, writing becomes an act of suicide as the parallel instruments of pen and sword do their work. The equivalence suggested in these and similar passages between writing, weeping, and bleeding, all of which stain the clean page, is represented, as Stephen Hinds has observed, by the similar words *littera/litura*, a visual and aural reminder of the kinds of corruption to which all ancient texts were subject.<sup>58</sup> But in our text, something has happened to the tears and the blood. They have disappeared. In all these cases of course the blots that the writers mention are, like Sappho's Greek, virtually there, but we do not actually see them; only words remain, words written (or nowadays printed) with sharp clarity where the text bids us expect blots and smudges. The combination of the writer's apology for the state of the text with the complete legibility of the text we see thus raises the question of editorial activity. Someone must have repaired, restored, or somehow altered the blemished text that left the putative writer's hand. In no case then can we be sure that it is the writer's text we read.

I have mentioned already the now familiar idea that every text creates its own implied or ideal reader, a reader who is perfectly equipped to interpret and appreciate the message that it bears.<sup>59</sup> I submit that the situation of the *Heroides* is more complex than this or rather that the relatively explicit situation outlined by these letters shows that the conditions of literary transmission and reception are always more complex; for here we must reckon with an implied editor and an implied translator as well. These shadowy figures appear occasionally in other texts, but they became, on Ovid's authority, constitutive generic elements of heroicism and the epistolary mode, and they are never wholly absent

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in the other (*Metamorphoses* 9.522). The wax tablet was a common medium for letters that had no great distance to travel or that were not to be archived. But the tears and blood of which the writers speak seem much more likely to cause the reader trouble if the letter were written on papyrus, the preferred medium for a letter that would have to travel a great distance or for one that the recipient might want to keep, as well as for the book-roll form in which a published letter or a collection of fictional poetic letters like the *Heroides* would be read. The text thus conflates at least two distinct stages in the dissemination of any ancient text, a procedure which Gregory Nagy has usefully dubbed "diachronic skewing" (*Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* [Baltimore 1990] 21).

<sup>58</sup> "Booking the Return Trip" 30 n. 12. The word *litura* is quite properly taken to mean "blot" in these passages, but it can also mean "erasure" or "editorial correction" (e.g., Caecina *apud Ciceronem Fam.* 6.7.1, Horace *AP* 293, Seneca *Dial.* 7.8.2) and Ovid himself occasionally uses it in just this sense (*Pont.* 2.4.18, 4.1.14, 4.12.26).

<sup>59</sup> See above, n. 30.

from any text. To understand their function in these texts, let us turn finally to one other character to whom we have so far alluded only in passing: the addressee.

## 5. THE *HEROIDES* AS PARADIGM

Just as the writers of *Heroides* are all women the addressees are all men. This polarity of genders within the text is (or should be) crucially important to the effort of interpreting these poems on any level, whether it be casual reading, writing a monograph, making a translation, or preparing a critical edition. The poems present themselves as texts written by women to an audience of men, and as truthful utterances made to agents of duplicity and falsehood. They also, if we consider the form in which we have them, require that we imagine them as having undergone a process first of editorial restoration, emendation, revision, or censorship—we can never be sure which—and then of translation into Latin. Both processes may take place after the letters have been read in Greek by the men to whom they are addressed. What are the chances, then, that the text we read accurately represents the words of the “original”? We can never say, of course. The *Vorleben*, so to speak, of the Latin text that we read forces us to imagine several definite acts of interpretation that widen the gap between writer and reader in such a way as to impugn the authority of the entire text. This *Vorleben* anticipates the *Nachleben* of the *Heroides* in ways that are uncannily precise. Like most other texts of Roman antiquity this collection has come down to us in a manuscript tradition. While this one is not exceptionally corrupt, it does have its problems. In particular, different witnesses exhibit extra couplets or groups of couplets at various places in the corpus.<sup>60</sup> These and other passages have come to be regarded by some editors as interpolations; but different editors and critics hold precisely opposite views as to the criteria for telling genuine from spurious passages and reach correspondingly divergent results.<sup>61</sup> And, as I noted previously, some whole poems have been condemned, although there is no real consensus on which ones are spurious, nor on the principles by

<sup>60</sup> These are discussed by L. C. Purser in his introduction to Arthur Palmer's edition and commentary, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Heroides* (Oxford 1898) xl–xli.

<sup>61</sup> The epistolary salutations are a case in point: see the discussions of Kirfel, *Untersuchungen zur Briefform* and Tarrant in *Texts and Transmissions* 270–271 with further references.



which to detect them. It would require a separate paper to trace in adequate detail the web of ironies created by Ovid's anticipation of the hermeneutic processes to which his text would inevitably be subjected. Of particular interest are the parallels that exist between these letters and the ones that Ovid was later to send under his own name, from Tomis, letters said to be equally disfigured by the writer's tears, composed by a someone who says he has come to think more readily in Getic than in Latin.<sup>62</sup> Such similarities add another layer of irony to the relationship between male author and multiple female personae in the *Heroides*, and exemplify the affinity that Ovid frequently posits between the life of the writer and the life of women—an affinity expressed not just in his repeated evocation of Sappho and other women poets, such as Corinna and Perilla, but in the theme, which is especially prominent in the later works, of writing as a response to an attempt to impose silence.<sup>63</sup> The writer's work is always subject to that of the censor in whatever form he may appear—whether as emperor or editor, reader or translator. The work itself, as Ovid frequently boasts, is destined to remain; it will not be destroyed.<sup>64</sup> But it remains subject to time, the greatest interpreter of all, which itself combines the function of scribe, censor, translator, and critic. It is the dramatization of this insight that makes the *Heroides* a paradigm for reading what time has left us not only of Ovid's work but of Latin literature as a whole and indeed of any literature that we experience through the fragile, corruptible, and therefore fallacious medium of the text.

#### UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

<sup>62</sup> Tears: *Tr.* 1.1.13–14, 3.1.15–16, 4.1.95. Language: *Tr.* 3.1.1718, 3.12.39, 3.14.45–50, 4.1.89–94, 5.2.67–68, 5.7.51–64, 5.10.35–38, 5.12.55–58: cf. Betty Rose Nagle, *The Poetics of Exile: Program and Polemic in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto of Ovid* (Brussels 1980 [Collection Latomus 170]) 132–140. For the *Heroides* as forerunners of the exilic poetry see Helmut Rahn, "Ovids elegische Epistel," *A&A* 7 (1963) 106–107, 112, 115; Nagle, *Poetics of Exile* 21–22, 44, 83–84, 173; Anderson, "The 'Heroides'" 81; Hinds, "Booking the Return Trip" 14–16, 28.

<sup>63</sup> On Corinna see Galand-Hallyn, "Corinne et Sappho" 344–349. On Perilla see Judith P. Hallett, "Contextualizing the Text: The Journey to Ovid," *Helios* 17 (1990) 191–193. On writing and censorship see D. C. Feeney, "*Si licet et fas est*: Ovid's *Fasti* and the Problem of Free Speech under the Principate," in *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*, ed. Anton Powell (Bristol 1992) 1–25.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., *Metamorphoses* 15.871–879, *Tr.* 4.10.115–132, *Pont.* 4.16.1–4. In other passages, however, Ovid openly questions the permanence and immutability of his textual corpus. I intend to explore this theme on another occasion.