The Roman calendar: Michels (1967) provides thorough information on the form and function of the Republican calendar; Scullard (1981) describes the festivals of the Roman year. Beard (1987) demonstrates the calendar's importance for the construction of Roman identity and thus draws attention to the social and political significance of Ovid's poem. Wallace-Hadrill (1987), investigating the political function of the Julian calendar and the changes made by Augustus, argues that Ovid's poetic version could not incorporate Augustus into a system of Hellenized values so at variance with the emperor's ideas of nationhood. Gee (1997 and 2000) deals with astronomy and argues that the *Fasti* engages closely with Greek scientific and Stoic interpretive traditions; at the same time Roman political power and the stars are closely connected.

Roman religion and the *Fasti*: the value of the *Fasti* as a source for Roman religion and history has frequently been debated. Feeney (1998) has argued that the *Fasti* is important for understanding Roman religious mentality. Wiseman (1998) has drawn attention to the value of the *Fasti* as a source for Roman dramas and mimes originally performed at religious festivals.

13

DUNCAN F. KENNEDY

Epistolarity: the *Heroides*

In Book 3 of his *Ars amatoria*, Ovid rounds off a survey of authors put forward as suitable reading for the would-be female lover with a characteristic claim that his works will bring him immortality. Perhaps, he surmises, his name will be ranked with those of Sappho, Propertius or Virgil; perhaps 'somebody will say: "read the cultured poems of our maestro, in which he draws up the battle-lines of the sexes"' – the *Ars amatoria* itself – '"or the *Amores*, or recite a *Letter* in an assumed voice; this type of work, unknown to others, he pioneered"' (*uel tibi composita cantetur EPISTVLA uoce; | ignotum hoc aliis ille nouauit opus*, 3.345–6). The nature of Ovid's claim for this last work – universally agreed to be what we have grown accustomed to call the *Heroides* – continues to generate considerable scholarly debate.[1] It is unlikely that the poet who was to go on to write the *Metamorphoses* would seek to claim that the emergence of any form – still less the invention of a literary one – takes place *ex nihilo*. The epistle of Penelope to Ulysses, which stands first in the collection of fifteen as we currently have it and may have been put in first place by Ovid himself as a programmatic gesture,[2] is itself a transformation of Homer's *Odyssey*, and the lament voiced by a heroine abandoned by her lover had had a long history in various generic manifestations in Greek and Latin literature, notably Euripidean tragedy and Alexandrianizing epic. Nor need we assume that the poet whose grandest theme was to be continuity in change would

[1] Classical scholars in particular have long wondered whether Ovid was already familiar with the third poem of Propertius' fourth book of elegies, in which a seemingly contemporary Roman woman (given, in accordance with the prevailing convention of erotic poetry, the Grecizing name 'Arethusa') writes a love-letter to her absent soldier husband 'Lycotas'. The precise literary chronology of this period is likely to remain uncertain, and if Ovid did know the fourth book of Propertius (the latest datable reference in which is 16 BC), then he is also likely to have been aware of the publication three years earlier of the first Book of Horace's *Epistles* – profound explorations in verse of the potential of epistolary form (see de Pretis (1999)), though scarcely ever mentioned in this context, perhaps because they are not love letters and are resolutely 'masculine' in ethos.

[2] See Hinds (1985) 28.

expect that the literary type to which he gave its initial form, as the epistolary lament of a heroine separated from her lover, would remain unaltered in its subsequent manifestations. The so-called 'single epistles' give rise in time to the 'double epistles' in which heroes and heroines exchange letters – Paris and Helen (*Her.* 16 & 17), Leander and Hero (*Her.* 18 & 19), and Acontius and Cydippe (*Her.* 20 & 21). Persistent scholarly doubts about the Ovidian authorship of some of the single[3] (and sometimes also the double)[4] epistles point to an assumption that Ovid had immediate imitators, a belief encouraged by Ovid's own statement (*Am.* 2.18.27–8) that his friend Sabinus penned replies from their menfolk to his own heroine's epistles.[5] The epistle of Sappho (*Her.* 15) does not come down to us in the same manuscript transmission as the rest of the single epistles,[6] and many scholars assume either that it is not the epistle Ovid refers to in *Amores* 2.18.26 and 34, or that these references are themselves interpolations. The dynamism of this tradition suggests that we might look for its subsequent manifestations not simply in the vogue for translations of the *Heroides* into the vernacular from the Middle Ages onwards (e.g. that of Planudes into Byzantine Greek in the thirteenth century, or the *Bursario o las Epístolas de Ovidio* of Juan Rodríguez in the mid-fifteenth, the first complete translation of all the single and double epistles),[7] or for close imitations of its verse epistle form and heroine authors, often adapted to non-classical subjects (e.g. Drayton's *England's Heroicall Epistles* or Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*).[8] The tradition of 'female complaint',[9] the Spanish *novela sentimental* of the fifteenth century[10] and the epistolary novel, especially in the eighteenth century,[11] have long been acknowledged to carry Ovid's stamp.

Seen in the light of developments that he could not have known, Ovid's claims for the *Heroides* do not seem fantastic or immodest. Although the would-be female lover in the *Ars amatoria* is instructed to *sing* these poems, and so practise the role of the lover lamenting her abandonment with her voice adjusted to the part she is to play (*composita ... uoce*),[12] Ovid refers to them specifically in terms of their form, *epistula*. The reference in the

previous couplet to the title of his earlier work, the *Amores*, makes at least plausible the suggestion that he gave these poems to the world not as the *Heroides* but as the *Epistulae heroidum*. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (a period in any case marked by a dramatic decline in the critical fortunes of Ovid,[13] not least in contrast with the eighteenth),[14] Ovidian scholarship was prone to downplay the epistolary form. In his introduction to Arthur Palmer's commentary of 1898, Louis Claude Purser asserts: 'The Epistles are *really* soliloquies, the epistolary setting being little more than a mere form which gives an apparent reason for these soliloquies being committed to writing at all', fretting that 'it is a poor kind of facetiousness to make merry over the epistolary setting' and 'shallow wit to object to Ariadne's letter to Theseus because there was no regular postal service between Naxos and Athens'.[15] In 1955, L. P. Wilkinson writes that '[t]he choice of epistolary form for what are *really* tragic soliloquies was not entirely happy.'[16] It was common practice to treat the poems as '*suasoriae* in verse', the *suasoria* being the rhetorical school exercise (at which Ovid is said to have excelled) advising a particular mythological or historical character to pursue a particular course of action. Although this remains of relevance to many accounts of the immediate literary context of the poems,[17] it helped to underpin a negative view of the *Heroides* as repetitive exercises on a single theme. As late as the 1960s and 1970s, critics who saw themselves as generally sympathetic to Ovid could still speak of 'the wearisome complaint of the reft maiden, the monotonous re-iteration of her woes'.[18] The commonplace of monotony was sometimes reinforced by approving echoes of Dryden's complaint about 'wit out of season' in the preface to his translation of 1680. Howard Jacobson put it thus: 'The wit and humour that are now and then present in the *Heroides* degenerate at times into little else than cleverness, sometimes rather ludicrous cleverness.'[19] Much though Jacobson wants to like and admire the *Heroides*, his book is pervaded by a profound sense of disappointment.

Retrospectively from the present, an antipathy to rhetoric together with an insensitivity to discursive difference (characteristic, perhaps, of a realist epistemology which largely failed to accommodate the works of Ovid in a positive manner), and a determinedly masculine condescension pervade this lengthy episode in the poems' reception, which, as we begin to leave it behind, seems ever more strikingly an aberration from the largely enthusiastic reception the poems met with in earlier times. The dramatic reversal in critical estimates of the *Heroides* in the past generation or so arises not

[3] For a brief discussion see Knox (1995) 5–14.
[4] For a brief discussion see Kenney (1996) 20–6
[5] The letters of Sabinus that are printed in Renaissance editions of Ovid were penned by Angelo Sabino.
[6] It was first placed in its present position as the last of the single epistles in the edition of Daniel Heinsius (1629); see R. J. Tarrant in Reynolds (1983) 272.
[7] Rodríguez excludes the epistle of Sappho, which he may not have known, but added three that he himself composed, and by default attributes them to Ovid (see Brownlee (1990) 39). Literary imposture is written into epistolary heroism from the start.
[8] See Dörrie (1968).   [9] See Kerrigan (1991).   [10] See Brownlee (1990).
[11] See e.g. Day (1966), Mylne (1981).
[12] For this sense of *composita* see Fränkel (1945) 190 n.1.

[13] See Vance (1988).   [14] See Trickett (1988).   [15] Palmer (1898) xi; emphasis mine.
[16] Wilkinson (1955) 86; emphasis mine.   [17] See Schiesaro in this volume, pp. 71–2.
[18] Otis (1970) 17.   [19] Jacobson (1974) 8.

simply from a closer attention to epistolary form,[20] but also a heightened awareness of, and investment in, the distinctive aspects of letter-writing as a discursive mode, as a model of communication and as a subject-position. Derrida's *La Carte postale*[21] itself cast in an epistolary form as a series of postcards addressed to his unnamed lover, draws attention to the way that letter-writing can suggest a mode, epistolarity, not reducible to formal elements of style or generic category: 'the letter, the epistle . . . is not a genre but all genres, literature itself' (*'la lettre, l'épître . . . n'est pas un genre mais tous les genres, la littérature même'*).[22] This can serve to remind us that in English ('letters'), as in Latin (*litterae*), the same term can embrace epistles and writing more generally, and that epistolarity as an analytical term can be applied not only to works that formally identify themselves as letters (such as the *Heroides* or the *Epistulae ex Ponto*) but also to those (such as the *Tristia*) which have some of the characteristics of letters (e.g. separation of writer and addressee) or are concerned to explore issues of communication more generally. Derrida's own use of epistolary form highlights the performative aspects of language in an effort to deconstruct received distinctions between amatory and scholarly discourse, between criticism and creation, and to question the conventional relegation of love letters to the margins of discourse (thereby interrogating marginalization from the margins in the role of one marginalized).[23] The capacity of epistolarity to render generic categories permeable diachronically as well as synchronically has facilitated the tracing of fresh literary genealogies back to Ovid of the kind that Linda Kaufmann, for example, proposes for works such as Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), Roland Barthes' *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977) or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986). The latter, she writes, 'has been compared thematically to *The Scarlet Letter* and to "fearsome future" novels like *1984*, but its epistolary origins can be traced to the *Heroides*, for like Ovid's heroines Offred narrates from exile, a ceaseless reiteration of her desire and despair.'[24] There is a useful corrective here: 'reiteration' rather than 'repetition' offers an invitation, not a disincentive, to view the *Heroides* collectively, even syntactically. What a more hostile tradition of reception tropes as 'monotony' may be alternatively construed as an important and lasting feature of Ovid's innovation, a poetics of 'writing in isolation' which has at its heart a cry, destined to be repeated, demanding (but not confident of receiving) an *adequate* response.

In considering further the 'epistolarity' of the *Heroides*, we might organize our thoughts around the question: what is their destination? At one level, the question has a deceptively straightforward answer: their addressees.

[20] See Kirfel (1969).   [21] Derrida (1980).   [22] Derrida (1980) 48.
[23] See Kaufmann (1992) 96–7.   [24] Kaufmann (1992) 223.

Penelope writes to Ulysses (though she protests that she does not know where he is); Ariadne writes to Theseus (though she is alone on a desert island with no means of conveying her letter to him) and so on. The writers turn to written missives to overcome a separation from their addressees which the letter attempts, with greater or lesser success, to bridge. As Terry Castle puts it, 'the letter symbolizes and reifies communication while it does not necessarily embody it'.[25] Some are physically separated from their addressees by forces outside their control, such as war or its attendant politics (Penelope (1); Briseis (3); Hermione (8); Laudamia (13)), whilst others have been, or consider themselves, abandoned (Phyllis (2); Dido (7); Deianira (9); Ariadne (10); Medea (12)). Others still may be physically close to the objects of their love but 'separated' from them by social convention (Phaedra (4)), or by the consequences of its transgression (Canace (11)). Paris actually writes to Helen while staying with her in the palace of her husband Menelaus at Sparta (16). It emerges from his letter that his previous attempts to seduce her in person have been rebuffed, and so he resorts to writing to her.

However, the addressee is not only spatially, but temporally absent. Penelope does not know where Ulysses is; she writes a letter to give to every passing sailor who visits Ithaca in the hope that he will be able to give it to Ulysses (*Her.*1.59–62). The implication of her words is that she does not know *when* Ulysses will read it.[26] The letters reflect an awareness of that absence whilst simultaneously working to eliminate it: this is what Janet Gurkin Altman refers to as the 'bridge/barrier' function of a letter.[27] Epistolary discourse must manipulate both space and time in order to overcome these barriers so as to make communication relevant rather than anachronistic at the moment when the letter is read. Paris, as it transpires from Helen's reply (*Her.* 17), succeeds; but we may surmise that many of the authors of the single epistles, at least in so far as their formal addressees are concerned, fail.

However, the destination of the letters cannot simply be reduced to the addressee formally identified. Gareth Williams has recently argued that the relationship of daughter and mother looms larger in Hermione's letter to Orestes (*Her.* 8) than that of husband and wife, with the result that 'the complexities of her tangled relationship with Helen make for a psychological drama in which Orestes (*qua* addressee) is a relatively peripheral player'.[28] Similarly, the destination of Hypsipyle's letter to Jason (*Her.* 6) is as much

[25] Castle (1982) 43.
[26] The particular letter that *we* read as *Heroides* 1 seems to be written to be given to a 'stranger' who is Ulysses returned to Ithaca in disguise; see Kennedy (1984).
[27] Altman (1982).
[28] Williams (1997) 130; see also his analysis of the relationship of Canace and her father Aeolus (*Her.* 11), again not the addressee of her letter: Williams (1992).

his current object of desire, Medea, with whom Hypsipyle is so obsessed that she comes to take on her characteristics and even her identity. Fantasizing revenge for the wrongs she feels, she exclaims: 'I would have drenched my face with the blood of your mistress, and your face, which she took away from me with her poisons. I would be Medea to Medea!' (*Medeae Medea forem*, 6.149–51). These letters have an *intended* destination, but the moment and circumstances of their arrival can be, in epistolary terms, no less important than the moment they are written (or sent), and this is not necessarily in the writer's control, and can have effects that the writer neither foresees nor would desire.[29]

The figure of the addressee/reader is thus a complex one, and the circulation of their letter can be wider than their writers intend, or wish, or imagine (this can be a source of anxiety: the writer of the letter ever has to contemplate the consequences of its publication). But there is another level at which these considerations hold. These are not only the heroines' letters: they are <u>Ovid's</u> *Heroides*, and at that level their destination is the reader who feels addressed by these poems, whether that be a contemporary of Ovid's, Dryden translating the *Heroides* in the seventeenth century or readers at the start of the twenty-first century – and beyond, for the relationship so established, as we shall see, is not wholly determined or foreclosed. Ovid, like Penelope, could not know what the circumstances would be in which his various letters would be read. As we have seen, at this level the *Heroides* have 'failed' as well as 'succeeded' as acts of communication: some readers have felt that these writings do not (in the classic trope of 'presence') 'speak' to them, or at least not in particular ways that matter to them: in so far as the barrier has not been bridged and readers do not feel that the poems 'address' them and their present concerns, they tend to resort to a historicizing mode of trying to (re-)construct what the writer *must have* intended. The barriers not bridged become those that serve to distinguish 'past' and 'present' in any mode of reception.[30] We need to keep these two levels of authorship, and their interaction, in mind in what follows. *Mutatis mutandis*, what is said of the heroine or hero and their readers can be interestingly predicated of Ovid and his, and vice versa.

The need or impulse to write a letter is the product of particular circumstances which the letter often explicitly acknowledges.[31] Letters thus involve writing 'to the moment,[32] and this can serve to associate them with spontaneity, sincerity and authenticity of emotion, an aspect often admired

[29] See e.g. Kennedy (1984), Williams (1992).
[30] In this way also, 'la lettre, l'épître ... n'est pas un genre mais tous les genres, la littérature même' (Derrida (1980) 48).
[31] For further implications of this see Kennedy (1984), esp. 413–16.
[32] The phrase comes from Samuel Richardson's introduction to his epistolary novel *Clarissa*.

by readers of works in the tradition of epistolary heroinism and often seen also as discursively feminine.[33] There is a continuing critical debate about whether this is to be accepted at face value in the case of the *Heroides*. The positive case has been argued most recently, against the critical commonplace that the 'rhetorical' nature of the letters marks them as insincere, by Joseph Farrell. The heroines, he says, 'no matter how rhetorically they express themselves, and even when they do not know it, are to be generally understood as speaking fom the heart.'[34] The exception, he says, is Phaedra (*Her.* 4), whose purpose is to deceive the object of her desire. However, sincerity is judged not solely in terms of the feelings or the intention of the moment, but, as Farrell's own parenthesis 'even when they do not know it' implies, in the light of subsequent events. Many of the heroines are, they have come to realize, the victims of deception, and, as writers, can be assumed to have a heightened sensitivity to rhetoric – not least the rhetoric of sincerity and deception – as a result. Writing to the moment can (even in the case of Phaedra) involve speaking from the heart, but the epistle is ever caught up in the logic of its temporality, as it attempts to bridge the 'present' of writing and the 'future' of reading, and to elide that tense distinction. Writing to the moment, and uncertain of the outcome of their situation or the response to their missives – however strong their desire for a particular response or outcome – the heroines (and heroes) fantasize events turning out as they choose and imagine responses, both to the reception of their letters and to acts they imagine: the addressee is, as Roland Barthes suggests, absent in a physical but present in an allocutory sense,[35] so that the anticipated reading is written into the text. As Janet Gurkin Altman says, in no other genre do readers 'figure so prominently within the world of the narrative and in the generation of the text'.[36] The writer's perception of her addressee and of his anticipated response therefore shapes her discourse and the way in which she constructs her identity, and her most fervent wish is that desired and actual responses will 'correspond', that no *unwelcome* distinction will be perceived between the 'present' of reading and the 'past' of writing. The writers of the single epistles are generally more concerned with reunion than reply; Penelope's opening sentiments ('but don't write anything back to me; come yourself!', *Her.* 1.2) are programmatic for this collection.[37] For the writers of the double epistles, however, the situation is more complex, for a favourable response may fulfil their more immediate desire by presaging the physical union they ultimately crave. As Paris writes (collapsing the temporal

[33] See Kaufmann (1992) 105.   [34] Farrell (1998) 318.
[35] Barthes (1979) 15.   [36] Altman (1982) 37.
[37] Contrast the final couplet of Sappho's letter (and of the modern collection of single epistles), which specifically asks for a reply (*Her.* 15.219–20).

barrier which separates the moment of inscription from the moment of reading), the fact that Helen *has* received his letter gives him hope that he might be likewise received (*Her.* 16.13–14). Helen's first response, she reports, was to treat his letter as tantamount to physical violation (*Her.* 17.1–4). Leander pictures himself *as* his letter, arriving at its intended destination, in the hands of his beloved, whose imagined response is all he could wish for. As it strives to achieve immediate presence, and the effacement of its materiality as text or sign, his letter is driven back on that materiality as a surrogate, even a fetishized substitute, for presence, as Leander imagines it kissed, fondled and subjected to even more passionate signs of physical love (*Her.* 18.15–18). The body's fluids become the most potent trope of presence, and blots, whether made by tears (*Her.* 3.3) or blood (*Her.* 11.1–2), are felt to carry a meaning that the letters they efface cannot aspire to. The epistles seek to make textual a surrogate for sexual intercourse, but in troping text as sex, physical absence loops back to emphasize a palpable sense of the potential gap between signifier and signified, fantasy and reality, the desired and actual response to the text.

In the case of the *Heroides*, as we have seen, another reader is always at hand, the reader of Ovid's poems (often referred to as the 'external' reader), who imposes a further perspective beyond that of the heroines and heroes or their formal addressee, and often finds in their words a fuller significance than they are in a position to grasp when they write them. The time of reading is thus crucial to the perceived meaning of the text. Thus Oenone reminds Paris that he had carved this epigram on a poplar tree as an earnest of his everlasting love (*Heroides* 5.29–30):

> cum Paris Oenone poterit spirare relicta,
> ad fontem Xanthi uersa recurret aqua.

When Paris shall be able to leave Oenone and still draw breath, the waters of the river Xanthus will turn and run back to their source.

What for Paris as he wrote is a trope of impossibility (*adynaton*) and, for Oenone at the moment when she reports it, a token of his insincerity and betrayal, is, for the 'external' reader at a much later stage, an ironic foreshadowing, since, by abandoning Oenone for Helen, Paris sets in motion the events of the Trojan war, which will include the incident narrated in *Iliad* 21 when Achilles slaughters so many Trojans that their bodies block the channel of the Xanthus. What the external reader will experience as 'foreshadowing' will not be so for the writers, who, however, if they look forward from their present in the belief or dread that the event they refer to will happen, may see it as an omen (*Her.* 13.135) or a dream (*Her.* 19.195–204), or express it as a prophecy (*Her.* 17.237–40) or a threat (*Her.* 12.207–8).

This raises issues of temporality and intertextuality, for the external reader's knowledge comes from what are often termed Ovid's 'source' texts – Homer, Euripides, Callimachus, Virgil and so on. The heroes and heroines who write these letters are not simply 'mythological' or 'legendary' but 'literary': many of the letters have an obvious specific canonical text or texts with which they correspond in both dramatic and verbal detail, and it is possible that, had more ancient literature survived, all would be seen to enjoy such a relationship. The heroines' stories, when we come to read their letters, are, in this sense, already written, and in versions more or less canonized in the literary tradition. The epistolary form freezes them at a moment *within* the story, foreseeing or desiring a particular 'end' to their stories, which may or may not approximate to the 'end', the outcome or consequences, with which the external reader is familiar. The writers experience, we may say, the circumstances of their stories at the moment when they write as open and contingent, whereas the external reader, in a privileged position beyond the end, sees them as working out a sequence of events already determined, and so as facilitating or struggling against their destiny – against the destination, that is, to which, at the end of the story, the external reader feels it has been directed all along. The meaning, and effect, of their letters, however strongly willed by their writers, remains anxiously contingent upon events, and it is against this end that the external reader reads their desire as 'fantasy'. When the end anticipated by the writer does not correspond to the end assumed by the external reader, the result is a sense of irony, tragic or humorous as the case may be. The 'source' texts we assume in and for our intertextual reading serve to determine the ironies we experience in the letters. So, if we assume Virgil's *Aeneid*, as well as the Homeric poems, as an intertext for the letter of Helen, the end, the outcome or consequences, against which the external reader assesses Helen's forebodings should she elope with Paris to Troy acquire all the more ironic resonances (*Her.*17.245): *nec dubito quin, te si prosequar, arma parentur*, 'nor do I doubt that, were I to follow you, war would be prepared'. The external reader with Homer in mind could take *arma* ('war') here as the Trojan war, but with Virgil in mind could see the resonances of the word extending into the wanderings of Aeneas and beyond into Roman history – even to the composition of the *Aeneid* itself, of which *arma* is, of course, the first word and surrogate title. It is therefore the so-called 'source' text which both suggests to the external reader contingencies of meaning in the letters and provides a sense of closure on those perceived contingencies.

It is from the 'source' text that the external reader may feel confident of what 'really' happened, and in this way of reading it acts therefore as an authority, taken, maybe, even as the 'objective' account of events. But a

consequence of this is to see the legendary author's perspective as not only 'subjective' but subject precisely to that authority. At this point gender issues and power relations tend to make themselves felt. This intertextuality has two temporal aspects, however, which relate to the two 'authors' of any of these epistles, the heroine/hero and Ovid. If we regard Ovid as the author, then the 'source' texts (Homer, Euripides, Virgil and so on) are temporally anterior to the epistle, which then echoes them. However, if we regard the heroine/hero as the author, then a chronology of authorship is established in which the legendary heroines and heroes have temporal priority: the so-called 'source' texts are 'forestalled' by the legendary authors of the *Heroides*, and it is Homer, Euripides or Virgil who 'echoes' *them*. There can be a subtle subversiveness to this procedure. The Dido of *Heroides* 7 contradicts Virgil, and does so, in terms of her 'authorial' chronology, 'before' Virgil writes.[38] Works such as the *Aeneid* from this perspective come to look like ('later') appropriations or recuperations of the legendary authors' words, and work either 'for' or 'against' what we then construe as the legendary authors' intentions and self-fashionings. The heroines, in particular, have a 'mythic' or prototypical quality to them (Penelope the faithful, Helen the adulterous wife, for example). Allowing them to write in their 'own' words, and, vitally, 'to the moment', gives them the opportunity to subvert the timeless abstractions they have become. The *Heroides* work to unravel the phenomenology of myth itself, and the role in myth-formation of 'classic' texts. In *Heroides* 17.141-4, Helen protests that adultery is something new to her:[39]

> sum rudis ad Veneris furtum, nullaque fidelem –
> di mihi sunt testes – lusimus *arte* uirum.
> nunc quoque, quod tacito mando mea uerba libello,
> fungitur officio littera nostra nouo.

I am not an expert in the theft of love, and – the gods are my witnesses – have never deceived my faithful husband with any intrigue. Even now, this very act of entrusting my words to a secret letter is a new kind of writing.[40]

The 'new kind of writing' of which Helen speaks concerns the deception of a *uir* and is characterized by the term *ars*. Helen's words, written to the moment, pinpoint the origin of a myth, that of Helen the prototype of the adulterous wife, a myth of which she is not aware, and would, as her oath suggests, disown if she were; but her words also provide a myth of origin,

and she does seem vaguely conscious and excited by it (intrigue is not only the subject but the tone of her words), for she presents herself as the author of a letter which adumbrates a fresh genre – one that was to issue forth in Ovid's own *Ars amatoria*. Similarly, when Paris carves an elegiac couplet on the poplar tree, we can see him as a proto-elegiac lover – his 'later' appearance in the *Iliad* serves to 'epicize' or 'heroize' (but also arguably to 'reduce'?) a figure fashioning himself as already elegiac – and also as a proto-elegiac *author*, devising the tropes which Ovid himself, as 'heir' to the elegiac tradition, was 'later' to take up, in defiance of the prevailing assumption of the priority, literary and historical, of epic.[41] Within this style of reading, concerns of literary genealogy and generic affiliation are thematized by the legendary authors of the *Heroides* themselves. The legendary authors can then be seen to be caught up in the politics of literary canon formation, with its attendant ideological pressures. But this temporal perspective can operate on a metaliterary level as well. Reading the literary canon 'forwards towards the present' rather than 'backwards from the present' works to reverse not only ideological hierarchies, but also literary ones. As with the waters of Xanthus, we can find, against our expectations, the flow of literary influence need not be one way, and, rather than talk of 'sources', we might think of meaning as not simply 'arising' out of one or other of the texts, as the river metaphor suggests, but as a result of a 'correspondence' between them, with all that that can imply at the epistolary level. This correspondence between texts, even as it emphasizes and manipulates the separation between texts, works to bridge that barrier, making the text of Homer 'present' in that of Ovid, of course, but also that of Ovid no less 'present' in Homer.

Each of these letters has, as we have seen, two notional authors, the legendary figure and Ovid, and one or the other tends to be privileged in any reading. Florence Verducci's otherwise timely defence of the humour of the *Heroides* ('The rule of Ovid's *Heroides* is the rule of indecorum, of wit in conception no less than in language, a wit which is not his heroine's own but the token of the poet's creative presence in the poem')[42] could be criticized as being at the expense of the heroine as writer. Similarly, the recent emphasis on the intertextuality of the *Heroides* has arguably focused attention on Ovid as manipulator of the literary tradition and seen him as ventriloquizing his literary concerns through the heroine or hero. A gender issue is often felt to be at stake here by those critical of these approaches: a concentration on the Ovidian voice muffles what is distinctive about the voice of the *heroine* in

[38] See Desmond (1993); also Tarrant in this volume, p. 25.
[39] I am grateful to Martin Brady for permission to summarize his exposition of this passage.
[40] For the translation I have adapted that of Kenney (1996) 137, ad loc.

[41] Barchiesi (1993) has several other analyses of this type; see also Barchiesi (1997a) 58-9 on elegy as (for Ovid) the original form of poetry.
[42] Verducci (1985) 32.

particular, relegating her and her concerns, authorial as well as erotic, once more to the margins. Attempts to recuperate that voice are currently under way,[43] a process complicated when two 'voices' are simultaneously inscribed in a text. In what sense is voice or authorship distinctively female (or male)? Because it comes from a woman? Can we treat the heroines as examples of *écriture feminine*? Or as ever exiled by patriarchy from a language that is not their own, like Briseis struggling to write Greek in her 'barbarian hand' (*Her.* 3.2)? But this runs the opposite risk of writing Ovid out of the letter entirely. In the *Ars amatoria*, as we have seen, Ovid (an interested party, to be sure) treats the reading of the *Heroides* as practice in role-playing, part of his pupil's acculturation of herself as a lover. If we may translate that into the terms of Roland Barthes,[44] the *Heroides* can thus be located as part of a lover's discourse in which its readers situate themselves as amatory subjects. This is not an exclusively female activity; the role-playing suggested to the female in Book 3 of the *Ars amatoria* is recommended no less to the would-be male lover in Book 1 (611–15). The heroines self-consciously model themselves on and identify with each other, when the circumstances of one are known to another, as in the cases of Hypsipyle and Medea or Phyllis and Ariadne. And, as we have seen, intertextualist readings can attribute a formative, even originary, role to the heroine in the development of amatory discourse. A Barthesian approach involves seeing Woman (and Man) as an effect of writing rather than an intrinsic essence, and gender therefore as situational. Biological sex does not wholly determine the roles one may play. As Barthes puts it:

> Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fictions, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades). It follows that in any man who utters the other's absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized. A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love. (Myth and utopia: the origins have belonged, the future will belong to the subjects *in whom there is something feminine*.)[45]

In an intertextually resonant moment, Barthes' comments evoke Penelope (the programmatic figure of Ovidian epistolary heroism, we may recall) to

underpin *his* 'myth' of 'origins'. Although *A Lover's Discourse* is not formally composed as a series of letters, Barthes nonetheless plays with the epistolary mode because, in the words of Linda Kaufmann, 'from the *Heroides* to Héloise, from *Letters of a Portuguese Nun* to *Clarissa*, [the epistle] has traditionally been considered the feminine mode par excellence',[46] and this is a subject position and cultural mode the authorial 'I' of Barthes' treatise wishes to inhabit: 'The necessity for this book is to be found in the following consideration: that the lover's discourse is today *of an extreme solitude.*'[47] In this scheme, desire is associated with absence: 'But isn't desire always the same, whether the object is present or absent? Isn't the object *always absent?*'; 'Like desire, the love letter waits for an answer'.[48] It is from within such an interpretative paradigm that Patricia Rosenmeyer treats Ovid's choice of the letter form for the exile poems 'not only as an allusion to, but also an authorial statement of identification – on some level – with his earlier epistolary work, the *Heroides*. The *Heroides* may be read as letters from exile ... in which Ovid pursues his fascination with the genre of letters and the subject of abandonment through literary characters; the *Tristia* take that fascination one step further as the author himself, in letters to loved ones, writes from the position of an abandoned hero of sorts.'[49] From this perspective, the heroines provide the tropes which the exiled Ovid inhabits, and the hierarchy of authorship so often attributed to the *Heroides* is reversed in the exile poems.

But if the 'authors' of the *Heroides*, the heroine and Ovid, are analytically separable in and for the agenda of any particular reading, they remain functionally intertwined: it is in their interplay, their correspondence even, that the *Heroides* achieve their distinctive form. When Briseis says at the beginning of her letter that it is written with difficulty in Greek by her barbarian hand, and the blots which Achilles will see are made by her tears (*Her.* 3.1–3), we may be conscious that we are reading a poem in Latin elegiac couplets, and in a clean and legible copy. Joseph Farrell has suggested that 'we must posit some intermediary – a translator, an interpreter, a *hermeneutes* – between the writer and ourselves.'[50] As Farrell observes, problems of translation become a basic constitutive generic element in the later tradition of epistolary heroism (e.g. *Les Lettres portugaises* (1669), published in French, purport to be a translation from the Portuguese), and the implicit Ovidian editor is often replaced by an explicit one who presents the correspondence. He

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[43] See Seeck (1975) who attempts to isolate the authorial 'I' of the letters; and Spentzou (forthcoming).

[44] On the issues raised by this see Kennedy (1993) 64–82.

[45] Barthes (1979) 13–14; emphasis Barthes'.

[46] Kaufmann (1992) 103.

[47] Barthes (1979) 1; emphasis Barthes'. On abandonment as a specifically 'female' condition, see Lipking (1983) and (1988).

[48] Barthes (1979) 15, 158; emphasis Barthes'.   [49] Rosenmeyer (1997) 29.

[50] Farrell (1998) 335.

also notes how the Latin word for 'blot' (*litura*) can also signify 'erasure' or 'editorial correction'.[51] The Ovidian author becomes troped as reader, and a particular kind of reader: scholarly concerns such as translation, textual emendation and authenticity become thematized within the text, and Farrell looks to future work which will trace 'the web of ironies created by Ovid's anticipation of the hermeneutic processes to which his text would inevitably be subjected.'[52] Farrell wants to associate this kind of reading with Ovid himself, but if Ovid is seen as a scholar, what sort of scholar committed to what kind of hermeneutic processes? A textual critic emending the text, as Farrell suggests? A feminist revealing the forces of appropriation and recuperation to which 'his' heroines have been subjected? Where might this list end? Theoretically it will never end, since the process of interpretation will continue to be reconfigured. Practically it ends in the preferred style of interpretation of each reader in that reader's here-and-now.

So, when we consider the relationship of Ovid and *his* addressee, the reader or critic of his poetic epistles, Ovid takes on the discursive situation and role of the heroine. The indeterminacy of space and time which separates writer and addressee is every bit as pronounced as it is in the case of the legendary writers and their beloveds. We figure Ovid as writing at a particular moment, temporally frozen, intending, desiring or willing meanings for his epistles, attempting to anticipate or determine those meanings, seeking to gain an adequate response from his reader. However, the meaning of his text remains anxiously contingent upon the end which will determine it. But what is that end? What is it that provides closure on *these* contingencies of meaning? What governs our sense that the ends we attribute to Ovid are or, ironically, are not fulfilled? At the level of the heroines' correspondence, the closure was provided by what was termed (if problematically) the 'source' text. If we are to know what Ovid was 'trying to do', 'succeeded in doing' or 'failed to do', we similarly need to have a 'source' text of some kind or other which we assume gives us a 'true' or 'objective' account of things. At this level, the 'source' text is our take on reality, which may be embodied in a corpus of texts which are presented as authoritative (e.g. Barthes, Ovid's *Ars amatoria*), but which is otherwise more surreptitiously provided by the grid of our theoretical assumptions – those ideas, terms and models we deem to be objectively and transhistorically true about reading, interpretation, history, love and so on (and which guide our choice, and our mode of reading, of those 'source' texts too). In recent scholarship, we may point to the discourses of intertextuality, genre, gender and above all epistolarity, which configure Ovid (as Farrell explicitly does) as already interested in and practising some or other

of the (eagerly contested) concerns which underpin scholarly readings. The construction of temporality involved seems oddly familiar: the text of the *Heroides* is organized as being 'prior' to those of the epistolary novelists of the eighteenth century and beyond, or of *The Handmaid's Tale* or *La Carte postale*, as temporally anterior, therefore, to the 'source' texts which provide closure on the contingencies of its meaning: Ovid is configured as a proto-novelist or a proto-poststructuralist writer, already, but not yet, manipulating the categories of, say, *écriture feminine* or the lover's discourse, just as Helen is already, but not yet, manipulating the tropes of the *Ars amatoria*. We may recall once more the issue of destination, and consider its association with the notion of destiny. The poems have their meaning when they arrive at the point to which we assume they have been directed, when we feel addressed by them. The meaning they happen to have in any such contingent reading thus becomes the meaning regarded as determinate and inherent in the text. Contingency and desire become closely linked, as do determination and satisfaction. The *Heroides* fashion a literary mode which allows us to resolve and separate the subject positions of desire and its (possible) satisfaction, of contingency and (possible) determination, and then to occupy both those subject positions through simultaneous identification with the complex and composite figures of the writer and the reader.

The relationship between Ovid and his reader is, historically, never fully determined or foreclosed. Other readers will succeed us, and can we foresee how the *Heroides*, and our readings of them, will be configured twenty, one hundred, two thousand years hence? This puts us in turn in the discursive position occupied by the heroine and by Ovid before us. Writing to this moment, it is possible to feel that a postmodernist sense of the inadequacy of language – the slippage between signifier and signified, the dialectic of presence and absence, the relativization of the roles of writer, reader and critic – and the lament over that inadequacy finds in epistolarity and epistolary tropes a congenial mode which is suited to its own sense of belatedness (every missive is a postscript to the already written, every reading a re-reading) and enacts its uncertainty of what is to come after (*post*).[53] Writing to this moment waits upon the response of the future.

FURTHER READING

The *Heroides* are now fairly well served by commentaries with the publication of Knox (1995), containing *Her.* 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 15; and Kenney's *Ovid Heroides* XVI–XXI (1996); Palmer (1898; repr. Hildesheim, 1967) covers all the poems and remains useful. For those with Italian there are now detailed commentaries on 1–3

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[51] Farrell (1998) 336 n.58.   [52] Farrell (1998) 338.

[53] See Kaufmann (1992) 264–5.

by A. Barchiesi (1992); on 9 by S. Casali (1995); on 12 by F. Bessone (1997) and on 18–19 by G. Rosati (1996). On epistolarity, key theoretical works are Altman (1982) and MacArthur (1990). Kaufmann (1986) and (1992) are particularly useful for the way they are prepared to rethink the tradition of epistolary heroinism and Ovid's relationship to it. For an older survey of this tradition see Dörrie (1968). Two major critical works on the *Heroides* remain useful: Jacobson (1974) and Verducci (1985); but the most influential work of recent years has been in article form: see especially Kennedy (1984); Barchiesi (1993); Hinds (1993); Farrell (1998).

14

GARETH WILLIAMS

Ovid's exile poetry: *Tristia, Epistulae ex Ponto* and *Ibis*

Ovid's sudden banishment from Rome in AD 8 was precipitated by two admitted causes, *carmen et error* (*Trist.* 2.207), the second of which – an apparently 'innocent' misdemeanour (cf. e.g. *Trist.* 3.5.49–52, 3.6.29–36, *Pont.* 1.6.21–6), possibly political in nature – receives only passing mention in the exile poetry and remains mysterious despite the speculations of modern theorists.[1] Whatever the truth of the matter, this *error* appears to have compounded the disfavour which Ovid had already incurred by the publication (c. 1 BC–AD 2) of the risqué *Ars amatoria* ('The Art of Love'), harmless on a 'sensible' reading (that naturally urged by Ovid in his defence of the poem in *Tristia* 2, addressed directly to Augustus) but fatally out of step with official tastes, themselves shaped by the programme of moral reform undertaken by Augustus (including legislation in c. 18 BC promoting marriage and curbing adultery).[2] If the *Ars amatoria* immediately aroused hostility in high places, Ovid's *error* may have supplied the pretext in AD 8 for a late but devastating retaliatory blow: relegation to Tomis (modern Constanza, on the Romanian coast of the Black Sea), a penalty less severe than *exilium* (which would have deprived him of Roman citizenship and property)[3] but still extreme in its deracinating physical and psychological effects. Two collections of exilic elegies, the *Tristia* ('Sorrows') in five books (fifty poems, AD 9–12) and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* ('Letters from Pontus') in four (1–3 were published together in AD 13, 4 probably posthumously; forty-six poems in all), chronicle Ovid's maladjustment to life in Tomis.[4] A third major production, the elegiac *Ibis* (c. AD 12),[5] elaborately curses an unnamed enemy at Rome (pseudonymously termed Ibis). A long introductory section (1–250) gives way to a vast catalogue of obscure imprecations drawn from the by-ways of mythology, history and legend (251–638); conventionally dismissed

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[1] Surveyed by Thibault (1964); for the political angle updated see Green (1982a) 49–59 and (1982b).
[2] See for the legislative details Green (1982a) 71–2.   [3] Evans (1983) 4, 27.
[4] Chronology: Syme (1978) 37–47.   [5] Date: Williams (1996) 132 n. 52.

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