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FANTASY, MYTH, AND LOVE LETTERS: TEXT AND TALE IN OVID'S *HEROIDES*

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In the *Epistulae Heroidum*, Ovid presents us with many poetic strata, the synthesis of which produces unique, and uniquely beautiful, literature.[1] This essay will focus principally on the interplay of three levels of that text, the first of which could be called mythical or intertextual, for myth, by Ovid's time, or at least in Ovid's text, is not an expression of a religious faith but a part of a poetic tradition. One might regard the second level as the fantastic or psychological, for the writers of these letters serve as affective filters, both in terms of processing the "influences" they have experienced in their previous literary loci and in terms of presenting the material in this new context in an emotional and fantasizing manner. The third level that will be considered here could be termed "contextual" or generic, i.e., the literary vehicle by which the newly created, fully psychological, mythical character has access to the literate audience. All three of these levels function together to create the various poetic personae that Ovid adopts in these letters. Consideration of the tension between these three elements will

[1] For the sake of limiting the field of this study, I will follow Jacobson 1973.ix in excluding the last six epistles from consideration. Jacobson regards the double epistles as a distinctly different work. See also Anderson 1973.68–81, and this is now the consensus opinion. The standard edition of the *Heroides* is Dörrie 1971, which is reviewed by G. P. Goold (*Gnomon* 46 [1974] 475–84), M. D. Reeve (*CR* 24 [1974] 57–64), J. M. Hunt (*CP* 70 [1975] 215–24). Dörrie 1971.287–90 accepts *Her.* 15 as Ovidian, but attributes its strange manuscript history to Ovid's having removed it in preparation for a second edition which included the double epistles. See also Dörrie 1975.224–26.

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be the focus of this brief study which, it is hoped, may shed some light on Ovid's boast to have created, with his *Heroides*, a new genre.[2]

Intertextuality provides the mythical dimension of the *Heroides*, a feature not at all unique to that collection or to Ovid in general,[3] though perhaps even more apparent here than elsewhere in his other early works.[4] Indeed, it has long been recognized that intertextuality is created through what Giorgio Pasquali called "arte allusiva"[5] and that poetic allusion is a prominent aspect of Augustan poetry. Gian Biagio Conte has analyzed a poignant allusion to Catullus in Ovid's *Fasti*, where the mythological heroine Ariadne receives life anew within the Roman poetic tradition, referring explicitly to her previous poetic locus.[6] Before turning to the text of the *Heroides*, it will be useful to consider this parallel example of intertextuality in the *Fasti* (3.473–75):[7]

> dicebam, memini, "periure et perfide Theseu!"
> ille abiit; eadem crimina Bacchus habet.
> nunc quoque "nulla viro" clamabo "femina credat!"
>
> As I remember it, I kept saying "Perjurous and
> perfidious Theseus!"
> He departed; Bacchus commits the same crime.
> Now again, I will exclaim, "Let no woman trust a
> man!"

2 *AA* 3.345f. On this topic, cf. the recent work of Steinmetz 1987. For more on Steinmetz' conclusions, see n. 62, below. See also the new work of F. Spoth 1992.26f.

3 Cf. the comments of Barchiesi 1984.66: "The *Heroides* are . . . intertextual formations, developed in association with other texts."

4 The date of the *Heroides* is generally assumed to be sometime between 25 and 1 BC; Jacobson 1973.312f. collates the various views and offers his own opinion of 10–3 BC on p. 316f. See also, among others, McKeown 1987.86–88.

5 For use of the word allusion see Pasquali 1942.185–87. For Ovidian allusion to Virgil generally, see Bömer 1968.175.

6 Conte 1986.61–63.

7 The texts cited are the following: for Ovid's *Fasti*, Bömer 1957; for Catullus, Mynors 1958; for *Heroides* 1–14, Dörrie 1971; for *Her.* 15, Dörrie 1975; for the *Aeneid*, Mynors 1969; for Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Brink 1971; for Ovid's *Amores*, Kenney 1961; for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Anderson 1977; for the *Tristia*, Owen 1915. Any departure from these texts are duly noted. All translations are my own.

Here Ariadne alludes to the poetic tradition whence she is drawn and thus signals that she has a personal knowledge of Catullus' poem (64.132–37):[8]

> sicine me patriis auectam, *perfide*, ab aris,
> *perfide*, *deserto liquisti in litore*, *Theseu*?
> sicine discedens neglecto numine diuum,
> *immemor a! deuota domum periuria portas*?
> nullane res potuit crudelis flectere mentis
> consilium?
>
> Thus, perfidious Theseus, perfidious, have you left me,
> carried away from my paternal home, on the deserted
> shore?
> Thus, departing, neglecting the will of the gods,
> unmindful (alas!), do you carry home your accursèd
> broken oaths?
> Could nothing change the purpose of your cruel mind?

and further on at 143, though here applied just to Theseus:

> *nunc iam nulla uiro iuranti femina credat*,
>
> From now on let no woman trust a man, even one under
> oath . . .

Bömer cites this parallel[9] and Conte rightly draws attention to the fact that Ovid's Ariadne "recalls" (*memini*, *Fasti* 3.473) her lamentation from when she was formerly the Ariadne in the text of Catullus 64.[10] While Conte's discussion does, on the one side, establish for us a model for Ovidian allusion, it will also be useful at this juncture to go beyond Conte's analysis and consider another Ariadne, that of *Her.* 10.

Howard Jacobson has, if chiefly as a matter of *Quellenforschung*,

8 Conte 1986.61–63. In the *Metamorphoses*, in particular, Ovid uses literary allusion to establish a "poetic mythology" for his characters. For Ovid's use of allusion to suggest a generic program, see Hinds 1987.21–24.

9 Bömer 1957.176.

10 Conte 1986.61.

presented in some detail the parallelism of *Her.* 10 with Catullus 64,[11] and Verducci has even gone so far as to suggest[12] that Ovid deliberately reverses Horace's advice against poor writing in the *Ars Poetica*.[13] The result for Verducci is, in contrast to the Catullan piece, a "rococo description" of which the mood is a "universal travesty."[14] Yet when Ovid recreates Ariadne in the *Heroides*, one finds imitation similar to that of the *Fasti*, for an echo of Catullus 64 can clearly be sensed in the words of Ariadne in *Her.* 10 (21–23, 35–36, 55–58):

> Interea toto clamanti *litore "Theseu"*!
> reddebant nomen concava saxa tuum
> et quotiens ego te, totiens locus ipse vocabat;
>
> "Quo fugis?" exclamo "scelerate revertere Theseu!
> *Flecte* ratem! Numerum non habet illa suum!"
>
> Incumbo lacrimisque toro manante profusis
> "Pressimus" exclamo "te duo, redde duos!
> Venimus huc ambo; cur non *discedimus* ambo?
> *Perfide*, pars nostri, *lectule*, maior ubi est?"
>
> Meanwhile, the whole shore was crying out "Theseus!"
> and the hollowed out rocks were returning your name
> and as often as I called you, so often did that very place
> do so;
>
> "Where are you fleeing?" I cry out, "Return, O wicked
> Theseus!
> Turn back your ship! It doesn't have its full payload!"
>
> I lie down and the whole couch is dripping wet with my
> tears.

[11] Jacobson 1973.213–27.

[12] À la Galinsky's suggestion that, by putting dolphins in trees *in fluvio* at *Met.* 1.302–03, Ovid flouts the Horatian precept of *AP* 30–31 (Galinsky 1975.81).

[13] Horace *AP* 131–35; Verducci 1985.244–46.

[14] Verducci 1985.246.

> I cry, "Two of us made an impression on you, so return
> two of us!
> We came here two, why don't we depart as two?
> Perfidious little bed, where is the bigger part of us?"

One can see from the italicized text the obvious parallels with Catullus' presentation, particularly in the words of Ariadne there.[15] It is the bed, however, that Ariadne now addresses as "perfidious," for it cheats her of her lover (*Her.* 10.58; Cat. 64.132f.): this is the politic thing to do, since the objective of the letter is to persuade Theseus to come back, whereas the point of the address in Catullus 64 is to denounce him after his departure. Note, too, the close proximity of the verb *discedere* with the vocative *perfide* in both texts (*Her.* 10.57–58; Cat. 64.132–34), by which Ariadne clearly evokes her previous poetic situation. Moreover, one should not fail to notice the line termination *litore Theseu*, which also occurs in each piece,[16] though with a difference: in Catullus it is part of Ariadne's direct address to Theseus, whereas in the *Heroides* one finds that it is the beckoning of nature, merely an echo of Ariadne's own speech, just as *Heroides* 10 echoes the text of Catullus 64.

Whether or not one accepts Verducci's assessment that Ovid's version is a travesty of that of his predecessor, it is nevertheless clear that in the *Heroides* Ariadne invokes the tradition whence she comes, not so much expressing her "debt" to it but rather establishing herself in a kind of intertextual mythology that gives life to literary characters. My view, then, would be that the seemingly tongue-in-cheek references to Catullus are not parodic but indicative of the character's personal growth, as it were, from text to text. Indeed Jacobson seems a little surprised by the fact that Ariadne does *not* appeal to Theseus' former love for her or to renewing it.[17] Yet this does not seem strange when considered in light of Ariadne's "maturation" over the course of time since she had last appeared in literature: she will not try again what didn't work last time. Indeed, as Jacobson rightly ob-

[15] At this point some distinction should be made between "quoted" allusion found in the mouth or, in the case of the *Heroides*, the written text of the characters and general poetic allusion by an author to the text of a predecessor. In the case of Ovid's Ariadne, cited above, it is clear that the character herself is referring to her own words spoken in the same context but in a previous poetic text.

[16] *Her.* 10.21 and Cat. 64.133.

[17] Jacobson 1973.225.

serves,[18] she is more concerned with her personal survival than with her perfidious lover, for she knows that while her "former" appeal to love failed, perhaps this time a more universal human appeal will work.

Alessandro Barchiesi has recently suggested that it is not so much the case that the traditional story offered Ovid a world of possibilities to work with, but rather that he opened a new window in an already existing story,[19] as we saw in the case of Ariadne. In some instances, however, Ovid goes beyond expansion. When Dido writes to Aeneas in *Her.* 7, her plea is one very much set against the backdrop of and in the context of *Aeneid* 1–6. Even a glance at Palmer's commentary on this poem[20] reveals just how abundant these references are, and it is not necessary to detail them all here; but let us briefly consider one or two examples. When Dido begins to draw heavily on the Virgilian account, she synecdochically recreates the Virgilian atmosphere by numerous references to the *Aeneid*.[21] At *Her.* 7.81–84, Dido accuses Aeneas of lying about his wife:

> Omnia mentiris; neque enim tua *fallere* lingua
> incipit a nobis primaque plector ego:
> Si quaeras ubi sit formosi mater Iuli—
> occidit a duro sola relicta viro.
>
> You lie about everything; nor indeed does your tongue
> begin its cheating with me and I am not the first to be struck by you:
> if you want to know where the mother of handsome Iulus is—
> she perished, lone and abandoned by her harsh husband.

This remark cannot exist apart from the textual/mythical context which is the unseen counterpart to it, for Dido's charges only make sense when viewed in light of the myth as it would be familiar to the reader. The second

[18] Jacobson 1973.226.
[19] Barchiesi 1984.66.
[20] Palmer 1898.339–50.
[21] These examples are abundant in Palmer's commentary. On the notion of creating an atmosphere by alluding to an author, see Knauer 1981.870–918; here, 876.

book of the *Aeneid*, of course, is the source to which Dido alludes (736–44):

> namque auia cursu
> dum sequor et nota excedo regione uiarum,
> heu misero coniunx fatone erepta Creusa
> substitit, errauitne uia seu lapsa resedit,
> incertum; nec post oculis est reddita nostris.
> nec prius amissam respexi animumue reflexi
> quam tumulum antiquae Cereris sedemque sacratam
> uenimus: hic demum collectis omnibus una
> defuit, et comites natumque uirumque *fefellit*.
>
> For while I follow the trackless places
> in my running and I depart from the section of the road that I know,
> alas, my wife Creusa, taken away—whether by a wretched fate she checked her step
> or she wandered from the path, or she sat down because she had fallen—
> I just don't know; nor did she appear to my eyes again,
> and I didn't look back for her when she was lost, nor did I pay any attention
> before we got to the mound of ancient Ceres and her sacred seat.
> Here, at long last, when all had been gathered, she alone
> was missing, and she cheated her friends, her son, and her husband.

Both authors employ passive participles of Creusa in order to indicate her fate (*erepta, Aen.* 2.738; *lapsa, Aen.* 2.739; *amissam, Aen.* 2.741; *relicta, Her.* 7.84): Ovid, however, specifies an agent, *a duro . . . viro* (7.84). Furthermore, the manner in which Dido turns the verb around in his passage is remarkable: according to Aeneas, it is Creusa who "cheated (*fefellit*) her friends, son, and husband" (*Aen.* 2.744), but now, as seen from the vantage point of Dido when she composes her epistle, it is Aeneas and his words that cheat her (*fallere, Her.* 7.81), just as he had previously cheated his

Creusa by abandoning her at Troy. Because she has already heard Aeneas' story in *Aeneid* 2, Dido is familiar with Aeneas' allegations that Creusa is to blame and she does not accept his account. Rather than simply opening a new window in an old story,[22] she "sets him straight," using against him the very verb he had used to describe his wife's disappearance.[23]

Yet, as Palmer notes in his commentary, it is when Dido refers to the marriage in the cave that the allusion to Virgil's text becomes most pointed. The passage that Dido has in mind, of course, is that of *Aen.* 4 (161–72):

> interea magno misceri murmure caelum
> incipit, insequitur commixta grandine nimbus,
> et Tyrii comites passim et Troiana iuuentus
> Dardaniusque nepos Veneris diuersa per agros
> tecta metu petiere; ruunt de montibus amnes.
> speluncam Dido dux et Troianus eandem
> deueniunt. prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno
> dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius aether
> conubiis summoque ululurunt uertice Nymphae.
> ille dies primus leti primusque malorum
> causa fuit; neque enim specie famaue mouetur
> nec iam furtiuum Dido meditatur amorem:
> coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.
>
> Meanwhile the sky grows threatening with peals of
> thunder,
> and rain follows, with hail mixed in. The scattered
> Tyrian company
> and the Trojan youth, as well as the Dardanian grandson
> of Venus,

22 See Barchiesi 1984.66.

23 In light of Ovid's clever manipulation of Virgil's text here, it is interesting to recall the comment (cited by Anderson 1973.56) of John Dryden who was once quoted by Joseph Addison (*Spectator 1710*, v.62): "I think I may be judge of this [the difference between Ovid's and Virgil's account of Dido], because I have translated both. The famous author of the Art of Love has nothing of his own; he borrows all from a greater master in his own profession, and, which is worse, improves nothing which he finds." On the idea of "correction," cf. Thomas 1986.185–89.

> in fear sought out different places for shelter through
> the fields;
> now torrents are rushing down from the hills.
> Dido and the Trojan leader come into the same cave,
> Primal Earth and Juno of the marriage rites
> give the signal; the torch-fires flashed and the air was a
> witness
> to the nuptials, and on the mountain top the Nymphs
> did wail.
> That day first was of death and of ills the cause;
> in fact Dido is no longer moved by appearances or
> reputation,
> no more is she fixated upon a secret love:
> she calls it marriage and with this name hides her fault!

This scene is a third-person description of an event that, here in the *Aeneid*, Dido clearly considers marriage (172). Gordon Williams has gone so far as to regard this wedding scene as evocative of the ancient form of common law marriage (*affectio maritalis*).[24] Later in *Heroides* 7, however, Dido's desperation leads her to reconsider the marriage scene and she is willing to compromise (169–70):[25]

> Si pudet uxoris, non nupta, sed hospita dicar;
> dum tua sit Dido, quodlibet esse feret.
>
> If it shames you that I be your wife, let me not be called
> your bride, but your hostess,
> provided only that Dido be *yours*, she will tolerate
> being whatever you want.

Here the Virgilian event is, as it were, perceived through the psychological filter of Dido: it is now presented in the first person and we understand that she backs away from her Virgilian position of "marriage" in an effort to preserve the relationship. Similarly, if we turn to her words elsewhere in this epistle, we find that, while clearly referring to her previous poetic

24 Williams 1968.381–82.

25 Cf. also the words of Briseis 3.69f.

context, Dido presents us with a new perspective of the event, namely a first-person perspective (93–96):

> Illa dies nocuit, qua nos declive sub antrum
> caeruleus subitis compulit imber aquis.
> Audieram voces, nymphas ululasse putavi:
> Eumenides fatis signa dedere meis.
>
> That day did me harm, the day on which rain of the
> blue sky
> with a sudden downpour drove us into the sloping cave.
> I had heard voices: I thought it the nymphs wailing:
> it was the Furies that gave signals for my doom!

Dido's words in *Her.* 7 more than merely echo Virgil's description of the encounter in the cave. Rather, as Gordon Williams has suggested, Dido refers to that scene directly and she does so in a unique way.[26] As a participant in that text, Dido's "interpretation" of Virgil is perceptibly different from the reader's. While she agrees with Virgil that in fact that was a fateful day when she and Aeneas entered the cave (93), Dido recalls the acoustical effects differently: what she thought was the cry of nymphs (as is stated in *Aen.* 4.168), turns out to be the signals of the Furies. Palmer suggests that this change amounts to a correction of Virgil's view;[27] but it is not Ovid who changes Virgil's account here—it is Dido.[28] Indeed, this is not strictly a correction, but simply a different perception of events described in Virgil's text by a character within that text: in this regard note the pluperfect *audieram* in line 95: "I had heard (when I was in the *Aeneid*)." Virgil specifies that Juno and Tellus gave the signal, but from Dido's perspective of forlorn lover, she remembers it as the signal of the Furies: she *feels* differently and so she "recalls" *Aen.* 4 differently.[29]

Like Ariadne and Dido, the other composers of these letters (and

26 Williams 1968.381.

27 Palmer 1898.344 *ad* 94.

28 My view of allusion here contrasts with the more traditional view of Lamacchia 1960.310–30, and, more recently, Boyd 1990.82–85.

29 Cf. Alessandro Barchiesi's discussion of Penelope in *Her.* 1, where Penelope's different perspective on events in the Odyssey is related to her subjective elegiac (specifically nonepic) point of view, Barchiesi 1984.71–74.

other Ovidian characters generally) have a Pirandello–like quality about them. Ovid's heroines possess a certain autonomy within their mythical contexts and the mythical context is itself molded by the tradition of which the characters are a part. A further example can be seen in the case of Penelope, whose letter, for obvious reasons, is rich in references to the *Odyssey.* She reveals that she has been "reading" the *Odyssey* in several instances when she purposely deviates from Homer's text, the most poignant of which, perhaps, is her statement that she sent Telemachus to Pylos to inquire after Odysseus (*Omnia namque tuo senior te quaerere misso / rettulerat nato Nestor, at ille mihi, Her.* 1.37–38). This has presented a great problem for commentators on this poem. Many, and Jacobson among them, assume that Ovid had not read his Homer carefully enough. Yet it can be seen from Jacobson's review of this poem that even he has a very difficult time believing that Ovid could have been careless.[30] If one assumes that Penelope, like Ariadne or Dido, has "read" the *Odyssey* and now presents her case in light of it, she can be viewed as justifying the account of her actions there—not Ovid correcting Homer, but rather Penelope altering, or distorting, her place in intertextualized mythology, for now she gets the opportunity to tell her side of the story.[31] It wasn't *really* Athene who sent Telemachus, it was Penelope herself (37–38). On this reading, Jacobson's contention that Ovid is "slipshod" in presenting the material from the *Odyssey* regarding Penelope and Telemachus can be discarded, replaced by consideration of a richer, more complex Penelope, whose misrepresentation of the Homeric facts can be explained by her power as a character given new life by the poet very much within—and here distorting—the poetic tradition.[32] In sum, the mythical character presents us with a kind of psychological filter, which brings a heightened pathos to the new context. The first-person perspective in which Ovid's heroines write makes private and personalizes what had been public about them in their previous contexts.[33]

Ovid's other heroines, too, reveal in their new settings knowledge

30 Jacobson 1973.267.

31 See Barchiesi 1984.70–71 and Kennedy 1984.419–21.

32 For further work on epic references in *Her.* 1, see Viarre 1987.2–11.

33 For a similar observation on Dido, cf. Anderson 1973.68: "Ovid . . . moves right out of the [Virgil's] heroic framework. His Dido emerges simply as a woman, a famous woman, but otherwise not to be distinguished from any woman about to be abandoned by the typically selfish male."

of their previous locations in the poetic tradition.[34] Simone Viarre has recently stated that references to the Homeric poems are defined by their "couleur psychologique . . . ainsi que par l'attitude mentale attribuée à l'épistolière élégiaque."[35] As Viarre points out for these poems, and as we have already seen in the epistle of Dido in particular, the fantasizing quality of a love letter functions on a psychological level, evoking the most basic human emotions of longing, anger, hope, and despair.[36] Such qualities have been viewed by T. E. Apter as a general feature of fantasy literature: "fantasy is unconscious, uncontrolled, highly personal, and its products lack integration or generality or balance."[37] Indeed, in his preface to the translation that he published to some of the *Heroides*, John Dryden mentions that the passion embodied in these poems seems to conflict with the eloquence of these heroines:

> His thoughts which are the Pictures and results of those Passions, are generally such as naturally arise from those disorderly Motions of our Spirits. Yet not to speak too partially in his behalf, I will confess that the Copiousness of his Wit was such, that he often writ too pointedly for his Subject, and made his persons speak more Eloquently than the violence of their Passion would admit: so that he is frequently witty out of season: leaving the imitation of Nature and the cooler dictates of his Judgment for the false applause of Fancy.[38]

[34] Aside from Ariadne (*Her.* 10), Dido (*Her.* 7), and Penelope (*Her.* 1) discussed here, intertextual precedents include Homer *Il.* 9 for *Her.* 3 (Briseis to Achilles), Euripides' *Hippolytus* for *Her.* 4 (Phaedra to Hippolytus) and his *Aeolus* for *Her.* 11 (Canace to Macareus), Apollonius Rhodius *Arg.* 1.609ff. for *Her.* 6 (Hypsipyle to Jason) and *Arg.* 3 (along with Euripides' *Medea*) for *Her.* 12 (Medea to Jason), Sophocles' *Hermione* and Euripides' *Andromache* and possibly Pacuvius' adaptation of Sophocles' play for *Her.* 8 (Hermione to Orestes), Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and Apollodorus 2.7.7 for *Her.* 9 (Deianira to Hercules), Euripides' *Protesilaus* and Catullus 68 for *Her.* 13 (Laodamia to Protesilaus), Horace's *Odes* 3.11 and Aeschylus' trilogy of *Supplices, Aegyptii*, and *Danaides* for *Her.* 14, and Sappho (along with the Attic comedies of Ameipsias and Diphilos) for *Her.* 15 (Sappho to Phaon; cf. Dörrie 1975.14–18).

[35] Viarre 1987.6.

[36] See also Steinmetz 1987.134.

[37] Apter 1982.3–4.

[38] From the preface to vol. 1 of Kinsley 1958.180.

Yet even if to some Ovid's wit may occasionally seem out of season (as apparently, regarding the *Ars Amatoria*, it later did to the emperor Augustus), in the case of these epistles this should be excused since these poems are not meant to be historically "accurate" representations of letters, but rather the embodiment of the passion of mythical characters in the context of a love letter. Accordingly, it is no surprise to find that Dryden himself here refers to Ovid's presentation of the passion in these poems as engendered by spiritual disorder.[39] Verducci has also discussed the disintegrating quality of these epistles; she notes that each of the letters embodies a disorder apparent to the reader but not to the heroines themselves.[40] While clear examples of this can be found in the words of Phyllis (2.131ff.) or Penelope (1.71ff.), perhaps Briseis provides the best example (3.5–8):

> Si mihi pauca queri de te dominoque viroque
> fas est, de domino pauca viroque querar.
> Non, ego poscenti quod sum cito tradita regi,
> culpa tua est—quamvis haec quoque culpa tua est.
>
> If it is right for me to complain a few things about you,
> my lord and my husband,
> about you, lord and husband, a few things will I
> complain.
> Just because I was quickly handed over to the king
> when he demanded,
> It is not your fault—yet *it is too* your fault.

On the one hand, one might view the epanalepsis found in lines 5–6 and the chiastic arrangement of line 8 as indicative of more eloquence "than the violence of . . . Passion" should admit, to use Dryden's phrase. Indeed, commentators have been so troubled by the lines that they have proposed excising them[41] and, at one point, these lines led one scholar to suggest that the whole of *Heroides* 3 is spurious.[42] On the other hand, notions of rhetoric and passion should not be considered contradictory: the rhetorical repe-

[39] On Dryden's comments, see further Verducci 1985.5, 25.

[40] Verducci 1985.28.

[41] See Palmer, *ad loc.*, who with Merkel, wishes to excise lines 7–8.

[42] Lachmann 1969.58.

tition here surely is indicative of a desperate tone and the design of line 8 should be regarded as suggestive of a moment of confusion on Briseis' part. Such a quality can also be seen in the love letters of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, e.g., E.B. to R.B.:

> it is for you, I fear, whenever I fear:—and if you were less
> to me, should I fear do you think?—if you were to me
> only what I am to myself, for instance, if your happiness
> were only as precious as my own in my own eyes, should
> I fear, do you think, then? Think, and do not blame me.[43]

The disorder is a logic to itself and, in the case of Ovid's heroines, such fantasizing should perhaps sometimes be viewed as produced by the sexual frustration that arises from the suppression of erotic impulses produced by the prolonged separation of the lovers;[44] (one will recall Apter's definition of fantasy as being "unconscious, uncontrolled," and lacking "integration or . . . balance").[45] The words of Ariadne in *Her.* 10.56ff. reveal this as do the impassioned statements of Penelope in *Her.* 1 (5–10):[46]

> O utinam tum, cum Lacedaemona classe petebat,
> obrutus insanis esset adulter aquis!
> Non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto,
> non quererer tardos ire relicta dies
> nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem
> lassaret viduas pendula tela manus.
>
> O would that then, when he was sailing for Sparta in his ship,
> that adulterer have been overcome by raging waters.
> Had it been so, I would not have lain here cold in a deserted bed,

43 Dec. 13, 1845, in Stack 1969.68. Cf. also Henderson 1986.7–10, 37–40, 67–70, 81–85, 113–20, who (p. 9) cites Barthes 1979.157, "I have nothing to tell you, save that it is to you that I tell this nothing."

44 For a very full account of alleged sexual innuendo in *Heroides* 1, see Jacobson 1973.268–74.

45 Apter 1982.3–4.

46 Cf. also 1.50 and 1.75–76.

> I, abandoned, would not be complaining that the days
> go slowly
> nor would the hanging woof weary my widow's hands,
> I who am trying to cheat the long and empty night.

I am not the first to suggest that Penelope's words are erotically charged. John Henderson remarks generally about this poem that "'characterization' is caught up in the problematic of sexuality,"[47] and later he states, "'writing at once represses and reveals desire' (E. Wright, *Psychoanalytical Criticism* [sic], Methuen 1984, 133). Yet the letter is exemplary Writing–as–the–dissimulation–of–its–status–as–Writing precisely because it is 'addressed' to a 'destination,' as if desire is portable, postable . . ."[48] Howard Jacobson has gone so far as to see many references in *Her.* 1, in particular, as sexually suggestive, including the seemingly innocent use of such phrases as *sine viribus uxor* (97) and the epic reference *sanguine . . . tepefecerat hastam* (19); for Jacobson these indicate that Penelope is a 'sex–starved, sex–obsessed woman."[49] Yet, whether one accepts Henderson's more general post–structuralist reading or Jacobson's highly specific philological position, it is perhaps most telling that Penelope here refers rather forthrightly to her suppressed sexuality in spite of the fact that she was a proverbial symbol of chastity in the ancient world (as can also be inferred from line 10).

Similarly, when Oenone recalls for Paris their former rustic love-making, she points out that she would be even better in a bed (*Her.* 5.87–88):

> Nec me, faginea quod tecum fronde iacebam,
> despice; purpureo sum magis apta toro.
>
> Just because I once used to lie with you on the leaves of a beech tree
> Don't despise me. I am more suited to the royal marriage bed.

47 Henderson 1986.7.

48 Henderson 1986.9.

49 Jacobson 1973.273. In general, Jacobson seems to me to take these "erotic" words out of context. I do, however, agree that the general backdrop of the *Heroides* is clearly informed by erotic suppression.

Oenone's reference to the bed is indicative not only of her claim to royalty, but of her lovemaking generally. While Oenone's statement does not comport the same degree of sexual frustration that we saw in Penelope's words above, it is certainly not merely a reference to sexual contentment: rather it stands as a challenge to Paris to turn from the adulteress (*adultera certe est*, 125) to a more homespun love (79ff.). But Sappho provides us with an even more graphic example (*Her.* 15.123–34):

Tu mihi cura, Phaon, te somnia nostra reducunt,
somnia formosa candidiora die.
Illic te invenio, quamvis regionibus absis;
sed non longa satis gaudia somnus habet.
Saepe tuos nostra cervice onerare lacertos,
saepe tuae videor supposuisse meos.
Oscula cognosco, quae tu committere lingua
aptaque consueras accipere, apta dare.
Blandior interdum verisque simillima verba
eloquor, et vigilant sensibus ora meis;—
ulteriora pudet narrare, sed omnia fiunt,
et iuvat, et siccae non licet esse mihi.

You are my care, Phaon. My dreams recall you,
dreams brighter than the fairest day.
I find you there, although you are gone from these
regions;
but sleep does not hold onto its delights long enough.
Often I dream that your arms are around my neck,
often that my arms are pressing on your neck.
I can recognize your kisses that you used to give and
take
with your tongue—you were a great kisser.
Sometimes I fondle you and I speak words so real
they're true,
and my lips keep watch for all my senses;
I'm ashamed to mention the things that happen beyond
this . . .
but we go all the way, it's pure pleasure, and I get all
wet.

This very rare literary specimen of an erotic dream further evidences that sexual suppression stands out as a leitmotif for these poems. In sharing her dream with Phaon in such a vivid manner, Sappho demonstrates the extreme to which the sexual fantasizing may go, a component of these poems that we have also seen presented in the other, less explicit, examples considered here.

Romantic fantasy, however, is not couched in strictly erotic terms in these poems. When Paris returns to the Trojan shore with Helen, Oenone reconstructs the scene of anagnorisis (*Her.* 5.63, 67–74):

hinc ego vela tuae cognovi prima carinae . . .

Fit propior terrasque cita ratis attigit aura:
Femineas vidi corde tremente genas.
Non satis id fuerat—quid enim furiosa morabar?—
haerebat gremio turpis amica tuo!
Tunc vero rupique sinus et pectora planxi
et secui madidas ungue rigente genas
implevique sacram querulis ululatibus Iden;
illuc has lacrimas in mea saxa tuli.

Thence I recognized the first sails of your ship . . .

The ship gets closer and closer and, with a sudden
breeze, it touches the shore:
With trembling heart I saw a female face.
And that wasn't enough—for what was I waiting for, I
in my madness?—
that shameless girlfriend was hanging all over your
chest!
But then I ripped at my bosom and beat my breast,
and with my hard nails I cut into my streaming cheeks,
and I filled sacred Ida with complaining cries;
just there did I bear these tears upon my rocks.

The emotional quality of this passage amply demonstrates the high passion of these epistles. While Oenone retains her composure in recounting the incident, her portrait here is nevertheless the worst kind of lover's fantasy,

namely to see one's paramour in the arms of another. Nor is this an isolated example: Medea's description of the wedding procession of Jason and Creusa (*Her.* 12.137ff.) has similar effect, leaving her with only a desperate response (157–58): *Vix me continui, quin sic laniata capillos / clamarem "meus est" iniceremque manus.*

That these heroines describe their worst fears for their romantic fantasies and lament their sexual separation is suited to these epistles, for as such they are documents of a highly personal nature. Yet it is also fitting on another level, specifically that of genre, for the elegiac meter had, of course, been long recognized as the meter of lament and had recently been described as such by Horace.[50] Furthermore, elegiac couplets were, of course, also known as the meter of love and thus it is not surprising that when Phaedra portrays herself as a spurned lover, she writes under the direction of the god Amor (*Her.* 4.9–20):

> Qua licet et †sequitur, pudor est miscendus amori;
> dicere quae puduit, scribere iussit amor.
> Quidquid Amor iussit, non est contemnere tutum;
> regnat et in dominos ius habet ille deos.
> Ille mihi primo dubitanti scribere dixit:
> "Scribe! Dabit victas ferreus ille manus."
> Adsit et, ut nostras avido fovet igne medullas,
> figat sic animos in mea vota tuos.
> Non ego nequitia socialia foedera rumpam;
> fama—velim quaeras—crimine nostra vacat.
> Venit amor gravius, quo serior. Urimur intus,
> urimur et caecum pectora vulnus habent . . .
>
> Wherever it is right that modesty be mixed with love,
> love also follows;
> whatever I have been ashamed to say, Love has ordered
> me to write.
> It is not safe to despise whatever Love has ordered;

50 Horace's description is well known (*AP* 75ff.): *versibus inpariter iunctis querimonia primum, / post etiam inclusa est voti sententia compos; / quis tamen exiguos elegos emiserit auctor, / grammatici certant et adhuc sub iudice lis est.* Cf. also Viarre 1987.6 (cited above, p. 258).

> he reigns and holds sway over the gods who themselves
> are lords.
> That one spoke to me when I was first hesitating to
> write:
> "Write; the iron-hearted one will yield conquered
> hands."
> Let him attend me and, just as he warms my marrow
> with his greedy flame,
> so let him pierce your heart in answer to my prayers.
> Not with wickedness will I break my marriage vows;
> go ahead and ask me and I'll tell you that my reputation
> is free from reproach.
> Love has come more gravely just as he has come later. I
> am burning within,
> I am burned and my breast has a blind wound . . .

While Phaedra's romantic situation with Hippolytus is certainly unique to her, her artistic situation is the same as the other heroines who struggle to commit their emotions to writing. Her psychological state is, as we saw in the case of Dido and Ariadne, not set in the chronologically remote, mythical past but is thoroughly contemporary, for she is a lover with whom the reader can identify emotionally. Moreover, her act of writing here is one with which Ovid himself can identify, for he had recently been in a similar predicament when embarking on his career as an elegiac poet (*Amores* 1.1.21–30):

> questus eram, pharetra cum protinus ille soluta
> legit in exitium spicula facta meum
> lunauitque genu sinuosum fortiter arcum
> "quod" que "canas, uates, accipe" dixit "opus."
> me miserum! certas habuit puer ille sagittas:
> uror, et in uacuo pectore regnat Amor.
> sex mihi surgat opus numeris, in quinque residat;
> ferrea cum uestris bella ualete modis.
> cingere litorea flauentia tempora myrto,
> Musa per undenos emodulanda pedes.
>
> I had made my complaint, when he straightway, having
> opened his quiver,

chose arrows made for my destruction,
bravely arching his sinuous bow on his knee. He said
"Receive the kind of poetry, bard, that you will sing."
Woe is me! that boy had accurate arrows:
I burn, and Love rules in my empty breast.
Six times does my kind of poetry rise up in its
measures, and ebbs in five;
Farewell iron battles together with your meter.
Gird your blond temples with myrtle that grows by the
beach,
O Muse that must be sung in eleven foot measures.

One can see from these lines not only that Ovid alleges originally to have contemplated writing epic but he also draws attention to the association of meter and content for both epic and elegy. She may not herself be debating over generic preference, as Ovid did, but by alluding to the predicament of the elegiac poet, Phaedra brings that text into play with her own in *Her.* 4. Thus, on one level at least, Phaedra reveals that although she is a mythical persona, she is nevertheless writing in the manner of a Roman elegiac poet. As a woman and as a poet, Phaedra is part and parcel of the Roman world.[51]

By introducing the strict rules of genre into the generally fantastic complexion of these heroines' sentiments, Ovid could very well create an impossible tension between the spontaneity of the fantasy and the form of the literary genre. Yet ironically it is within the constraints of genre that Ovid's poetic genius has freest reign, for he defies traditional notions associated with the epistolary mode of expression: as was suggested above, the epistolary format of the *Heroides* cloaks another genre, namely Roman

[51] In his preface to the *Heroides*, Dryden suggests that Ovid may have "Romanized" these heroines too much. Ovid's use of fantasy within the Romanized context, then, does not offer his audience an escape, but rather brings the reality of the reader's situation to bear upon the fantasy of these women. This, Apter 1982.2 has observed, is a normal feature of fantasy literature: "fantasy is essential to the authors' various purposes, which must be understood not as an escape from reality but as an investigation of it." This, however, runs counter to the view of Manlove offered in the Schlobin collection. For more on "Romanization," cf. Verducci 1985.5 and, more recently, Solodow 1988.55.

elegy.[52] When Phaedra alludes to Ovid's programmatic poem on his choice of elegy, she brings a generic tension into the text of her epistle.[53] The genre of the epistle has an earlier tradition of both prose (obvious examples are Cicero, Plato, and Epicurus) and poetry (e.g., the hexameter tradition of Lucilius and Horace; recently Propertius had even cast one of his elegies in the form of an epistle,[54] though not in a mythical setting).[55] The Roman elegiac tradition is, of course, at the time of the *Heroides*, vibrantly represented by Ovid himself in his *Amores*. While the reader who has "intercepted" this letter before it reaches Hippolytus barely senses the clever integration of the chronologically incongruous elements in the "Romanization" of the mythical heroine, it is nevertheless likely that the tension of elegy–within–epistle is a feature that Ovid wishes to be prominent in this corpus of poems.[56] Still, the elegiac and the epistolary elements of these poems do not collide violently, but combine gracefully, as do the mythical and the Roman.

Such graceful combination can also be seen in the general constitution of the *Heroides*. Just as genre cloaks genre, so the author of these poems (Ovid) is cloaked by another author (the heroine);[57] and, as befits such a sexual reversal, in each case she writes to a male. I would suggest that this is why Ovid makes the recipient of Sappho's letter a man instead of a woman—not because Ovid enjoys engaging in "transvestite ventriloquization," as E. Harvey has recently argued.[58] In fact, Harvey suggests that Ovid engages in sexual and poetic "subjugation" and goes on to say that by pre–empting Sappho's voice in this epistle Ovid commits a Philomela–like "linguistic rape." Yet Harvey does not seem to consider adequately the textual dynamic of the relationship that Ovid, as heir of the

[52] See Barchiesi 1984.69–71; now also Spoth 1992.85–88, 107f., 221–23.

[53] The text of Horace, *AP* 75ff. (n. 50, above), clearly suggests that in the Augustan period the genre of elegy was distinctly linked with the concepts of lament and love, suitable on both counts for these letters, as does Sappho herself, who says in *Her.* 15.7ff.: "my love must be wept over; the song of lament belongs to elegy . . ."

[54] Propertius 4.3.

[55] See Cunningham 1949.100.

[56] See Steinmetz 1987.143–44, Jacobson 1973.331–34. For further discussion of reader as recipient for epistolary composition generally, cf. Altman 1964.117ff.

[57] See Steinmetz 1987.141, section 5.

[58] Harvey 1989.120.

literary tradition, establishes with the texts that he inherits—a relationship that strangely parallels the intimate relationship that the reader of an epistle has with the author of the epistle.[59]

In contrast to Harvey's interpretation it should be noted that, as I suggested just above, the inversion of female/male for the author uniformly supposes a male recipient.[60] Ovid does not "ventriloquize" Sappho by having her write to Phaon, but allows her, as informed by the poetic tradition, to speak once more. Here, as elsewhere in the *corpus Ovidianum*, the characters speak because they live within the tradition; their rebirth in the Ovidian text is obliged to that tradition and shapes their role in subsequent literature. Indeed, perhaps it would not be going too far to say that, as I have suggested in the case of other heroines, if anyone ventriloquizes anyone, it is Sappho who ventriloquizes Ovid.

But let us now bring some of these strands together. We have noted that the tension of author within author itself presents an interesting parallel to that of text (of the letter) within the text (of elegy).[61] In the midst of this combination of distinctly different generic ideas which inform the surface of the text, Ovid also performs the further internal synthesis of the opposing strands of intertextualized myth and personal fantasy. Disparate elements are so uniquely combined that the reader is rarely aware of the fleshing out of this dynamic. Could this be the new genre, a genre of conflict and synthesis, to which Ovid refers in his *Ars*?[62] Such synthesis is, after all, elsewhere characteristic of Ovid's poetry (*Met.* 1.1–4):

[59] This intimate relationship is noted by Altman 1964.117ff. as a general feature of the epistolary genre.

[60] No matter who the actual reader is, of course.

[61] Or vice versa; or, perhaps, even a triple layer of elegy (the aspect of the content containing the heroine's love/lament), within the letter (of the heroine), itself within the elegiac couplets (of Ovid).

[62] *Ars Amatoria* (3.345f.). Steinmetz 1987.143f., suggests that single aspects of various different literary forms, such as elegy, drama, and epistle combine in the *Heroides* to form a new genre, in a manner similar to Virgil's adaptation of previous poetic forms for the *Eclogues*. While Steinmetz is surely right that there is a conflation of elements that goes into the formulation of the *Heroides*, his tenfold schematization seems to me to be an oversimplification of a wider (inter-)textual dynamic, one that Barchiesi comes closer to defining. See Barchiesi 1984.66, for a more sensitive, if less fully documented, approach to this question.

> In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas
> corpora: di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illa)[63]
> adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi
> ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen.
>
> My mind carries me to speak of forms changed into
> new
> bodies; ye gods, breathe upon my undertakings (for you
> changed them, too) and spin forth a perpetual song
> from the first origin of the world to my own times.

One facet of his poetic program, Ovid suggests at the beginning of his *Metamorphoses*, is the integration *and* dichotomization of two major strands of the poetic tradition, the *carmen deductum* and the *carmen perpetuum*.[64] By making *perpetuum . . . carmen* the object of *deducite*, Ovid reveals that he intends to bring these two kinds of poetic expression together in the *Metamorphoses*. Again, in the comments on this prologue that he makes in his exile poetry, Ovid reveals that such combination of tension and harmony is one of his poetic goals when he appeals to Caesar on the basis of the prologue to the *Metamorphoses* (*Trist.* 2.555–60):

> dictaque sunt nobis, quamvis manus ultima coeptis
> defuit, in facies corpora versa novas.
> atque utinam revoces animum paulisper ab ira,
> et vacuo iubeas hinc tibi pauca legi,
> pauca, quibus prima surgens ab origine mundi
> in tua deduxi tempora, Caesar, opus!
>
> And we have words, too, though the final touch did lack
> for my undertakings, bodies turned into new
> appearances.
> And I pray that you would call back your spirit a bit
> from your wrath

[63] Anderson 1977 has *illas*. For the reading of *illa* for *illas* here see Kenney 1976.46–50 and Tarrant 1982.350–51. See also Knox 1986.9.

[64] Mack 1988.107–08.

and bid that these few things be read to you, at your
leisure,
few things, by which, rising up from the first origin of
the world,
I spun the work down to your times, Caesar!

While the times have changed—specifically from Ovid's (*ad mea . . . tempora, Met.* 1.4) to Caesar's (*in tua . . . tempora, Trist.* 2.560)—the poetic objective, it seems, has not. Indeed, the participle *surgens* (559) here, as Stephen Hinds has demonstrated elsewhere, suggests generic tension:[65] in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid, like a line of elegiac verse (cf. *Am.* 1.1.17), rises up in the epic tradition but winds up spinning out his work (*deduxi*) in a neoteric, elegiac manner. It is not surprising, then, to find him pursuing this same goal of generic synthesis at an earlier stage in his career, when he designs and executes this most interesting genre of amatory epistles, love letters set in elegiac couplets.

These three components, then,—intertextualized myth, psychological fantasy, and the conflation of generic variants—though different, are thematically inseparable in these poems and actually work together to create a uniquely Ovidian textual dynamic. The reader is drawn into the experience of the text by the very artificiality which would seemingly conflict with the spontaneity of fantasy. As we have seen, conflict and synthesis exist at several levels in the work: epistle and elegy, Romanized fantasy and ancient myth, reader and recipient, heroine and Ovid. The result is a kind of incongruous harmony, which should not work, but does and does so elegantly. Just as Keats' Grecian urn comes to life through his portrait of the vessel's stiffness, the fantasy of these lovers is unencumbered for the reader by the very mechanisms of genre and text that would appear to encumber it.[66]

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65 On *surgo*, cf. Hinds 1987.166, n. 39. For the association of *deduco* with Ovid's elegiac poetry, cf. *Amores* 2.18.18–19, where Ovid is called back from writing tragedy to elegy: *hinc quoque me dominae numen deduxit iniquae, / deque cothurnato vate triumphat Amor.* Cf. also *Amores* 2.1.21ff. and, as Hinds notes, Virgil *Ecl.* 10.75–76.

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