III ⊙ *SERVITIUM AMORIS: HEROIDES 3*

Briseis to Achilles

What you will now read comes to you from stolen Briseis:
Greek, but clumsily written in her barbarian hand.
Still, every blot you see on my characters is owed to a tear,
and tears are just as eloquent as words.
If a small complaint about you, my lord and master, is not wrong,
then I lodge, respecting my lord and master, a small complaint.

It was not your fault I was surrendered to the king's demand
so quickly—although this is also your fault.
No sooner had Eurybates and Talthybius come to summon me
than I was given to accompany Talthybius and Eurybates,
both of them silent, each with his eyes on the other,
each asking the other where now was your love for me.
I could have been given up with delay. That would have been charity for my pain.
But no! I left without giving you a farewell kiss.
I left in tears, infinite tears, and tore my hair, grieving.
I felt I was taken captive for a second time.

I have often wanted to escape my guard, and return to you,
but the enemy was stationed for a raid upon my fears.
I was afraid that if I did go out I'd be taken at night
and sent as a prize to some daughter-in-law of Priam.
But even if you surrendered me because you had to, I've been away so many nights,
and not recalled. You become yielding, pliant in your wrath.
Even Patroclus, when I was surrendered, spoke softly in my ear,
"Why cry? In no time at all you'll be back."

Yet not content with refusing to force my return, you resist it, Achilles!
Now try to keep your dignity, your lover's claim to fame.
The sons of Amyntor and Telamon approached you,
one close to you by blood, the other a comrade in arms,
and with them Laertes' son; in their company I must return.
Huge gifts enriched their suppliant courtesies:
twenty tawny cauldrons of wrought bronze,
and seven tripods their equal in weight and art.
In addition to these, twice five talents of gold,
and twice six stallions accustomed to win every time,

HEROIDES 3

QUAM legis, a rapta Briseide littera venit,
vix bene barbarica Graeca notata manu.
quascumque adspicies, lacrimae fecere lituras;
sed tamen et lacrimae pondera vocis habent.
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;
nam simul Eurybates me Talthybiusque vocarunt,
Eurybati data sum Talthybioque comes.
alter in alterius iactantes lumina vultum
quaerebant taciti, noster ubi esset amor.
differri potui; poenae mora grata fuisset.
ei mihi! discedens oscula nulla dedi;
at lacrimas sine fine dedi rupique capillos—
infelix iterum sum mihi visa capi!

Saepe ego decepto volui custode reverti,
sed, me qui timidam prenderet, hostis erat.
si progressa forem, caperer ne nocte timebam,
quamlibet ad Priami munus itura nurum.
sed data sim, quia danda fui—tot noctibus absum
nec repetor; cessas, iraque lenta tua est.
ipse Menoetiades tum, cum tradebar, in aurem
"quid fles? hic parvo tempore," dixit, "eris."

Nec repetisse parum; pugnas, ne reddar, Achille!
i nunc et cupidi nomen amantis habe!
venerunt ad te Telamone et Amyntore nati—
ille gradu propior sanguinis, ille comes—
laertaque satus, per quos comitata redirem.
auxerunt blandas grandia dona preces:
viginti fulvos operoso ex aere lebetas,
et tripodas septem pondere et arte pares;
addita sunt illis auri bis quinque talenta,
bis sex adsueti vincere semper equi,

not to mention that useless addition, girls of surpassing beauty
from Lesbos—their bodies taken when their home was ruined—
and with all this—but you don't need a wife—a wife,
a daughter of Agamemnon, one of the three.

If you had had to buy me back from Agamemnon for a price,
you would have had to pay him what you now refuse as his gift.
How have I deserved to be held so cheap, Achilles?
Where has your love sped so quickly and lightly away?
Or can it be that grim fate still presses upon wretched men,
and that once our misfortunes begin no gentler hour comes?

I saw the city walls of Lyrnessus ravaged by your army,
my father's land, and I its ornament.
I saw three men share death, as they shared their birth,
three whose mother was equally theirs, and mine.
I saw my husband lavish upon the bloody earth his magnificent ruin,
his chest heaving, livid with his life's blood.
For so many lost, you have been my single reparation.
You were master, you were my husband, you were my brother too.
You swore to me, swore by the spirit of your seaborn mother:
you said that capture had proved a useful advantage to me,
yes, so useful that now you may dismiss me, although I come to you dowered,
and may repulse both me and the riches that are offered to you.

There is even a rumor that tomorrow, at the first light of dawn,
you intend your white sails to invite the cloud-thronging wind from the South.
When, frightened and unhappy, I heard the whisperings of that monstrous plan,
ashen, I lost all consciousness and color.
You are leaving, but to whom, in your violence of rage, are you leaving me?
In whom shall I find tender comfort when I am left behind?
May the earth open, may it swallow me in its gaping mouth,
or may I be charred by the thunderbolt's red and consuming flame,
before the sea is whitened to foam, without me, by your oars,
and I must stand watching the wake of the ships that abandon me.

If what you want is to return home, to return to the hearth of your father,
I am no great freight for your ship to carry.
Let me follow my captor as a captive, not as a wife following her husband.
My hand knows the skilled labor of soft-spun wool.
Of the daughters of Achaea, the loveliest by far
will come to your chamber as your wife.

quodque supervacuum est, forma praestante puellae
Lesbides, eversa corpora capta domo,
cumque tot his—sed non opus est tibi coniuge—coniunx
ex Agamemnoniis una puella tribus.

Si tibi ab Atride pretio redimenda fuissem,
quae dare debueras, accipere illa negas!
qua merui culpa fieri tibi vilis, Achille?
quo levis a nobis tam cito fugit amor?
an miseros tristis fortuna tenaciter urget,
nec venit inceptis mollior hora malis?

Diruta Marte tuo Lyrnesia moenia vidi—
et fueram patriae pars ego magna meae;
vidi consortes pariter generisque necisque
tres cecidisse—tribus, quae mihi, mater erat;
vidi, quantus erat, fusum tellure cruenta
pectora iactantem sanguinolenta virum.
tot tamen amissis te conpensavimus unum;
tu dominus, tu vir, tu mihi frater eras.
tu mihi, iuratus per numina matris aquosae,
utile dicebas ipse fuisse capi—
scilicet ut, quamvis veniam dotata, repellas
et mecum fugias quae tibi dantur opes!

Quin etiam fama est, cum crastina fulserit Eos,
te dare nubiferis lintea velle Notis.
quod scelus ut pavidas miserae mihi contigit aures,
sanguinis atque animi pectus inane fuit.
ibis et—o miseram!—cui me, violente, relinquis?
quis mihi desertae mite levamen erit?
devorer ante, precor, subito telluris hiatu
aut rutilo missi fulminis igne cremer,
quam sine me Phthiis canescant aequora remis,
et videam puppes ire relicta tuas!

Si tibi iam reditusque placent patriique Penates,
non ego sum classi sarcina magna tuae.
victorem captiva sequar, non nupta maritum;
est mihi, quae lanas molliat, apta manus.
inter Achaeiadas longe pulcherrima matres
in thalamos coniunx ibit eatque tuos,

And may she come, worthy of your father Peleus, grandson of Jove and Aegina,
and acceptable to ancient Nereus as his grandson's bride.
I meanwhile, shall be your lowly slave-girl, spinning what I'm told to spin
and the swollen distaff will diminish at my hands' touch.
Only do not, I beg you, let your wife persecute me—
somehow I know that she will be unfair—
or let her tear my hair in front of you,
or casually tell your wife "I had her, too."
Or *let* that happen, as long as I'm not left behind!
At the very thought my body shakes with fear.

What are you waiting for? Agamemnon regrets his wrath,
and Greece lies grieving at your feet.
Conquer your passion and your anger, you who conquer all else!
Why does stubborn Hector still harass the Danaan lines?
Take up your arms, O child of Aeacus, but take me back first,
and by the favor of Mars rout them and destroy their ranks.
Your wrath began because of me: let it stop for me,
and let me be your sorrow's cause and limit too.

And do not think it base to yield to my entreaties:
at his wife's plea Meleager returned to war.
I've heard the story; you know it well. Having lost her brothers,
a mother cursed the hope, and the very life, of her son.
There was war. In fury he lay down his arms and withdrew from battle
and with unbending spirit denied any help to his country.
Only the wife could change her husband's mind. The happier she!
My words have no weight, and weightless fall.
Yet I am not haughty, nor have I carried myself like a wife
because summoned, as a slave, so often to my master's bed.
A captive girl, I remember, once called me mistress.
With that word, I replied, you add a burden to my slavery.

Yet, by the bones of my husband, ill-covered by a hasty grave,
bones which in my thoughts must forever be honored,
and by the brave souls of my three brothers, my own ghosts,
who, fallen for their country, lie fallen with it,
and by your head and my own, which once lay near to each other,
and by your sword, a weapon my kinsmen knew too well,
I swear that the Mycenean has never taken me to bed.
If I lie, *then* you may wish to leave me abandoned here.

digna nurus socero, Iovis Aeginaeque nepote,
cuique senex Nereus prosocer esse velit.
nos humiles famulaeque tuae data pensa trahemus,
et minuent plenos stamina nostra colos.
exagitet ne me tantum tua, deprecor, uxor—
quae mihi nescio quo non erit aequa modo—
neve meos coram scindi patiare capillos
et leviter dicas: "haec quoque nostra fuit."
vel patiare licet, dum ne contempta relinquar—
hic mihi vae! miserae concutit ossa metus.

Quid tamen expectas? Agamemnona paenitet irae,
et iacet ante tuos Graecia maesta pedes.
vince animos iramque tuam, qui cetera vincis!
quid lacerat Danaas inpiger Hector opes?
arma cape, Aeacide, sed me tamen ante recepta,
et preme turbatos Marte favente viros!
propter me mota est, propter me desinat ira,
simque ego tristitiae causa modusque tuae.

Nec tibi turpe puta precibus succumbere nostris;
coniugis Oenides versus in arma prece est.
res audita mihi, nota est tibi. fratribus orba
devovit nati spemque caputque parens.
bellum erat; ille ferox positis secessit ab armis
et patriae rigida mente negavit opem.
sola virum coniunx flexit. felicior illa!
at mea pro nullo pondere verba cadunt.
nec tamen indignor nec me pro coniuge gessi
saepius in domini serva vocata torum.
me quaedam, memini, dominam captiva vocabat.
"servitio," dixi, "nominis addis onus."

Per tamen ossa viri subito male tecta sepulcro,
semper iudiciis ossa verenda meis;
perque trium fortes animas, mea numina, fratrum,
qui bene pro patria cum patriaque iacent;
perque tuum nostrumque caput, quae iunximus una,
perque tuos enses, cognita tela meis—
nulla Mycenaeum sociasse cubilia mecum
iuro; fallentem deseruisse velis!

But if I should say to you now, "O most heroic of men, you too must swear
that you took no pleasure while I was gone"—if I said that, you would refuse.
Yes, the Greeks think you are cast down!!—meanwhile you toy with your music,
held by a delicate mistress in her warm embrace.
And if someone should ask *why* you refuse to fight?
Battle is fatiguing: you prefer the recreation of the zither, the night, and love.
War is dangerous, too. It is safer to lie in bed, clasping a girl,
strumming the Thracian lyre with your finger tips,
than to take up the shield and the sharp-edged sword
and endure the weight of the helmet that flattens your curls.
Once it was not security, but brilliant deeds that pleased you,
and the renown won in warfare was something you found sweet.
Or did you respect the savagery of battle only *before* you took me captive,
and does your glory lie as dead as my city lies?
God forbid! And I pray that the spear of Pelion, hurled
from your strong arm, may pierce the side of Hector.

Danaans, release me! I will go to my lord as your envoy
and bear him, with your commission, my mingled kisses.
I shall achieve more than Phoenix, more than eloquent Ulysses,
or Teucer's brother—trust me, I shall do more.
The touch of familiar arms around his neck: that is no small thing,
and the sight of my breasts will awaken memories.
Even if you are harsh, or wilder than your mother's turbulent sea,
even though I say nothing at all, my tears will break you.

Even now—so may Peleus, your father, fill the full span of his years,
so may your son Pyrrhus go into battle with his father's good fortune—
even now, brave Achilles, have compassion for Briseis in her pain;
do not, with a will of iron, sear my grief with slow delay.
Or, if your love for me has turned into indifference, then force death
upon one whom you force to live without you.
Continue, and you will compel me to die: my body and color have wasted away;
only my hope in you sustains what little life is left in me.
Take that hope away, and I shall go to join my brothers and my husband.
It will be no great boast that, at your command, a woman died.

Yet why should you command? Draw steel. Strike my body.
Stab my breast: it has blood enough to flow.
Let your blade seek me. Had the goddess allowed, it is the sword
that would have entered the heart of Atreus' son.

Si tibi nunc dicam: "fortissime, tu quoque iura
nulla tibi sine me gaudia facta!" neges.
at Danai maerere putant—tibi plectra moventur,
te tenet in tepido mollis amica sinu!
et quisquam quaerit, quare pugnare recuses?
pugna nocet, citharae noxque Venusque iuvant.
tutius est iacuisse toro, tenuisse puellam,
Threiciam digitis increpuisse lyram,
quam manibus clipeos et acutae cuspidis hastam,
et galeam pressa sustinuisse coma.
sed tibi pro tutis insignia facta placebant,
partaque bellando gloria dulcis erat.
an tantum dum me caperes, fera bella probabas,
cumque mea patria laus tua victa iacet?
di melius! validoque, precor, vibrata lacerto
transeat Hectoreum Pelias hasta latus!

Mittite me, Danai! dominum legata rogabo
multaque mandatis oscula mixta feram.
plus ego quam Phoenix, plus quam facundus Ulixes,
plus ego quam Teucri, credite, frater agam.
est aliquid, collum solitis tetigisse lacertis,
praesentisque oculos admonuisse sinu.
sis licet inmitis matrisque ferocior undis,
ut taceam, lacrimis conminuere meis.

Nunc quoque—sic omnes Peleus pater inpleat annos,
sic eat auspiciis Pyrrhus ad arma tuis!—
respice sollicitam Briseida, fortis Achille,
nec miseram lenta ferreus ure mora!
aut, si versus amor tuus est in taedia nostri,
quam sine te cogis vivere, coge mori!
utque facis, coges. abiit corpusque colorque;
sustinet hoc animae spes tamen una tui.
qua si destituor, repetam fratresque virumque—
nec tibi magnificum femina iussa mori.

Cur autem iubeas? stricto pete corpora ferro;
est mihi qui fosso pectore sanguis eat.
me petat ille tuus, qui, si dea passa fuisset,
ensis in Atridae pectus iturus erat!

But no! Save my life, yours, given as your gift to me.
What, as conquerer, you gave to an enemy, I ask of you now as your friend.
The walls of Neptune's Troy offer better victims for your ruin.
Look to the enemy for a source of slaughter.
Only, whether you even now ready your fleet to submit to the force of oars
or whether you are staying here, exert an owner's right: command me to come.

A, potius serves nostram, tua munera, vitam!
quod dederas hosti victor, amica rogo.
perdere quos melius possis, Neptunia praebent
Pergama; materiam caedis ab hoste pete.
me modo, sive paras inpellere remige classem,
sive manes, domini iure venire iube!

HORACE, in the fourth ode of the second book, encourages his friend Xanthias not to be ashamed of his love for an *ancilla*, a maidservant. After all, Horace argues lightly, *prius insolentem / serva Briseis niveo colore / movit Achillem* (In earlier days Briseis the slave, her skin like snow, aroused aloof Achilles, *Odes* 2.4.2–4).[1] It is one thing to call Briseis a barbarian princess in captivity; it is quite another to call her a slave. Ovid, following Horace's lead, imagines his Briseis too as a *serva*, a slave. But because his poem is a monologue, he has the opportunity, unusual in antiquity, to imagine a high-born slave's conception of her own servitude. Ovid could scarcely have failed to seize upon an occasion for so effective an interplay between pride and humility, an occasion for literary antithesis on a conceptual level especially congenial to his own talents. But in Ovid's evocation of Briseis, humility dominates. His Briseis is a slave who knows too well what she is.

Slavery was a significant fact of life in Augustan Rome. Slaves were as conspicuous then as they were later in Seneca's time. As Seneca writes in *De Clementia: Dicta est aliquando a senatu sententia, ut servos a liberis cultus distingueret; deinde apparuit, quantum periculum immineret, si servi nostri numerare nos coepissent* (A proposal was once made in the senate to distinguish slaves from free men by their dress; it then became apparent how great would be the impending danger if our slaves should begin to count our number, 1.24.1–4). The issue of slavery was equally a matter of concern, controversy, and nervousness in the politics of the early principate. It has been conjectured that as much as eighty-five percent of the household and industrial labor force in Rome was composed of slaves or ex-slaves. The Italian element was swamped. Slaves were being imported and emancipated in hordes. In the words of Syme, "Augustus stepped in to save the race, imposing severe restrictions upon the freedom of individual owners in liberating their slaves."[2] And another, more spectacular freedom was revoked: Augustus forbade the marriage of freedwomen and senators.

The Roman double-standard in the treatment of slaves must have been apparent to Ovid.[3] Some slaveowners, most notably the latifundist oligarchs, did not scruple to use and abuse their slaves according to the Aristotelian definition of the slave as a "living tool." Others liked or even loved their slaves, taught them or learned from them, freed them, even married them. What Ovid cleverly saw in his Briseis letter was, in part, and admittedly only in part, an occasion to report the events of the heroic age of Greece not only through a female but through a female and servile perspective. It was an occasion to explore the seeming paradox of servile love, and to render into literal terms—from the unorthodox vantage of a woman's perspective—one of the most dominant of all conventions of Roman elegiac poetry, the lover's *servitium amoris*.

In order to examine Ovid's intention in *Heroides* 3, the letter of Briseis to Achilles, it is necessary first to examine the degree to which he developed or altered Homer's Briseis. Critics generally assert, with some exaggeration, that Ovid gave a speechless character speech. Wilkinson argues that the "affecting pathos" of Briseis' letter, the pathos which distinguishes it from (in his view) Dido's frigid epistle to Aeneas, arises from Ovid's freedom to create a character from Homer's only shadowy outline, a freedom not available when "the heroine's [Dido's] feelings had already been imagined":

> It will be seen that there is hardly a hint in Homer's story that Ovid has not turned to account, and he has added some good touches of his own. This is one of the best pieces, almost free from his besetting faults. It is not too long, and achieves an affecting pathos. Perhaps it was just because Homer did not dwell on Briseis' feelings that Ovid, forced to rely on developing imaginatively such hints as he gave, produced something worth while.[4]

And to this Fränkel adds, "In the *Iliad* Briseis had nothing [*sic*] to say and was no more than an object of transactions between the great kings."[5]

While it is true that Ovid expands upon the word *aekousa* (unwilling),[6] which is the single telling modifier Homer uses to describe

[1] *The Odes and Epodes of Horace*, trans. Joseph Clancey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 79.

[2] Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 446.

[3] See the discussion by G. Bagnani in *Arbiter of Elegance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1954), pp. 19ff., on the *Lex Petronia de Servis*: "From the point of view of Roman Law slaves are merely a particular type of property, and it is a basic principle of law that an owner can do what he pleases with property to which he has a clear title. That this practice in absolute right was limited—and not only in the case of slaves—by custom, public opinion, self-interest, and other important but extra-legal considerations does not affect the strictly legal position in the slightest."

[4] L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 92.

[5] Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid, a Poet Between Two Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945), p. 8.

[6] *Iliad* 1.348.

Briseis' demeanor as she is first led away by Agamemnon's heralds, Briseis does speak once, and at length, in the nineteenth book of the *Iliad*. It is that extraordinary speech which reveals not only that Ovid developed Homer's character from "hints" in the text of the *Iliad* but that he tampered with her as well.

By the time of this speech in the *Iliad*, Patroclus has fallen in Achilles' armor, Achilles has been reconciled with Agamemnon, and Briseis, along with other women and gifts, has been returned by the Myrmidons to Achilles' tents near his ship. When Briseis finds Patroclus' lifeless body there, she laments for him:

Βρισηΐς δ' ἄρ' ἔπειτ', ἰκέλη χρυσέῃ Ἀφροδίτῃ,
ὡς ἴδε Πάτροκλον δεδαϊγμένον ὀξέϊ χαλκῷ,
ἀμφ' αὐτῷ χυμένη λίγ' ἐκώκυε, χερσὶ δ' ἄμυσσε
στήθεά τ' ἠδ' ἀπαλὴν δειρὴν ἰδὲ καλὰ πρόσωπα.
εἶπε δ' ἄρα κλαίουσα γυνὴ ἐϊκυῖα θεῇσι·
"Πάτροκλέ μοι δειλῇ πλεῖστον κεχαρισμένε θυμῷ,
ζωὸν μέν σε ἔλειπον ἐγὼ κλισίηθεν ἰοῦσα,
νῦν δέ σε τεθνηῶτα κιχάνομαι, ὄρχαμε λαῶν,
ἆψ ἀνιοῦσ'· ὥς μοι δέχεται κακὸν ἐκ κακοῦ αἰεί.
ἄνδρα μὲν ᾧ ἔδοσάν με πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
εἶδον πρὸ πτόλιος δεδαϊγμένον ὀξέϊ χαλκῷ,
τρεῖς τε κασιγνήτους, τούς μοι μία γείνατο μήτηρ,
κηδείους, οἳ πάντες ὀλέθριον ἦμαρ ἐπέσπον.
οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδέ μ' ἔασκες, ὅτ' ἄνδρ' ἐμὸν ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεὺς
ἔκτεινεν, πέρσεν δὲ πόλιν θείοιο Μύνητος,
κλαίειν, ἀλλά μ' ἔφασκες Ἀχιλλῆος θείοιο
κουριδίην ἄλοχον θήσειν, ἄξειν τ' ἐνὶ νηυσὶν
ἐς Φθίην, δαίσειν δὲ γάμον μετὰ Μυρμιδόνεσσι.
τῷ σ' ἄμοτον κλαίω τεθνηότα, μείλιχον αἰεί."
(*Il.* 19.282–300)

And now, in the likeness of golden Aphrodite, Briseis
when she saw Patroklos lying torn with sharp bronze, folding
him in her arms cried shrilly above him and with her hands tore
at her breasts and her soft throat and her beautiful forehead.
The woman like the immortals mourning for him spoke to him:
"Patroklos, far most pleasing to my heart in its sorrows,
I left you here alive when I went away from the shelter,
but now I come back, lord of the people, to find you have fallen.
So evil in my life takes over from evil forever.

The husband on whom my father and honored mother bestowed
me
I saw before my city lying torn with the sharp bronze,
and my three brothers, whom a single mother bore with me
and who were close to me, all went on one day to destruction.
And yet you would not let me, when swift Achilleus had cut
down
my husband, and sacked the city of godlike Mynes, you would
not
let me sorrow, but said you would make me godlike Achilleus'
wedded lawful wife, that you would take me back in the ships
to Phthia, and formalize my marriage among the Myrmidons.
Therefore I weep your death without ceasing. You were kind
always."[7]

At the end of Briseis' lament, Homer adds a penetrating and almost cynical qualification, one which seems designed to distinguish Briseis from her companions and thereby enhance and illumine the purity and depth of her grieving:

ὣς ἔφατο κλαίουσ', ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες,
Πάτροκλον πρόφασιν, σφῶν δ' αὐτῶν κήδε' ἑκάστη. (*Il.* 19.301–2)

So she spoke, lamenting, and the women sorrowed around her
grieving openly for Patroklos, but for her own sorrows each.

For this occasion Homer wraps Briseis, and only Briseis, in poetry. She is "in the likeness of golden Aphrodite" and "a woman like the immortals in mourning" as she grieves for Patroclus, "who was kind always." And what is the occasion? It is one of those rare moments of transcendence in the *Iliad* in which a person speaks from his heart, even past death, to the heart of another. Simone Weil describes it as one of those

few luminous moments, scattered here and there throughout the poem, those brief, celestial moments in which man possesses his soul. The soul that awakes then, to live for an instant only and be lost almost at once in force's vast kingdom, awakes pure and whole;

[7] All translations from the *Iliad* are taken from *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

> it contains no ambiguities, nothing complicated or turgid, it has no room for anything but courage and love.[8]

In describing those moments of inner deliberation, or of love, Weil adds, "But the purest triumph of love, the crowning grace of war, is the friendship that floods the hearts of mortal enemies."[9] It is friendship which floods Briseis' heart too—not, however, friendship for her captor Achilles but for Achilles' own best friend, who was "far most pleasing to my heart in its sorrows." Homer is very careful to distinguish this emotion from what Briseis' companions feel. What each of them feels, "grieving openly for Patroklos, but for her own sorrows each," has also been described at length by Miss Weil. I shall quote her passage in full. It is entirely inapplicable to Homer's Briseis, but for Ovid's Briseis I know of no more cogent if fortuitous analysis:

> And what does it take to make the slave weep? The misfortune of his master, his oppressor, despoiler, pillager, of the man who laid waste to his town and killed his dear ones under his very eyes. This man suffers or dies; then the slave's tears come. And really why not? This, for him, is the only occasion on which tears are permitted, care, indeed, required. A slave will always cry whenever he can do so with impunity—his situation keeps tears on tap for him: "So she spoke weeping, and the women groaned / using the pretext of Patroclus to bewail their own torments." Since the slave has no license to express anything except what is pleasing to his master, it follows that the only emotion that can touch or enliven him a little, that can reach him in the desolation of his life, is the emotion of love for his master. There is no place else to send the gift of love; all other outlets are barred, just as with the horse in harness, bit, shafts, reins, bar every way but one. And if, by some miracle, in the slave's breast a hope is born, the hope of becoming, someday, through somebody's influence, someone once again, how far won't these captives go to show love and thankfulness, even though these emotions are addressed to the very men who should, considering the very recent past, still reek with horror for them. To lose more than a slave does is impossible, for he loses his whole inner life.[10]

What Ovid has done with his Briseis epistle is first to freeze and

[8] Simone Weil, "The *Iliad* as a Poem of Force," in *Continental Literature*, ed. D. van Ghent and J. Brown (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968), p. 142.
[9] Weil, "Poem of Force," p. 143.
[10] Weil, "Poem of Force, p. 130.

then to parody the ambivalence of a slave's subservient love. What he has done with his Briseis is strip her of the poetry in which Homer clothed her and of the momentary autonomy Homer gave her. She becomes, unlike Homer's woman, indistinguishable from her attendants. That is to say, she becomes any captive woman, any *captiva*. She is not the Briseis of the *Iliad*. Yet Ovid's method of exploring and presenting her psychological servitude is a method of elaborate quotation and misquotation of the *Iliad*. Surprisingly, Ovid's method of allusion invokes precisely those moments in the *Iliad* when a character's subjection to his context is transcended or briefly revoked. He takes precisely those moments of speech in the *Iliad* most flooded with the light of human recognition, reconciliation, affection, and love, gives that speech to a slave, and turns that light out. But that is not all. He first embroiders the darkness with an elegant filigree of false pathos, learned wit, and contrivance. The result is a complicated and amusing poem, and a tone at once chill and fervid.

Briseis writes her letter to Achilles after she has learned of the failure of Agamemnon's deputation. Achilles is so obdurate in resentment of Agamemnon that he is now threatening to return immediately to Phthia. And Achilles is so far from struggling to regain Briseis that he is, she understands, even working against her return! Briseis' letter oscillates between the extremes of reproach and supplication—reproach insofar as Briseis addresses Achilles as her *vir* (her man, or lover), and supplication insofar as she addresses him as her *dominus* (literally, not metaphorically, her master). If vacillation is typical of Ovid's heroines, this sort of oscillation is not, for it is an alternation between opposites, expressive not of the usual Ovidian range or spectrum of feeling but of only two extremes. In short, Briseis' position—as slave and as lover—is an affective paradox.

The opening of the poem occasions close analysis. Few critics of the *Heroides* have failed to exercise their ingenuity in vilification of the first ten lines. Lachmann even condemned the whole poem as fraudulent because of the excessive epanalepsis. Palmer concedes that the lines are flawed but not inexplicably, since

> Ovid has not yet warmed to his work, and the blemishes of these opening lines appear to me to resemble the weak and uncertain notes of a minstrel which are often the prelude to a full and strong burst of music.[11]

[11] Palmer, *Heroides*, p. 18.

However tentative the poem's first lines might at first sight seem to be, we should nonetheless examine them carefully to determine whether even that tentative beginning might not be a clue to the initial tone of the poem, and to the Briseis who here begins to take on definition:

quascumque adspicies, lacrimae fecere lituras;
sed tamen et lacrimae pondera vocis habent.
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;
nam simul Eurybates me Talthybiusque vocarunt,
Eurybati data sum Talthybioque comes.[12] (3–10)

Still, every blot you see on my characters is owed to a tear,
and tears are just as eloquent as words.
If a small complaint about you, my lord and master, is not wrong,
then I lodge, respecting my lord and master, a small complaint.

It was not your fault I was surrendered to the king's demand
so quickly—although this is also your fault.
No sooner had Eurybates and Talthybius come to summon me
than I was given to accompany Talthybius and Eurybates.

What is the effect of such repetitions, especially repetitions heightened by an equally tentative anacoluthon? They establish, almost programmatically, I think, the polarities of feeling the poem will explore. Achilles is a *vir*, but a *dominus* too. It is not Achilles' fault that Briseis was taken; yet it is his fault, since the manner of her surrender was perfunctory beyond words. Briseis is writing a lament (*querela*), but she has doubts about how legitimate (*fas*) her complaint will be. Appropriately, and yet ironically too, Ovid begins his reassessment of the Briseis of Homer's *Iliad* with the same problem which dominated the opening of the *Iliad*: Can one call a *dominus* into question with impunity? These repetitions imitate the central coincidental fact of Briseis' position, both as a stranger to the language and a querulous slave: her strenuous hesitancy, her tentative urgency. Yet despite their thematic justification, these lines are also artificial and precious in the

[12] For the convenience of the reader, all citations from Ovid's *Heroides*, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Loeb Classical Library Edition, *Ovid I, Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914).

extreme. They intrude the *author* of the letters, possibly even more than the *authoress* of the letter, into the reader's consciousness. And that, I think, is what Ovid chiefly intends. The lines are witty insofar as Ovid writes them, and painfully irresolute insofar as Briseis does. Her almost stolid indecision is a function of Ovid's wit, her inexperience a function of his practiced intelligence. And thus it is throughout the poem.

Briseis' "weak and uncertain notes" are not really, after all, the preface to a "full and strong burst of music." Briseis is never shrill, and certainly never strong. She is far too frightened. Too diffident openly and directly to challenge Achilles' love for her, she reports that it was the heralds, not she herself, who were quietly shocked at Achilles' behavior: *alter in alterius iactantes lumina vultum / quaerebant taciti, noster ubi esset amor* (both of them silent, each with his eyes on the other, each asking the other where now was your love for me, 11–12). Homer's heralds were also silent, but not for the reason Ovid's Briseis imputes to them. They were speechless from fear:

τὼ δ' ἀέκοντε βάτην παρὰ θῖν' ἁλὸς ἀτρυγέτοιο,
Μυρμιδόνων δ' ἐπί τε κλισίας καὶ νῆας ἱκέσθην.
τὸν δ' εὗρον παρά τε κλισίῃ καὶ νηῒ μελαίνῃ
ἥμενον· οὐδ' ἄρα τώ γε ἰδὼν γήθησεν Ἀχιλλεύς.
τὼ μὲν ταρβήσαντε καὶ αἰδομένω βασιλῆα
στήτην, οὐδέ τί μιν προσεφώνεον οὐδ' ἐρέοντο. (*Il.* 1.327–32)

They went against their will beside the beach of the barren
salt sea, and came to the shelters and ships of the Myrmidons.
The man himself they found beside his shelter and his black ship
sitting. And Achilleus took no joy at all when he saw them.
These two terrified and in awe of the king stood waiting
quietly, and did not speak a word at all nor question him.

Thereafter, no doubt, they were speechless from relief. The poetic process Ovid initiates with this instance of Briseis' misapprehension (and Ovid's misrepresentation) is the daring adjustment and transposition of all heroic motives to the erotic frame of reference. This is the mode of Ovid's comic *protervitas* (intrepidity), and it has escaped few of the commentators on the *Heroides*. Michael von Albrecht's formulation of the workings of the mannerism is one of the clearest:

All that exists for her is the world of erotic love, but that makes her blind to Achilles' world, the world of war and of honor. She

does not understand his reaction—or, better, she understands it wrongly.[13]

But while it is a nice distinction to claim that Briseis does not fail to understand Achilles' reactions but understands them incorrectly, what is interesting about this poem, and what most distinguishes it from the other *Heroides*, is that even Briseis' erotic world is not intact. Her erotic appeal to Achilles and her erotic understanding, or misunderstanding, of his motivation are themselves complicated, inhibited, and deflected by her position as a slave. It is this double mutation which gives the poem its unique standing among the epistles. Briseis is wrong, yes, but she is not even free to be wrong in the right way.

From the very beginning of her epistle, as we have seen, Briseis labors at once to arouse and to appease Achilles; as a result, the tone of her appeal is self-effacing, tentative, and curiously servile. She wishes that her "second capture" had been delayed so that she might have given kisses (not received or shared them). She wept, she says, tears of bereavement. Yet we recall that in the *Iliad* it was not she but Achilles who wept *lacrimas sine fine* (endless tears)—and his were tears of outrage, frustration, and humiliation. Most telling of all is her explanation of why she did not escape to Achilles in the night:

Saepe ego decepto volui custode reverti,
sed, me qui timidam prenderet, hostis erat.
si progressa forem, caperer ne nocte timebam,
quamlibet ad Priami munus itura nurum. (17–20)

I have often wanted to escape my guard, and return to you,
but the enemy was stationed for a raid upon my fears.
I was afraid that if I did go out I'd be taken at night
and sent as a prize to some daughter-in-law of Priam.

Since it is really out of the question that Achilles might have expected Briseis to attempt escape, these lines claim our attention, not the least for their apparent superfluity. What Briseis is saying, in an outlandish way, is what she said before: she prefers her first servitude to her second. But what is most outlandish about this assertion is *hostis erat* (the enemy was there, 18). We are brought up short. Can she really mean that the Trojans are her enemies but the Greeks not? This, it

[13] Michael von Albrecht, *Die Parenthese in Ovids Metamorphosen und ihre dichterische Funktion* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1964), p. 42 (my translation).

would seem, is servility parading its own abasement. Ehwald circumvents the problem by conjecturing *redderet* for *prenderet*. Palmer, rightly sensitive to a threat to Briseis' charm, tries to explain the difficulty away while keeping the text intact; he would emphasize the spatial dimensions of *reverti*, asserting, almost too trenchantly, that "Briseis did not identify herself with the side of her captors so thoroughly that *hostis* cannot refer to them."[14]

Palmer's rather elaborate rationale is ingenious, yet unconvincing. The fact is that the second couplet reads like a natural expansion of the first, an explanation of *hostis erat*. There is no syntactical clue to reinforce the doubtful lexical suggestion that Briseis is describing two different alternatives. Moreover, even were Palmer correct, the reader would not know to take *reverti* in its strictly spatial sense until he encountered *progressa*. So the word *hostis* would have to be at least temporarily ambiguous. Yet such ambiguity, so disturbing to many readers, is resolved in the remainder of the poem, a poem in which Briseis' "identification with the side of her captors" becomes gradually more explicit, more abject, and more pitiful.

Briseis knows she had to be given up but wonders why Achilles has since made no move to recover her. Since she cannot quite bring herself to appeal openly to his love for her, she attempts to appeal to his pride and vanity: *cessas, iraque lenta tua est* (You become yielding, pliant in your wrath, 22). She thereby hits unwittingly (and Ovid wittily) upon the chasm between their worlds: because Achilles' anger was not slow, either to come or to go, Briseis' existence as a person has in fact become a matter of entire indifference to him. She identifies so sedulously with what she mistakes for his perspective that her unobtrusiveness obtrudes far more than she can know. Her account of Patroclus' gentle, strengthless consolation, "*Quid fles? hic parvo tempore" dixit "eris"* ("Why cry? In no time at all you'll be back," 24), words which she cites as a rebuke, serves to deepen the impression that she cannot speak to Achilles in the way that a woman addresses a lover. She obviously means to remind Achilles that someone whom he loves once had unhesitating certitude in his valor and, moreover, once found *her* lovable, human. Briseis uses Patroclus to embellish her own worth in Achilles' eyes and thus excite Achilles' shame. As a result, Patroclus' kindness, so generous and so lambent in Homer, when invoked in this context and for this motive, turns shabby. It is part of Briseis' dossier, proof of her existence, a kind of desperate letter of recommendation.

[14] Palmer, *Heroides*, pp. 18–19.

Because she is, to her own mind, a commodity, a *munus*, Briseis tries to establish further her own worth by enumerating the commodities offered Achilles by the deputation, reminding him that *auxerunt blandas grandia dona preces* (Huge gifts enriched their suppliant courtesies, 30). The lengthy bit of translation from the *Iliad* that follows enhances our impression of the inert materiality of Briseis' self-conception, an impression fostered throughout the poem by her concrete language, the absence of abstraction and argument, and the subsequent strong reliance upon narrative—all of which are stylistically in sharp contrast, for example, to the romantic, philosophic, and speculative mode of the immediately preceding epistle, *Heroides* 2, Phyllis' letter to Demophoon. Briseis now begins to warm to the paradox of her unfortunate fall. She lists the goods Achilles would have had to pay to buy her back, goods now offered him as a reward, in her mind, for accepting her back. In the most straightforward piece of comic parody in the poem, Ovid has Briseis several times lapse into thinking of Agamemnon's gifts as her own dowry (*quamvis veniam dotata*). Then, almost caught off guard, she mentions the gift of one of Agamemnon's daughters for Achilles' bride as one of the "items" of that dowry:

> cumque tot his—sed non opus est tibi coniuge—coniunx
> ex Agamemnoniis una puella tribus. (37–38)
>
> and with all this—but you don't need a wife—a wife,
> a daughter of Agamemnon, one of the three.

Coming sharply to her senses, she now addresses Achilles openly for what seems the first time in the poem:

> qua merui culpa fieri tibi vilis, Achille?
> quo levis a nobis tam cito fugit amor? (41–42)
>
> How have I deserved to be held so cheap, Achilles?
> Where has your love sped so quickly and lightly away?

This address, with its tone of heightened affect following so suddenly on Briseis' half-comic and half-witless self-deception, has merited some approbation among scholars. It is taken as the signal for a new and loftier level of expression. Palmer writes, "From vs. 45 the poem is a fine specimen of masculine and vigorous composition, with considerable pathos, and not devoid even of sublimity."[15] It is true that Ovid's models for these lines are not "devoid even of sublimity," but Ovid's treatment certainly is. Briseis' question is the preface to the most extensive, ambitious, yet oblique moment of literary wit in the entire poem:

> qua merui culpa fieri tibi vilis, Achille?
> quo levis a nobis tam cito fugit amor?
> an miseros tristis fortuna tenaciter urget,
> nec venit inceptis mollior hora malis?
>
> Diruta Marte tuo Lyrnesia moenia vidi—
> et fueram patriae pars ego magna meae;
> vidi consortes pariter generisque necisque
> tres cecidisse—tribus, quae mihi, mater erat;
> vidi, quantus erat, fusum tellure cruenta,
> pectora iactantem sanguinolenta virum.
> tot tamen amissis te compensavimus unum:
> tu dominus, tu vir, tu mihi frater eras.
> tu mihi, iuratus per numina matris aquosae,
> utile dicebas ipse fuisse capi. (41–54)
>
> How have I deserved to be held so cheap, Achilles?
> Where has your love sped so quickly and lightly away?
> Or can it be that grim fate still presses upon wretched men,
> and that once our misfortunes begin no gentler hour comes?
>
> I saw the city walls of Lyrnessus ravaged by your army,
> my father's land, and I its ornament.
> I saw three men share death, as they shared their birth,
> three whose mother was equally theirs, and mine.
> I saw my husband lavish upon the bloody earth his magnificent ruin,
> his chest heaving, livid with his life's blood.
> For so many lost, you have been my single reparation.
> You were master, you were my husband, you were my brother too.
> You swore to me, swore by the spirit of your seaborn mother:
> you said that capture had proved a useful advantage to me,

These lines may at first seem only a revision of Briseis' lament for

[15] Palmer, *Heroides*, p. 17.

Patroclus' death quoted earlier—a revision with, of course, certain glaring differences in emphasis and tone. Ovid's Briseis is one of Homer's anonymous slave-women: she laments for herself, not for anyone else. Her doublet, the rhetorical question *An miseros tristis fortuna tenaciter urget, / nec venit inceptis mollior hora malis?* (43–44) is an embellishment upon one of Homer's simplest and noblest lines (*Il.* 19.290). While Homer's description of Briseis' slaughtered family remains in outline the same, it is, in Ovid, interrupted by Briseis' proud reminder of her own lost worth and revoked identity: *et fueram patriae pars ego magna meae* (46). Furthermore, the husband of Ovid's Briseis is larger than his Homeric counterpart, and he takes a longer time in dying a more sanguinary death. But with *tot tamen amissis te compensavimus unum* (51) we are clearly in another world than Homer's Briseis inhabited: the Briseis of the *Iliad* was not recompensed. Much of the dignity of the Homeric lament is in Briseis' acceptance of the futility of Patroclus' promise to her. She does not reproach the dead man for his ineffectuality. She cared for him for what mattered more to her, his motive, his kindness. Ovid's Briseis, on the other hand, does reproach Achilles. He promised a fair exchange, swore that it had been worth her while to be taken: *utile fuisse capi* (54). And for a while it did seem that that exchange had been fair: *tu dominus, tu vir, tu mihi frater eras* (52).

These lines complete Ovid's simultaneous creation and defamation of Briseis. There can be no doubt of their source, although critics, while knowing that source only too well, have hesitated to find Ovid guilty of so great a sacrilege as such a transposition would, in their eyes, surely prove to be. They have therefore concurred with J. N. Anderson, who writes, "It is very doubtful, however, if Ovid goes back directly to Homer here, for this quotation does not belong to our story."[16] It is not doubtful that Ovid goes back directly to Homer here, but what is he after? Why should he care to call Briseis so deeply into question? Why place her in the distorted and foreshortened foreground against so luminous a backdrop, the delicate and tragic domesticity of one of the most famous moments in the literature of antiquity, *Iliad* 6.429–30, Andromache's final parting from Hector? Can Ovid have intended a comparison of the two scenes, one of which surely highlights the tarnished shabbiness and mimic triviality of his own creation?

There can be no doubt that the allusion to the entire scene in its

[16] J. N. Anderson, *On the Sources of Ovid's Heroides: I, III, VII, X, and XIII* (Berlin: Weidemann, 1896), p. 38. (Jacobson's recent discussion of the sources of each of Ovid's *Heroides* has rendered this work obsolete.)

context is intentional, for Andromache's tender lines in which she declares that Hector is father and mother to her, brother and husband to her, complete Andromache's description of how Achilles in one day slaughtered her father and brothers in the city of her homeland. What Ovid is after, and what he achieves by this allusion, is the grotesque, or the near grotesque, or the grotesque disturbingly touched by an almost unthinkable pathos. Andromache tells Hector that he is father, mother, and brother to her because Achilles has slain her family. All are dead; she has only her husband. But such a sentiment must be, and is, grimly slanted and disturbingly callous when addressed to the slayer of family and husband. Briseis is only capable of saying this because she has assimilated all the most fearful lineaments of the psychopathology of slavery:

> And if, by some miracle, in the slave's breast, a hope is born, the hope of becoming, someday, through somebody's influence, someone once again, how far won't these captives go to show love and thankfulness, even though these emotions are addressed to the very men who should, considering the very recent past, still reek with horror for them. To lose more than a slave does is impossible, for he loses his whole inner life.[17]

With a temerity calculated to astonish, Ovid sustains a similar mode of literary parody throughout this poem. Each of Briseis' attempts to enliven the pathos of her condition and to awaken the pity of Achilles diminishes her appeal, and each of her attempts becomes progressively less ambitious as she sacrifices more and more to her desire to be effective and yet unobtrusive. Again and again in her appeal, moments in the *Iliad* in which characters wake to a lucent consciousness or independence are blurred and sullied by Briseis' adoption of them. Ovid unflaggingly enlists those moments to enlarge upon Briseis' incomprehension, lovelessness, and servility. A few examples will follow.

Briseis' moment of strongest assertiveness and most bitter irony (55–56) is followed immediately by her deepest self-abasement. As though aware that her momentarily independent or mocking tone presupposes an utter violation of the real terms of their union, she suddenly turns to the theme of Achilles' bruited departure for home. She gives up all her fantasies of a legitimate marriage and imagines herself truly a thing: *si tibi iam reditusque placent patriique Penates, / non ego sum classi sarcina magna tuae. / victorem captiva sequar, non nupta ma-*

[17] Weil, "Poem of Force," p. 130.

ritum (If what you want is to return home, to return to the hearth of your father, I am no great freight for your ship to carry. Let me follow my captor as a captive, not as a wife following her husband, 67–69).

She imagines Achilles' marriage to an Achaean girl and begs that the new wife not be allowed to abuse her; but then she consents, histrionically, to endure even that (81).

The literary source for Briseis' imagined marriage of Achilles in Achaea is Achilles' own statement in Book Nine of the *Iliad*. Achilles contemptuously refuses Agamemnon's offer of one of his daughters in marriage and says that Peleus can arrange a marriage for him with any number of Achaean girls (*Il.* 9.391–400). Needless to say, Achilles does not include in his vision of wedded happiness the sort of viciousness and squabbling, more appropriate to Plautus than to Homer, that Briseis so realistically envisions: *neve meos coram scindi patiare capillos / et leviter dicas: "haec quoque nostra fuit"* (Do not let her tear my hair in front of you, or casually tell your wife "I had her, too," 79–80). But Briseis' description of Achilles' future marriage does not parody the *Iliad* merely by the addition of a comic or sordid dimension. When, in the *Iliad*, Achilles speaks of a possible marriage in Phthia, his statement is really incidental to a refusal of Agamemnon's terms. But central to that refusal is the reason that Achilles, with bitter clarity, gives for his sudden interest in marriage and home. What Briseis omits and distorts by omitting, and what Ovid parodies by her omission, is Achilles' understanding of the role of choice in his life. If he ever intended to go to Phthia again, it was scarcely for a wife before whom he might vaunt his amorous, not martial, prowess. It was for life:

οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ ψυχῆς ἀντάξιον οὐδ' ὅσα φασὶν
Ἴλιον ἐκτῆσθαι, εὖ ναιόμενον πτολίεθρον,
τὸ πρὶν ἐπ' εἰρήνης, πρὶν ἐλθεῖν υἷας Ἀχαιῶν,
οὐδ' ὅσα λάϊνος οὐδὸς ἀφήτορος ἐντὸς ἐέργει,
Φοίβου Ἀπόλλωνος, Πυθοῖ ἔνι πετρηέσσῃ.
ληϊστοὶ μὲν γάρ τε βόες καὶ ἴφια μῆλα,
κτητοὶ δὲ τρίποδές τε καὶ ἵππων ξανθὰ κάρηνα·
ἀνδρὸς δὲ ψυχὴ πάλιν ἐλθεῖν οὔτε λεϊστὴ
οὔθ' ἁλετή, ἐπεὶ ἄρ κεν ἀμείψεται ἕρκος ὀδόντων. (*Il.* 9.401–9)

For not worth the value of my life are all the possessions they fable
were won for Ilion, that strong-founded citadel, in the old days
when there was peace, before the coming of the sons of the Achaians;

not all that the stone doorsill of the Archer holds fast within it,
of Phoibos Apollo in Pytho of the rocks. Of possessions
cattle and fat sheep are to be had for the lifting,
and tripods can be won, and the tawny high heads of horses,
but a man's life cannot come back again, it cannot be lifted
nor captured again by force, once it has crossed the teeth's barrier.

Through Briseis' misapprehension and the poet's own misrepresentation of Achilles' pride, anger, and hesitation, and with the parodic sleight of hand worthy of a future master of metamorphosis, Ovid turns that hero into a braggadocio *miles gloriosus*. Homer's Achilles, confronted with his Ovidian counterpart, would have quite as much right as Bottom the Weaver to the cry "O, I am translated!"

Adjusting to her fear of Achilles' departure, Briseis again initiates an exhortation to battle. Rising to a new pitch of fervor, she declaims:

Quid tamen expectas? Agamemnona paenitet irae,
et iacet ante tuos Graecia maesta pedes.
vince animos iramque tuam, qui cetera vincis!
quid lacerat Danaas impiger Hector opes? (83–86)

What are you waiting for? Agamemnon regrets his wrath,
and Greece lies grieving at your feet.
Conquer your passion and your anger, you who conquer all else!
Why does stubborn Hector still harrass the Danaan lines?

But comic self-interest, in the form of a sudden thought of a new contingency (proved all too valid by the *Iliad*), hobbles her increasing urgency: *arma cape, Aeacide, sed me tamen ante recepta* (Take up your arms, O child of Aeacus, but take me back first, 87). Blind, as always, to Achilles' motivation, she would presume to end his elegiac sadness (*tristitia* is an unexampled permutation of the Homeric heroic depression) with an elegiac caress: *propter me mota est, propter me desinat ira, / simque ego tristitiae causa modusque tuae* (Your wrath began because of me: let it stop for me, and let me be your sorrow's cause and limit too, 89–90). In an attempt to dignify the doubtful decorum of female persuasion, Briseis adopts the Meleager exemplum used by Phoenix in Book Nine's embassy scene. In this passage, Ovid's literary parody is once again perpetuated at Briseis' expense—at the expense of her rhetorical advantage—and certainly not at the expense of the *Iliad*.

Ovid uses the Meleager example to deepen even further Briseis' ineffectuality: her use of this example is so fraught with futility as to be counterrhetorical. In the *Iliad* Phoenix ignores the many ways in which the details of his story are inapplicable to the current situation. Achilles is not refusing to defend his homeland and his children as Meleager was. It is not Achilles' own cause which he refuses to take seriously. The enemy is not besieging his own city's gates. Phoenix' true emphasis is that even when Meleager had at last fought and won, the promises of the elders were revoked. By his excessive delay, Meleager forfeited the gratitude and recompense otherwise due him. Phoenix' analogy, proffered with such deference and depth to his surrogate child, can be said to be most appropriate to the poetic substructure of Homer's epic. In refusing Phoenix, Achilles will ultimately be following the example of Meleager, who similarly first refused a "parent."

The precedent of a great warrior king persuaded by a woman, his wife, to rejoin a battle and save the citizenry of his city would have a more facile decorum, one would think, when employed by a woman than by a decrepit and aged male retainer. Ovid might have highlighted what has been called his "advantage" in this respect.[18] Characteristically, however, he does just the opposite. Briseis is like Meleager's wife Cleopatra, in being a woman who begs her man to rejoin battle. But she is unlike Cleopatra in two other important respects: she is the pretext upon which he abandoned the battle in the first place, and she is a slave, not a proper wife at all. It is, perversely, these failures of analogy to which Ovid pays the closest attention. Not only are these failures of analogy glaringly present in Briseis' epistle, but Briseis is herself aware of them and even comments on them, undermining, in the process, the persuasive force of her own example and slipping back once again from argument to entreaty.

Briseis invokes the Meleager example but interrupts herself midstream to remark at its indecorum: *sola virum coniunx flexit. felicior illa! / at mea pro nullo pondere verba cadunt* (Only the wife could change her husband's mind. The happier she! My words have no weight, and weightless fall, 97–98). Because she is a woman, she is certainly closer to Cleopatra than Phoenix is. But she is not close enough—she is not a wife. As though anticipating a possible reproach, she then defends the humility with which she at all times carried herself during the tenure of Achilles' favor. In fact, she says, when another of Achilles' servant-women forgetfully called her *domina*, that title

[18] Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled*, p. 92.

only made her feel more bitterly the pain of her own real servitude. Thus Briseis fails, because of her diffidence, to enhance what rhetorical "advantage" she might have exploited in the use of the Meleager precedent. Moreover, the time factor makes that example doubly unsuccessful, and comically so. Briseis introduces the whole exemplum by saying *res audita mihi, nota est tibi* (I've heard the story; you know it well, 93). The distinction between *audita* and *nota* is more trenchant than she intends, and the verbs are ironically reversed, because just the day before, Achilles had heard that very story from Phoenix. For Achilles, then, it is literally a *res audita* and a story all too recently made known. If it failed to rouse the hero then, how stale, flat, and profitless it surely will seem when told by Briseis now, only one day later. Thus Ovid parodies the rhetorical dissonance of Phoenix' appeal by divorcing that appeal from the tender parental ethos of its speaker. He renders the appeal comically otiose by toying with the time-scheme of his poem. And he subordinates an already doubly futile appeal to the ineffectuality derived from Briseis' servile but persistently inopportune declarations that, really, she has no true rights in the matter, no privileges to claim.

In the ninth book of the *Iliad*, by refusing Agamemnon's deputation, Achilles protests his indifference to Briseis' return. Indeed, he says, he had loved her as his own wedded wife, but now Agamemnon can, for all Achilles cares, do anything he likes with her. In the nineteenth book, Achilles, obsessed with the desire to avenge Patroclus, "unsays" his anger toward Agamemnon and once again "unsays" his love for Briseis:

> Ἀτρεΐδη, ἦ ἄρ τι τόδ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἄρειον
> ἔπλετο, σοὶ καὶ ἐμοί, ὅ τε νῶϊ περ ἀχνυμένω κῆρ
> θυμοβόρῳ ἔριδι μενεήναμεν εἵνεκα κούρης;
> τὴν ὄφελ' ἐν νήεσσι κατακτάμεν Ἄρτεμις ἰῷ,
> ἤματι τῷ ὅτ' ἐγὼν ἑλόμην Λυρνησσὸν ὀλέσσας·
> τῷ κ' οὐ τόσσοι Ἀχαιοὶ ὀδὰξ ἕλον ἄσπετον οὖδας
> δυσμενέων ὑπὸ χερσίν, ἐμεῦ ἀπομηνίσαντος. (*Il.* 19.56–62)
>
> Son of Atreus, was this after all the better way for
> both, for you and me, that we, for all our hearts' sorrow,
> quarrelled together for the sake of a girl in soul-perishing hatred?
> I wish Artemis had killed her beside the ships with an arrow
> on that day when I destroyed Lyrnessos and took her.
> For thus not all these too many Achaians would have bitten
> the dust, by enemy hands, when I was away in my anger.

Briseis' plea *arma cape, Aeacide, sed me tamen ante recepta* is only too appropriate to the context of the *Iliad*. Achilles is interested only in getting on with the battle and in avenging Patroclus' death, and he would prefer to dispense entirely with all ceremonial delay, including receiving Briseis and his other prizes. But Agamemnon, in an almost patronizing excess of civility, sends Achilles his gifts, restores Briseis, and swears an elaborate oath that he has not touched her:

ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς πρῶτα, θεῶν ὕπατος καὶ ἄριστος,
Γῆ τε καὶ Ἥλιος καὶ Ἐρινύες, αἵ θ' ὑπὸ γαῖαν
ἀνθρώπους τίνυνται, ὅτις κ' ἐπίορκον ὀμόσσῃ,
μὴ μὲν ἐγὼ κούρῃ Βρισηΐδι χεῖρ' ἐπένεικα,
οὔτ' εὐνῆς πρόφασιν κεχρημένος οὔτε τευ ἄλλου.
ἀλλ' ἔμεν' ἀπροτίμαστος ἐνὶ κλισίῃσιν ἐμῇσιν.
εἰ δέ τι τῶνδ' ἐπίορκον, ἐμοὶ θεοὶ ἄλγεα δοῖεν
πολλὰ μάλ', ὅσσα διδοῦσιν ὅτίς σφ' ἀλίτηται ὀμόσσας.

(*Il.* 19.258–65)

Let Zeus first be my witness, highest of the gods and greatest,
and Earth, and Helios the Sun, and Furies, who underground
avenge dead men, when any man has sworn to a falsehood,
that I have never laid a hand on the girl Briseis
on pretext to go to bed with her, or for any other
reason, but she remained, not singled out, in my shelter.
If any of this is falsely sworn, may the gods give me many griefs,
all that they inflict on those who swear falsely before them.

In her epistle to Achilles, Briseis too swears an oath that Agamemnon has not slept with her. *Obsecratio, obtestatio*, and the *figura ius iurandi* so highly prized by Roman declaimers are favorite devices as well of Ovid's heroines—and that is natural enough, since so often theirs is the posture of adjuration. There are nine lengthy oaths in the *Heroides*, but of them all, Briseis' is by far the strangest:

Per tamen ossa viri subito male tecta sepulchro,
  semper iudiciis ossa verenda meis;
perque trium fortes animas, mea numina, fratrum,
  qui bene pro patria cum patriaque iacent;
perque tuum nostrumque caput, quae iunximus una,
  perque tuos enses, cognita tela meis—
nulla Mycenaeum sociasse cubilia mecum
  iuro; fallentem deseruisse velis! (103–10)

Yet, by the bones of my husband, ill-covered by a hasty grave,
  bones which in my thoughts must forever be honored,
and by the brave souls of my three brothers, my own ghosts,
  who, fallen for their country, lie fallen with it,
and by your head and my own, which once lay near to each
    other,
  and by your sword, a weapon my kinsmen knew too well,
I swear that the Mycenaean has never taken me to bed.
  If I lie, *then* you may wish to leave me abandoned here.

Briseis' oath, sworn upon the bones of her husband, upon the souls of her brothers, and upon Achilles' sword, which tasted the flesh of those brothers and that husband, would have been entirely appropriate in a vow professing hatred and threatening retribution. It is entirely inappropriate as an avowal of sexual fidelity, especially since within the body of her oath Briseis names the man for whom she has been kept inviolate as the same man who is most properly her mortal enemy.

Once again Ovid's literary parody includes a tacit interpretive comment upon the *Iliad*. Agamemnon's elaborate courtesy, especially when he swears a great oath that he has not touched a woman whom Achilles has only recently rejected as a matter of concern to him, is as irrelevant a concession to Achilles' present all-consuming desire as Briseis' oath is. Both oaths efficiently discredit their speakers, Briseis' even more than Agamemnon's, since in the very avowal of her loyalty to her *dominus*, she calls her deeper human loyalty unwittingly, and pathetically, into question.

Having insisted upon her own fidelity to Achilles—a fidelity which is shown to be scarcely a product of her own volition—Briseis reproves Achilles for his disloyalty and infidelity to her, reproaching him as well for what she pretends to interpret as his cowardice. But her insults seem halfhearted, and she soon apostrophizes the Greek leaders, begging to be sent in person to move Achilles by her presence, her embrace, her tears. She then begins anew her supplication of Achilles by mentioning his love for his father and his child:

Nunc quoque—sic omnes Peleus pater inpleat annos,
  sic eat auspiciis Pyrrhus ad arma tuis!—
respice sollicitam Briseida, fortis Achille,
  nec miseram lenta ferreus ure mora. (135–38)

Even now—so may Peleus, your father, fill the full span of his
    years,

so may your son Pyrrhus go into battle with his father's good
fortune—
even now, brave Achilles, have compassion for Briseis in her
pain;
do not, with a will of iron, sear my grief with slow delay.

Here, at the end of Briseis' letter, Ovid glancingly alludes to the end of Homer's *Iliad*, to that lucid moment when Achilles does yield, moved in part by Priam's likeness to his own father Peleus. Ironically, the one appeal most likely to affect her lover is the one most casually invoked by Briseis, yet one haunted by the fact (unknown to her) that Priam, no less than she, will kiss the hands of the man responsible for the death of his most dearly loved creature, his son Hector.

Similarly ironic, and ominous, is the fact that the appeal to parental love is followed by a reference to Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, who is never mentioned in Homer by that name but who is familiar to all readers of the *Aeneid* as the brutal, sacrilegious murderer of King Priam of Troy. Briseis' final plea is unwittingly ironic in yet another way. It calls to mind the preternatural depth of Achilles' love not for Briseis but for Patroclus, of whose death Achilles will say:

νῦν δὲ σὺ μὲν κεῖσαι δεδαϊγμένος, αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ
ἄκμηνον πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος, ἔνδον ἐόντων,
σῇ ποθῇ· οὐ μὲν γάρ τι κακώτερον ἄλλο πάθοιμι,
οὐδ' εἴ κεν τοῦ πατρὸς ἀποφθιμένοιο πυθοίμην,
ὅς που νῦν Φθίηφι τέρεν κατὰ δάκρυον εἴβει
χήτεϊ τοιοῦδ' υἷος· ὁ δ' ἀλλοδαπῷ ἐνὶ δήμῳ
εἵνεκα ὀιγεδανῆς Ἑλένης Τρωσὶν πολεμίζω·
ἠὲ τὸν ὃς Σκύρῳ μοι ἔνι τρέφεται φίλος υἱός,
εἴ που ἔτι ζώει γε Νεοπτόλεμος θεοειδής. (*Il.* 19.319–27)

But now you lie here torn before me, and my heart goes starved
for meat and drink, though they are here beside me, by reason
of longing for you. There is nothing worse than this I could
suffer,
not even if I were to hear of the death of my father
who now, I think, in Phthia somewhere lets fall a soft tear
for bereavement of such a son, for me, who now in a strange
land
make war upon the Trojans for the sake of accursed Helen;
or the death of my dear son, who is raised for my sake in Skyros
now, if godlike Neoptolemos is still one of the living.

Briseis does not understand that she is, to Achilles, an object inestimably cheaper than his own tragically jeopardized self-worth, and an object cheaper still when weighed in the balance against Achilles' love for Patroclus. Thus she cannot move him by assuring him of what he already most assuredly presumes upon: her docility, her dependence, her value as a commodity. Only an appeal to what is common in their experience might avail, if anything might. By every assertion of her own servility, Briseis thus estranges herself from Achilles the more deeply.

This epistle is a curiously compelling, curiously unpalatable poem. Briseis is unlike Ovid's other heroines. She has not the charm of Dido, the seductiveness of Phaedra, the intensity of Medea, the dangerousness of Hypsipyle, the ardor of Phyllis, the morbidity of Laodamia, the silliness of Hero, the vanity of Helen, the innuendo of Oenone, the candor of Sappho. Her circumstances, too, diminish the pathos of her appeal: no one is going to kill Briseis, and unlike so many other heroines of Ovid's collection, she will not be a suicide. Yet her interior condition is, in a way, worse than what the other women of the *Heroides* exhibit and endure—worse because her extinction as a woman is already an accomplished fact, and it is from the centrality of that extinction that she speaks to Achilles. Her letter is charged with an almost isometric inertia. She asks for life but has already died a death of sorts: *abiit corpusque colorque* (my body and color have wasted away, 141). The image of the woman perished for love takes on a new dimension in Briseis' epistle; it no longer seems the conventional hyperbole. It is because she is at once so colorlessly material and so tentative, even cringing, that Briseis' letter is unpalatable, especially since a plea such as hers must, almost by definition, be assertive. It makes certain claims, presumes upon certain rights, requires that certain demands be met. Yet a slave (similarly, almost by definition) is permitted no such claims, rights, and demands. Briseis *is* a *serva*; Achilles *is* her *dominus*. Her life is objectively, not rhetorically, his for the giving or the taking: *A, potius serves nostram, tua munera, vitam* (But no! Save my life, yours, given as your gift to me, 149).

If Briseis is truly *conscious* of anything, she is conscious of her position. Throughout her letter she simultaneously affirms her own presence and insists upon her own invisibility. She is, she declares, nothing if not accommodating—and that is what makes her cringing and servile. The Briseis who emerges from this epistle is thus uniquely Ovid's Briseis. She is the creature both of her *situation* and of the poet's designing emphasis upon that situation, his exploration of its incompatibility with the very erotic-elegiac framework which includes

it.[19] Moreover, Ovid does not simply recognize the material and psychological implications of Briseis' servitude: he maximizes and enhances them. By transposing Briseis from an epic world to an elegiac context fraught with erotic expectations, and to a rhetorical context that by definition elicits self-dramatization, the poet makes her materiality the more glaring. She becomes a talking *geras*, a speaking prize of war to whose dark and uncomprehending, terrified garrulity Ovid subjects the most luminous and lovely moments in Homer's *Iliad*.

The Briseis epistle is an appropriate poem with which to begin an enquiry into Ovid's use of wit and parody. For all her servility, Briseis never forfeits a kind of minimal pathos which invites our compassion, even as the poet's wit at her expense invites our detached understanding of a self struggling, unsuccessfully, against its own annihilation. Insofar as Ovid recreates Briseis from hints in the *Iliad*, and against a selectively heightened epic backdrop, Briseis the slave exhibits the poet's literary freedom, his sedulous independence vis-à-vis the tradition he inherits. Part of that independence is the freedom to be unkind to his characters in the name of a larger, more obscure sympathy. Ovid is irreverent. He asserts his right always to be unimpressed, and *Heroides* 3 is one expression of that disengaged irreverence, an irreverence which, by this poem's counter-rhetoric, becomes an attack upon the arrogance of literature, its pretension to tell the whole story.

No one, I think, after reading this epistle will read the *Iliad* again in quite the same way, with quite the same trust in the comprehensive illusion of a world it creates. That world does not include the Briseis who here, in Ovid's poem, so pathetically, so cruelly desires the servitude she has suffered. If I have seemed to discuss too seriously the nature of Ovid's literary parody and creative deformation of his Homeric model, it is not simply because it is difficult to emulate the delicate balance of Ovid's bookish tightrope, its delicate equilibrium

[19] On this subject, Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, p. 41, remarks: "It is, however, true that, in spite of Ovid's frequent attempts to weave the erotic elements into the texture of the epic, he is not always successful, and that at times even his successes must be deemed artificial. In addition, that sense of remove, of distance, which so often informs Ovid's poetry, lurks here sometimes as well, and this we can only regret. Ovid and his audience were undoubtedly delighted and amused to hear the words of the great Homeric heroes in the mouth of a mere girl, in an elegiac format and a partially amatory context, and, to top it all, with a very different sense and put to quite distinct purposes, but this delight and amusement is one thing the poem could do well without, especially since it invests the character of Briseis with an element of unconscious self-parody. Unfortunately, even when Ovid fully sympathizes, he is incapable of fully empathizing, though this is perhaps more a function of his art than of his character." It will be apparent even from this brief citation that my analysis of *Heroides* 3, as well as of Ovid's purpose in general in the *Heroides*, is fundamentally at odds with that of Mr. Jacobson.

between Briseis' pathos and her almost intolerable, excruciating humility. It is because despite Ovid's moments of travesty, Briseis is a creature whose suffering and whose deformation are so coherently, convincingly realized in her letter that when we do smile at her, that smile becomes, inevitably, a wince, a reflex at once of sympathy and of recoil.

OVID'S TOYSHOP OF THE HEART:

Epistulae Heroidum

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