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From the Heroides: Re-Centering Myth through Epistolary Form

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Ovid's *Heroides* are elegiac poems in the form of letters from mythical heroines to their heroes. Each of the heroines is physically separated from her lover for various reasons. By putting the thoughts of the heroine into letter form, Ovid utilizes a different narrative method to retell famous myths and stories. More importantly, Ovid gives a chance for these heroines to speak. The letters give the women the platform to prove that "theirs is the voice that most needs to be heard."¹ Most heroines in earlier stories are passive characters and do not get a chance to make their voice heard. In the use of the epistolary format, Ovid picks a powerful moment from each myth and this timing is what helps to give the epistle power.² The epistolary format and themes that Ovid uses ultimately give the heroines he writes about agency and power they never had in previous stories.

Catherine Bolton, Joseph Farrell and Linda Kauffman all have written extensively on the epistolary form of the *Heroides* and the authority it granted the heroines.³ While these authors have established the utility of the epistles that the heroines write, I will expand on their analyses by reading these poems in the context of epistolary theory. The epistolary format of the poems allows for these heroines to reestablish themselves as important characters in the myths by giving them voice and depth. Even further, heroines become the center of the myth because of the one-sided nature of reading a single epistle. This creates a new version where men are now the passive characters and the women the active.

Three epistolary themes have import for my reading of the *Heroides*. First is the separation and distance between the heroines and their heroes. All the heroines in the *Heroides* face some spatial distance from their lover and epistles become an effective method of bridging this distance. For some of these heroines, letters are the only way that they can state "their wish to narrow or abolish the gap."⁴ Secondly, the letters act as face to face conversation. The epistolary format allows the heroines to "stand in for living speech, and for the living presence of the speakers."⁵ The use of letters also grants some heroines a new voice that they never had, nor had control over. Third is the way in which letters act as a one-sided conversation. The one-sided nature of an epistle, as described by Trapp, is "fragments of a conversation between the

¹ Laura Fulkerson, "The *Heroides*: Female Elegy?" in *A Companion to Ovid*, ed. Peter E. Knox (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 86.

² Duncan F. Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's *Heroides*," *The Classical Quarterly* 34 (1984): 413, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/638299>. Kennedy focuses his paper on the time and the motivation for using an epistle.

³ Catherine M. Bolton, "Gendered Spaces in Ovid's *Heroides*," *The Classical World* 102 (2009): 273-290, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40599850>; Joseph Farrell, "Reading and Writing the *Heroides*," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998): 307-338, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/311346>; Linda S. Kauffman, "Ovid's *Heroides*: 'Genesis' and Genre," in *Discourses of Desire: Gender and Epistolary Forms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 30-61. Bolton writes mostly about the way space and sexuality interact, but addresses the importance of the epistles and the way that the heroines use them to their advantage. Kauffman and Farrell recognize the platform from which women could be vocal and speak to their lovers.

⁴ Michael Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters: An Anthology with Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 39.

⁵ Trapp, 39.

correspondents.”⁶ The uninterrupted nature of the letters allows for a different narrative, one that is female centered and without an omniscient third person narrator. The different narrative is a direct result of these heroines getting a chance to speak their mind without being overruled by a dominant male figure.

SEPARATION AND DISTANCE

Correspondence through epistles was a way for Romans to overcome physical separation and distance to maintain relationships with loved ones. The first poem in the *Heroides* is a letter from Penelope to her absent husband Ulysses. Penelope’s chaste love (*castus amor*) for her husband Ulysses is her most well-known character trait.⁷ In *Heroides I*, Penelope uses epistles to pinpoint the location of her husband:

Quisquis ad haec vertit peregrinam litora puppim,
Ille mihi de te multa rogatus abit.
Quamque tibi reddat, si te modo viderit usquam,
Traditur huic digitis charta notata meis.⁸

Whoever turns their wandering ship to these shores
That man leaves having been asked much about you by me.
And the letter he will deliver to you if he will have seen you anywhere
Having been signed by MY fingers, is handed over to this one.

Megan Drinkwater understands this passage to show Penelope’s activity in writing epistles to her absent husband because epistles have become “her singular means of self-expression.”⁹ Epistles have become the form of communication primarily because of her spatial restrictions. Fighting off influence from her father and the various suitors who ask her to leave the widowed bed (*viduo discedere lecto*),¹⁰ she cannot take the time to wander the various *poleis* to find her husband.¹¹

Penelope’s loyalty is tied to the space that she occupies, as Catherine Bolton states.¹² Thus, the epistles she writes are the best mode of communication. Penelope takes an active role in controlling the restrictions on her. She does not fully step outside of her space, but she has

⁶ Trapp, 39.

⁷ *Heroides I*. Line 23, from Grant Showerman, *Heroides & Amores* (London: Heinemann, 1914). All Latin passages and phrases will be taken from this text. English translations of Latin text are my own, with help from the Showerman text.

⁸ *Heroides I*, 59-62. This passage is the most quoted passage that I came across while researching the epistolary features of the *Heroides*.

⁹ Megan O. Drinkwater, “Which Letter? Text and Subtext in Ovid’s *Heroides*,” *American Journal of Philology* 128 (2007): 371, accessed April 1, 2015. DOI:10.1353/ajp.2007.0034.

¹⁰ *Heroides I*, 79.

¹¹ The various suitors are convinced that Ulysses has died and that she should remarry to establish a new king in Ithaca. In the meanwhile, the suitors have gone through much of the food and wine stores.

¹² Bolton, “Gendered Spaces in Ovid’s *Heroides*,” 274.

expanded it. Her epistles to Ulysses have traveled far, especially if she truly has given *charta notata* to all foreigners. So while she herself has not been able to go abroad, the epistles become “the living presence of the speaker...representing its writer to its recipient;” in these epistles she can contact Ulysses.¹³ Based on the reading of this epistle, as a reader, we can assume that she has asked him to return home so that she may embrace him again. It is a simple request and one that truly connects to the goal of ancient letters: to eliminate distance and to reconnect in person.

Based on Trapp’s analysis of epistolary theory, Penelope displays in her writing that she is taking an active role in “sustaining friendships.”¹⁴ Her letters aim to replicate a conversation with Ulysses, in an attempt to persuade him to come back to Ithaca. She gives Ulysses updates on what she has been doing, including sewing a funeral shroud so that she is able to *fallere noctem* without him.¹⁵ She was forced to take up a tedious activity just to make her nights bearable. Even though Penelope concedes that Ulysses *esse peregrino captus amore potes*, she continues to write and to remind him that she awaits at home.¹⁶ These attempts to call back on their relationship establishes Penelope’s desire for friendship and conversation.

Dido also seems to seek the same thing from Aeneas as he sails away from Carthage. Dido is restricted by her duty to new Carthage (*nova Karthago*).¹⁷ Not only is she the queen but she is also physically blocked by men. Her duty to *Karthago* means protecting the city because:

Quid dubitas vinctam Gaetulo tradere Iarbae?
Praebuerim sceleri bracchia nostra tuo.
Est etiam frater, cuius manus impia poscit
Respergi nostro sparsa cruore viri.¹⁸

Why do you hesitate to hand me over, having been bound to Iarbas of the Gaetuli?
I would have offered my arms for your crime.
There is even my brother, whose wicked hand, having been sprinkled
By my husband’s blood, seeks to be dirtied with my blood.

She faces threats from a rival ruler as well as her brother who murdered her husband. She cannot escape because this city she has constructed has become her safe place. Yet, she reaches out to Aeneas as he prepares to leave for the promised lands in Italy. In this epistle Dido begins to establish their relationship as a married couple and that there is a chance that Aeneas will violate the marriage vows again (*quamquam iterum fallas, altera danda fides*).¹⁹ Dido attacks his faithlessness and the fact that he has constantly betrayed her.²⁰ Dido can speak with impunity,

¹³ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 39.

¹⁴ Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters*, 40.

¹⁵ *Heroides* I, 9: “to cheat the night.”

¹⁶ *Heroides* I, 76: “you are able to be captured by a foreign love.”

¹⁷ *Heroides* VII, 11.

¹⁸ *Heroides* VII, 125-128.

¹⁹ *Heroides* VII, 18: “although you may cheat again, another faith is to be given.”

²⁰ Bolton, “Gendered Spaces,” 278.

because she has not done anything to violate the marriage or their love. In fact, she has opened her home to him and given him what he wants: a homeland. Not only that, it is an established kingdom that she is willing to surrender to him.²¹ This place that Dido has claimed as her own safe space can be Aeneas' as well. She reaches out to him in this letter in an attempt to eliminate their distance. As Dido calls him back to Carthage, she is also seeking out a lifetime companion. The letter Dido has written gives her the ability to overstep her boundaries and reach out to Aeneas directly in an attempt to reconnect with her lover. The letter becomes the most effective mode of communication because it can travel far distances.

Ariadne also is the victim of a failed relationship, but is the most tragic and the one who uses an epistle in the greatest attempt to reach out to her lover. Her epistle starts with an awful realization that in the morning:

Incertum vigilans ac somno languida movi
 Thesea prensura semisupina manus:
 Nullus erat. Referoque manus iterumque retempto
 Perque torum moveo bracchia: nullus erat.²²

Waking uncertain and languid in sleep, I moved
 About to hold the hand of Theseus, half lying down:
 There was no one. I draw back my hands and try again
 I move my arms through the bed: there was no one!

Abandoned on a desert island, Ariadne was literally trapped and left to die. Even if she had a way off the island, she could not return to her homeland (*accessus terra paterna negat*) because of her betrayal.²³ Her role in helping Theseus prevented any return home. What was once “used as a vehicle of escape, now becomes a barrier to escape.”²⁴ For Ariadne, the only way of contacting Theseus lies in an epistle. The epistle gives her at least a chance, no matter how small, to convince Theseus to return for her. While some scholars contend that this poem is the most ridiculous application of the epistolary form, I find this use to be one of the more effective poems.²⁵ This epistle shows how desperate she is. Even though it has almost no chance of reaching Theseus, she wants to communicate by any means possible. This is a pure example of a heroine using an epistle to connect to her lover and to approximate contact and conversation. She even recounts the help she gave to Theseus including killing her brother (*fratrem*

²¹ Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 89.

²² *Heroides* X, 9-12.

²³ *Heroides* X, 64: “my father’s homeland denies approach.”

²⁴ Bolton, “Gendered Spaces,” 285.

²⁵ Florence Verducci, *Toyshop of the Heart* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 253. Verducci’s quote is “The fiction of the epistolary form is nowhere else in Ovid’s *Heroides* so transparently absurd as in this letter...” Verducci’s stance is not one that many scholars echo and the various poems do exhibit typical conventions of epistles.

mactasses).²⁶ By helping Theseus, she chose a stranger over family. Cornered and trapped on an island, Ariadne faces death. Under these circumstances, Ariadne's crazed writing becomes understandable. This is her only hope of interaction and the epistle is her platform for convincing Theseus that she ought to be saved by him.

Ovid used the epistolary format to show the heroines attempting to overcome their boundaries. Though their attempts may have been futile, the epistles seek to bring their lovers back to them, into their own space so that they could be reunited. By bringing their lover back into their respective spaces, the heroines aimed to eliminate the far distance between themselves and their lover and recreate the purest form of interaction for Romans: face to face contact.

CLAIMING AGENCY

Penelope attempts to reclaim her significance in Ulysses' life in her letter. Because neither she, Telemachus nor Laertes have the strength to drive out the suitors from the palace (*nec sunt vires inimicos pellere tectis*),²⁷ Penelope almost faces no choice but to marry one of them. Penelope makes a direct appeal to his heart, informing Ulysses that she might not be his wife any longer. In fact, this should encourage him to "return as quickly as possible...to keep her."²⁸ By telling Ulysses this, she also lets Ulysses know that she is a human who cannot withstand pressures for too long. It is another method of informing him of the struggles she has faced in his absence. Penelope's letter acts as a conversation to convince him to return home to her. She informs him of all the things she has done since he has been gone. Her letter tries to directly converse with Ulysses to appeal to his emotion and heart. This letter gives Penelope a chance to directly address Ulysses and maintain some sort of relationship.

Phaedra uses her epistle to voice her incestuous desire and to talk to Hippolytus. Since previously in her conversations with her love interest and stepson Hippolytus she was rendered speechless:

Ter tecum conata loqui ter inutilis haesit
Lingua, ter in primo destitit ore sonus.²⁹

Three times having tried to speak with you, three times my tongue stopped
Useless, three times the sound stopped in the first mouth.

In speaking to her desired lover, Phaedra could not even get the words off her tongue. Though Phaedra has been unable to previously talk with Hippolytus, it is in her epistle that she now has the ability. The epistle has her words on it and contains what she did not have the capacity for previously. The epistle has given her a chance to say the things that she never could. The act of writing "gives her a freedom that speech denies her both because of her so-called modesty and

²⁶ *Heroides* X, 78: "you killed my brother."

²⁷ *Heroides* I, 109: "I do not have the strength to force out the enemies from the house."

²⁸ Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 258.

²⁹ *Heroides* IV, 7-8.

because of the beloved's absence."³⁰ Phaedra's epistle "is more rational...more direct, less complex..." showing how the letter makes her a more effective speaker.³¹ Though she could not get the words out previously, she has a new facility with language. By using the letter format, Phaedra is directly addressing her desired lover. In asking Hippolytus, *quid epistula nocebit*, Phaedra challenges his power.³² By directly addressing him and questioning what harm reading an epistle would do, Phaedra lets him know that she is talking directly to him. Phaedra forms her letter to gain answers from Hippolytus and express her love.

Oenone also makes her presence known to Paris and uses the epistolary format to protest his new love interest as well as reminding readers of her divine status. Oenone was Paris' wife, but was abandoned when he returned to Troy with Helen. Much like Phaedra, she questions Paris' ability to act freely, asking *Perlegis? An coniunx prohibet nova?* She then orders him at the end of the first line to *Perlege*.³³ She makes it seem as if Helen's presence would be a challenge to Paris' actions. Similar to Phaedra, Oenone is giving her epistle, and her voice, authority over Paris, because she is dictating to him what he should do.³⁴ Oenone takes time in her epistle to remind Paris that as a nymph, she accommodated him and married a slave (*servo nubere nymphae tuli*).³⁵ Here, Oenone resets the power structure and shows that she sacrificed status to marry Paris. She effectively places herself back as a respectable figure by claiming her divine status. She brings her divine ability into the epistle as well, when she curses Paris and Troy asking that:

Xanthe, retro propera versaeque recurrere lymphae!
Sustinet Oenonen deservisse Paris.³⁶

Xanthus, rush back and springs, having been returned, run back!
Paris tolerates that Oenone has been deserted.

Oenone takes a vengeful stance and makes her will known, asking the river that supports and flows through Troy be cut off. This vexation is the result of Paris writing on a tree about their relationship and asking the Xanthus to return to its source *cum Paris Oenone poterit spirare relictas* as a result of his transgression.³⁷ Oenone takes center stage in the epistle, asserting her voice to Paris and reminding him of his place in the social hierarchy and placing herself as an authoritative figure. Oenone's epistle reasserts her traditional position and elevates herself over Paris.

³⁰ Linda Kauffman, "Ovid's *Heroides*," 36.

³¹ Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 151.

³² *Heroides* IV, 3: "what will a letter harm?"

³³ *Heroides* V, 1: "are you reading? Or does your new wife prevent it? Read!"

³⁴ At the same time, it also seems to give Helen some authority, as she is written to have some control over Paris.

³⁵ *Heroides* V, 12: "I, a nymph, agreed to marry a slave."

³⁶ *Heroides* V, 31-32.

³⁷ Farrell, "Reading and Writing the *Heroides*," 328. "When Paris will be able to breathe having left Oenone."

Ovid tries to give the heroines in the *Heroides* agency and authority that they had lost in their original myths. The epistolary format gives them a voice, like it did Phaedra, but also challenges the true power of the heroes, the way Penelope and Oenone did. By writing, these characters assume some risk to reach out to their lover. However, the act of writing is defiance and establishes how powerful they really are. Whether the women are divine or mortal, the *Heroides* gives them the format to announce their true feelings and presence.

ONE-SIDED CONVERSATION

The *Heroides* interact deeply with the earlier telling of the myth, working with the original source material to create a basis for the character, but also create a vastly different character to expand the myth. The *Heroides* act as more than fragments of a conversation though, as stated earlier. They take the form of monologues, with the heroine getting to speak her grievances or wishes to her hero without interruption.

The most dramatically different heroine is Briseis, who speaks a paltry fourteen lines in the *Iliad*.³⁸ Jacobson remarks that Ovid was really creating a new character because even in tragedy she hardly shows up. Her epistle creates a different view of Achilles. It makes the relationship between the two nuanced and more difficult than it may have originally been considered. Her words in the *Heroides* show both bitterness and dependence. Briseis starts her letter and tells Achilles:

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.³⁹

The letter which you read, comes from stolen Briseis
 Scarcely well written in Greek from her barbaric hand.
 Whatever smears you see, tears have made;
 But nevertheless even tears have the weight of speech.

Here the letter contains the physical representations of Briseis (her tears) and alert the reader to the relationship that she has with Achilles. But Briseis also recognizes that their relationship is not rooted in love, but in Achilles' role as a protector. In an epistle, Briseis has our attention as a reader and gives her view of the event without interruption. Briseis blames Achilles for the trauma that she has experienced and in her letter "suggests his great obligation to her."⁴⁰ Now this obligation is one that Briseis is willing to acknowledge as less than marriage because her fear is that Achilles only holds her *ne contempta reliquar*, a trophy of the war.⁴¹ She is not

³⁸ Kauffman, "Ovid's *Heroides*: 'Genesis' and Genre," 39.

³⁹ *Heroides* III, 1-4.

⁴⁰ Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, 30.

⁴¹ *Heroides* III, 81: "so that I will be left behind, hated."

asking Achilles to take her back as a wife, but just to be with him, in any capacity. It is also her dependency that destroys her mental state. Because, as she states in her salutation to Achilles, she is a *barbarica*, she does not have the same perception of Greek society. Without that knowledge, she would not understand “that...she was...the symbol of his honour...”⁴² Through the epistolary format, Briseis establishes their relationship and the importance of Achilles. Without Achilles’ voice, Briseis’ letter adds to the story of the *Iliad*. An obligation to Briseis should compel Achilles to fight, in order to make up for the pain and sorrow that she has endured.

Dido’s epistle to Aeneas creates a new character and a new version of the *Aeneid* which contrasts strongly with Vergil’s version. By reading Dido’s account of her relationship with Aeneas, Dido becomes a sympathetic character. Ovid does so in a very organized and structured manner, finding problems with Aeneas’ justification for leaving her. The biggest difference between Ovid and Vergil’s depiction is the mode in which the two are communicating: Ovid through letter, Vergil through speech. Ovid takes full advantage of the format in organizing Dido’s speech. Ovid’s Dido writes that it is the gods who wrong Aeneas consistently and reminds him of such by saying:

Nec mihi mens dubia est, quin te tua numina damnent:
Per mare, per terras, septima iactat hiems.
Fluctibus eiectum tuta statione recepi
Vixque bene audito nomine regna dedi.⁴³

My mind is not doubtful, that your gods damn you:
Through the sea, through the land, the seventh winter throws you.
I received [you] safe in a safe place, having been thrown by the waves
And scarcely hearing your name well, I gave you my power.

Dido takes into account Aeneas’ long suffering and the troubles he has undergone, while also reminding him of her decision to give him power to rule over her people. By cutting Aeneas’ voice out of the story, making the conversation truly one sided, Ovid emphasizes how much Dido accommodated Aeneas.

Not only did Dido give Aeneas a land to rule and a place to start over, but she promises that Carthage is the right place for him and his son Iulus because *nequid desit praebebitus hostem*, giving Iulus a chance at glory.⁴⁴ Dido is not only looking out for Aeneas himself, but also his children that are to follow. She continues to cite weather and supplies, and even prays that Aeneas live.⁴⁵ Ovid’s Dido is not vengeful and emotional, she is measured and, to an extent,

⁴² L.P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 90.

⁴³ *Heroides* VII, 87-90.

⁴⁴ *Heroides* VII, 155: “We will give an enemy and he will not lack them.”

⁴⁵ *Heroides* VII, 63.

reserved.⁴⁶ She uses her epistle to organize her thoughts and in that manner she constructs an argument that is “persuasive...reasonable, both in their content and in the manner of presentation.”⁴⁷ Dido’s letter in the *Heroides* eliminates Aeneas’ voice and makes her a much more rational character. Ovid’s Dido is not responding to Aeneas’ departure or any other events, but is crafting an argument to persuade him to join her in ruling Carthage. Instead of a character destined for death, Ovid’s Dido is a woman trying to woo a lover.⁴⁸ With only Dido’s voice, we get a different story from that of Vergil and the one-sidedness makes her a different character.

Ovid’s Ariadne also creates a new view point of the myth and one that remakes Theseus. Ovid’s Ariadne, according to Florence Verducci, is a parodic figure, who experiences “trivialization through excessive amplification.”⁴⁹ For Verducci, the beating (*plangore*)⁵⁰ and the torn hair (*rupta coma*)⁵¹ draw away from Ariadne’s plight. The excessive display of emotion, though, elicits a response for the reader and draws their attention to the fact that “her [Ariadne’s] concern is for life, not love...”⁵² Ariadne’s epistle makes the reader aware of just how heartless Theseus is. Ariadne defied family to save her lover and reminds Theseus that:

cum tibi, ne victor tecto morerere recurvo,
 quae regerent passus, pro duce fila dedi.⁵³

With you, so that you, a victor, might not die under the curved roof,
 I gave to you the threads in place of a leader, which guided your steps.

It was by Ariadne’s hand that Theseus made it out of the labyrinth alive. But that fact does not matter for he has abandoned her. Ariadne even expresses regret over helping Theseus kill her brother, the Minotaur, because as monstrous as her brother may have been, Theseus was worse. For his iron heart (*praecordia ferrea*)⁵⁴ was stronger than the Minotaur’s horns. Ariadne refers to Theseus’ heart as cold and unforgiving, because he has left her on a “physical prison...landlocked.”⁵⁵ In her epistle, Ariadne recounts her tale and her misery to Theseus, giving the reader an unfiltered version of the story. Her position on the island also leaves her with little incentive to lie, as lies would do her no good. It is also worth remembering that Ariadne’s letter has little prospects of reaching her recipient. This prospect is reflected in her

⁴⁶ Jacobson, 84. Jacobson does not necessarily call her reserved, but calls to attention that she recognizes how resigning herself to death would have little sway over Aeneas.

⁴⁷ Jacobson, 89.

⁴⁸ Kauffman, “Ovid’s *Heroides*: ‘Genesis’ and Genre,” 48.

⁴⁹ Verducci, *Toyshop of the Heart*, 250.

⁵⁰ *Heroides* X, 37.

⁵¹ *Heroides* X, 16.

⁵² Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, 226.

⁵³ *Heroides* X, 71-72.

⁵⁴ *Heroides* X, 107.

⁵⁵ Bolton, “Gendered Spaces,” 284.

epistle, as she does not once directly ask Theseus for an explanation of why he abandoned her.⁵⁶ Perhaps we should read Ariadne the way Jacobson does. He feels that Ariadne was not interested in love, but was more focused on her life because “abandoned, alone, doomed, it makes no difference why Theseus left.”⁵⁷ This makes Ariadne’s epistle a plea for life and to take her off of the island that is trapping her. The epistle begs for the return of an escape from death, for the person with whom she desired to run away with.⁵⁸ For Ariadne, Theseus’ return would mean life and survival.

CONCLUSION

Ovid’s use of epistolary format gives the *Heroides* great depth and character. The letters have added meaning when read with epistolary theory. Ovid’s epistles complicate the myths that these heroines come from, giving a new interpretation of the famous stories. One result of this new interpretation is the increased agency created. The epistles create new characters who challenge their status as secondary characters. Ovid’s interpretation of Dido in the *Heroides* is remarkably different from the Dido in Vergil’s *Aeneid*. His writing also increases the actual power the female has, like Oenone, to the point that the females are more powerful than the males.

Ovid’s writing also seems to take a feminist stance in patriarchal Rome. Now it is the women who are the focus of the myths, not the male characters. The males are shown for their transgressions and are being reprimanded for them. All the men are being criminalized for their infidelity and for taking advantage of the women. By also centering these heroines as the main characters, Ovid is perhaps giving a voice to all Roman women at the time. The *Heroides* then might no longer just be fictional works of the heroines, but the reality for Roman women.

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⁵⁶ She directs questions to the environment surrounding her, but never directly to Theseus. But even then, the *concavea saxa* (hollow rocks, line 22) return her calls, giving the environment around her a lifelike feel.

⁵⁷ Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides*, 227.

⁵⁸ Phillip Hardie, “The *Heroides*,” in *Ovid’s Poetics of Illusion*, 107 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Hardie writes that line in reference to Penelope’s epistle, but it is applicable to the other heroines in the story as well. For as he states later on the same page, “the request not to send a letter in return is not only programmatic...but is also a signal to Ovid’s readers that these are autonomous texts...”

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