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Ovid's Insight into the Minds of Abandoned Women

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Ovid's Insight into the Minds of Abandoned Women

Honors Bachelor of Arts Thesis

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Précis

Mythical heroines, such as Penelope of the *Odyssey*, often took minor roles in literature, ones in which their characters' complexities were not addressed. Ovid revived the heroines of tradition and gave them voices which expressed realistic feelings and thoughts in his *Heroides*. In these fictional letters to absent lovers, Ovid creates realistic characters, each of whom reacts to her abandonment with an insightful feminine voice. By examining the heroines' voices and the ways in which the *Heroides* differs from the literary tradition, and by considering the effects of the epistolary genre on the characters' voices, I argue that Ovid managed to create realistic, feminine personas to be the authors of his letters.

Introduction

Heroines such as Penelope of the *Odyssey* and Dido of the *Aeneid* often took minor roles in ancient literature, ones in which their characters' emotions, fears, and thoughts were not addressed. Ovid revived the heroines of tradition and gave them voices which expressed realistic feelings and thoughts in his *Heroides*, a set of letters written by popular women of mythology to their husbands and lovers. In his *Heroides*, by examining well-known myths from an alternative viewpoint, Ovid creates honest, real characters who react to their abandonment with an insightful feminine voice. By using a realistic feminine voice, the credibility of which is strengthened by the format of the letter and Ovid's experience as a poet and outsider, Ovid became an innovator in the genre of love elegy.

Latin elegy was already a popular genre for writers before Ovid's time, but Ovid brought an originality and life to the genre by introducing a truly feminine voice to his heroines. Latin elegy itself introduced a new role for its female characters. Whereas a majority of women in established ancient genres were passive, submissive, and loyal characters, in Latin elegy women were often placed in an exalted, masterful role, one which was often given to men.¹ This appreciation of women as active characters in their own right was somewhat counter-cultural for Augustan Rome, which generally appreciated women as domestic, obedient, and chaste daughters, wives, and mothers.² This new attitude towards women in Roman poetry opened the door for Ovid not only to portray well-known mythological women in a new light, but also to give these women voices of their own by making them the authors of the letters.

The *Heroides* are even more significant as letters written by women because they are written by familiar women of popular myths. Penelope, Dido, Ariadne, Briseis, Medea, and

¹ Hallett 1973:103.

² Hallett 1973:103,104.

more, all have a chance in the *Heroides* to tell their side of the story, to give an account of what they were feeling during the events with which Ovid's audience was already well-acquainted. Ovid retells several famous myths, such as the Trojan War, Aeneas' journey to Italy, and Theseus' departure from Naxos. Earlier literature, including the epics the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, focuses on the men of the stories and only briefly glances over the women.³ When women are included in these stories, they are understood through the eyes of the heroes or the narrators and only described in a basic way. Ovid lets the women speak and think, and he gives all of his heroines plausible, feminine voices, which add an interiority to each of these characters. This insight into the mythical women's thoughts and reactions allows the readers of the *Heroides* finally to know the women of the myths and to understand their feelings, thoughts, and motives.

The question of how a male author affects the readers' interpretations and understandings of the women's voices of the *Heroides* has been answered in different ways. Some believe that the women's voices of the letters are shallow and unrealistic, while others believe that Ovid, even though he is a man, creates accurate, meaningful depictions of abandoned women.⁴ Through a thorough examination of a few of the most popular letters of the *Heroides*, including analyses of the heroines' voices and the ways in which they differ from the literary tradition, I argue not only that Ovid managed to create true, feminine personas to author the letters, but that he also was an innovator of Latin love elegy because of his use of a feminine voice which had the ability to speak freely through the letter.

³ Mack 1988:19.

⁴ Lindheim 2003:8.

The Feminine Voice

The term “feminine voice” is not static, consistent, or definite; it changes with the times, with the culture, with the situation. Gender identity in literature is a heavily debated topic, but even the most basic characteristics of the voices in the *Heroides* will lead readers to identify the voices of the characters, such as Penelope, Dido, Ariadne, as truly feminine. The societies which first heard the stories of these women are of a time long gone, and even the women of Ovid’s own time lived in a much different society than today’s. A feminine voice of the heroic age, being formed not only by the nature of woman but by her surroundings and the society to which she has conformed, will be slightly different than a feminine voice defined in more modern times. The combination of their complex emotions, their concern for children and family, and their frustrated passivity, is what identifies the voices in the *Heroides* as feminine. The Penelope, Dido, and Ariadne most popularly known from two epics and an epyllion share some of these characteristics, such as care for family and a passive role in the story, but what sets Ovid’s characters apart from the women of epic is their wide range of emotions, particularly their anger, and their ability to accuse their lovers.

The women of the *Heroides* are torn by the complex emotions within them, all vying for an outlet. Some of the most common emotions displayed by the abandoned heroines are anger, loneliness, frustration, fear, and love. Ovid writes all of these into the women’s letters where appropriate, as seen by the quick changes from one emotion to another within the short letters. Edward Bradley describes the letters of the *Heroides* as, “the turbulent flow of emotions running through the mind of the heroine.”⁵ Because of this focus on emotion, some scholars attribute a psychological insight, or a “psycho-dramatic” quality, to the *Heroides*.⁶ The constant onslaught

⁵ Bradley 1969:159.

⁶ Baca 1969:5, Fränkel 1956:36-37.

of emotions, which the abandoned women endure and which are expressed in these letters, makes the emotions more of a reality than the physical situations they endure, whether they are in a house full of suitors or on a deserted island. Bradley writes that, “In the Ovidian world the most dynamic realities of human experience are, paradoxically, emotional, internal, and impalpable, while ordinary external realities seem to be reduced in comparison to immaterial illusions.”⁷ The abandoned women let their emotions take the front seat in their letters, in order to further convince their lovers either how much they love them, miss them, or hate them.

Women of epic are more stuck in the values and conceptions of society than Ovid’s women, because heroic women, like their respective men, are meant to be perfect examples of how to act rightly and respectably in society. Penelope, a well-known example of this, sets an example of a woman’s fidelity and steadfastness in the *Odyssey*, and her character represents “the general conception of female behaviour held by Homer’s audience,” and specifically, in Penelope’s case, the female behavior of the wife of a hero.⁸ Women who did not conform to the standards of society, then, served as examples of how not to act, such as Clytemnestra, to whom Penelope is compared in the *Odyssey*. Ovid’s women, while still living within the heroic, mythological society, are freer to express themselves. They express a wider range of emotions than the epic women, whose anger or doubt in their husbands’ and lovers’ heroic causes would be unappealing. Felson and Slatkin note, “[W]omen’s anger is so foreign to Iliadic representation that it almost never appears, as if it were, or should be, unimaginable.”⁹ Women in epic must live

⁷ Bradley 1969:161.

⁸ Beyé 1974:87.

⁹ Felson and Slatkin 2004:97. Once this has been said, however, it is important to note an exception to Felson and Slatkin’s idea. In book three of the *Iliad*, Helen is angry at Aphrodite and Paris and rebukes them (Hom. *Il.* 3.395-447). These are her harsh words to the goddess: ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ περὶ κείνον οἴζυε καὶ ἐφύλασσε,/εἰς ὃ κέ σ’ ἢ ἄλοχον ποιήσεται ἢ ὃ γε δούλην (Hom. *Il.* 3.408-409). “But stay with him forever, and suffer for him, and look after him/until he makes you his wedded wife, or makes you his slave girl.” Then moments later, to her husband: ὄσσε πάλιν κλίνασα, πόσιν δ’ ἠνίπαπε μύθῳ:/ἦλυθες ἐκ πολέμου: ὡς ὄφελος αὐτόθ’ ὀλέσθαι/ἀνδρὶ δαμεις κρατερῷ, ὃς ἐμὸς πρότερος πόσις ἦεν (Hom. *Il.* 3.427-429). “Turning her eyes away, and spoke to her lord in derision:/“So you

up to the ideals of the society, ideals of faithfulness, loyalty, and virtue, and under the constraints of both the epic poets and society, they do not always have the capability of expressing their emotions openly, especially the negative ones. One exception to this is their ritual of lamenting the dead.

Women in ancient epic could express their grief through public laments containing elements of praise and reproach. In Homer's *Iliad*, Andromache laments Hector's death and bewails the fact that he died away from her and left her and their son Astyanax to the Greeks (Hom. *Il.* 24.725-745). The reproach in the laments was not meant to shame the dead, but to grab the spirit's attention so that they would fulfill the lamenter's requests.¹⁰ The reproach was always coupled with praise for the dead. This is not always the case in Ovid's *Heroides*.¹¹ Laments would not work in the heroines' situations, on the one hand, because most of their lovers are not dead; in some cases, such as Dido's, the heroines are the ones nearest death. Ovid uses the format of the letter instead of the lament in order that the heroines may freely and privately accuse and question their lovers. The letter allows the heroines to express their feelings to their lovers intimately and honestly, without a public audience, who, in the heroic society as depicted in epic literature, might side with the men, as they do in other literary accounts. Ovid's heroines, in their anger and loneliness, accuse and scold their lovers, almost unwilling to consider the tasks the heroes have undertaken and instead dwelling on everything the hero has forsaken: safety,

came back from fighting. Oh, how I wish you had died there/ beaten down by the stronger man, who was once my husband'" (translation by Richmond Lattimore). Helen is angry at her situation, especially at how Aphrodite deceives her and how Paris is a source of shame for her on the battlefield. Although readers may empathize with Helen's situation, they recognize that she is the source of trouble for the Greeks and Trojans and brand her as a selfish, fickle woman. Readers agree with the Trojan leaders when they wish that she would go back to Greece (Hom. *Il.* 3.153-160). Helen may display anger, but because of her responsibility for the Trojan War, her anger is not that of a virtuous, well-spoken heroine, but of a reckless adulteress. Like Dido in the *Aeneid*, Helen and her anger serve a purpose to the epic values of the *Iliad*, and even though readers may pity her, they still see her from an epic standpoint. Ovid takes these women out of the context of these epic values and redeems them. I will discuss *Heroides* 7, the letter from Dido to Aeneas, later in this paper. The double letters between Helen and Paris, *Heroides* 16 and 17, I do not discuss here, mostly because of the question of authenticity surrounding letters 16 through 21.

¹⁰ Alexiou 2002:182.

¹¹ Alexiou 2002:184.

love, family, and home.

Some of the most important roles for women in ancient society were wife and mother, and these roles are revealed in the heroines' letters. Through their arguments and their emotions, they show concern for family and attempt to convince their husbands and lovers to care about family in the same way. Penelope attempts to persuade Odysseus to come home quickly so that he can protect, guide, and teach Telemachus (*Ov. Her.* 1.99-109). Even Dido, who has no children of her own, expresses concern for Aeneas' young son Ascanius, and she tries to tempt Aeneas to stay in Carthage with just the possibility of her bearing his son (*Ov. Her.* 7.75-77,133-138). Ariadne, abandoned completely by Theseus, does not seek a family with him, but instead wishes that she had not betrayed her family for his sake (*Ov. Her.* 10.99-104). Whereas the heroes are concentrated on glory, fate, and war, the women they leave behind are often focused on the safety and love of the home.

In an epic setting, one of the major differences between men and women is how they deal with their emotions and problems. While men were able to channel any emotions into their warfare or travels, women were often confined to the home. Although men and women might share some of the same feelings, the grief of a man in ancient literature was different from a woman's because his was followed by action.¹² This activity versus passivity is not necessarily a natural distinction between men and women, but during the lives of Penelope, Dido, Ariadne, and the other heroines of epic, it was certainly a distinction constructed by society. Ovid places his letter-writing heroines in the same basic stories and settings as epic, and so while the women are realistic and not paragons of virtue, they still endure the same societal constraints. A man in the time of the heroes was driven to action by his need for validation, status, and honor among his peers, but a woman did not always feel the same way, especially when the man's actions led

¹² Felson and Slatkin 2004:97.

him or their family to danger.¹³ In the *Heroides*, the women, unable to follow their lovers, react by stripping away the status, honor, and glory from the heroes, because they care more about love, safety, and family. When the man leaves her, the heroine turns him into a faithless lover, an impious man, or even a criminal. Spentzou declares, “In this sense, the heroines’ struggle for control over their own destinies is really these feminine literary figures’ effort to (re)write their stories, against the will of the classical authorities.”¹⁴ In Ovid’s *Heroides*, the women try to overcome their passive roles by writing the letters, by doing something. Stowers’ understanding of letters adds to this interpretation: “It is more helpful to think of letters in terms of the actions that people performed by means of them.”¹⁵ These letters may not have affected their lovers’ decisions, but they should have affected the readers’ opinions of them in some way.

The feminine voice found in Ovid’s *Heroides* is not a radical, society-changing voice, but it is a voice of a woman who has suffered abandonment and must deal with her emotions in any way she can. These characters experience a wide range of emotions, including anger, which sets them apart from their more unrealistic, epic counterparts. Besides the lover’s absence or their own loneliness, some of the emotions focus on the family and children affected by the men’s decisions. Despite their heightened emotions, the women can do nothing but write these letters, in the hopes that either their men will come back to them or the readers of the letters will know their side of the story. Ovid cannot free them entirely from the restraints of their society, but he does let these mythological heroines tell the stories in their own voices.

¹³ Clarke 2004:77.

¹⁴ Spentzou 2003:28-29.

¹⁵ Stowers 1986:15.

Ovid and the Letter

The letters of the *Heroides* are written in such a way that the basic story they tell is the same as the original which Ovid relies on, but the women either show new emotions, tell part of the story we have not heard, or argue their point of view differently in order to change the readers' understanding of the traditional stories. Ovid characterizes these women with many significant details in order to give them true feminine personas, and yet it is not only the content of the letters which makes them seem truthful and realistic. The format of the letter puts the heroines' voices at the front of the story; they are the ones writing the details. Ovid also has interesting ideas about letters, which he discusses in his *Ars Amatoria*. While men write deceptively, women view letters as very private, intimate things. Women reveal part of themselves in letters; they do not write to lie, but to "speak from the heart."¹⁶ This makes the format of the letter all the more significant, because Ovid has presented these women's stories to us from their point of view and in their own honest words.

Ovid was the first to combine the elements of the letter, mythology, and elegy, but the epistolary genre itself was already popular in the ancient world. Communication, whether between family members, between patrons and their clients, or between friends, was the obvious task of the letter.¹⁷ Letter-writers like Cicero and Seneca, who were taught in the rhetorical schools, wrote for "aesthetic expression," expecting that their letters would be shared within their group of highly educated friends.¹⁸ Concerning the content of rhetorical letters, Stowers writes, "Rebuking and giving praise and honor, for example, were very important activities in ancient letter writing and had a significance for Greco-Roman society."¹⁹ Praise and blame in letters,

¹⁶ Farrell 1998:318.

¹⁷ Stowers 1986:31.

¹⁸ Stowers 1986:34-35.

¹⁹ Stowers 1986:16.

which meant bestowing honor or shame, respectively, was essential to many different social relationships, including those between patrons and clients or between friends or family members.²⁰ Rebuke is an important part of Ovid's *Heroides*, and the possibility for rebuke in the epistolary genre meant that, by writing letters, the heroines could damage their lovers' reputations as epic heroes and perhaps question the epic values themselves.

Ovid's own uses for letters add much to what he was trying to accomplish with the *Heroides*. In his *Ars Amatoria*, he gives advice to men on how to attract lovers through letters. For the men, letters are means of deceiving and offering empty promises (Ov. *Ars.* 1.443-444). Ovid urges the young men to get a good education in order to be able to use eloquence to sway judges and women. *Quam populus iudexque gravis lectusque senatus,/tam dabit eloquio victa puella manus* (Ov. *Ars.* 1.461-462). "A woman, no less than the populace, elite senator, or grave judge, will surrender to eloquence."²¹ Examining the first two books of the *Ars Amatoria*, which are addressed to the Roman men, Farrell concludes that, "in short, the ultimate purpose in writing is deception."²² Farrell also admits that a large part of women's writing is deception as well, but they write to deceive everyone except their lovers—their parents or guardians, for example.²³ In the third book of his *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid writes, *Saepe viri fallunt: tenerae non saepe puellae,/paucaque, si quaeras, criminal fraudis habent* (Ov. *Ars.* 3.31-32). "Men are often deceivers, girls hardly ever: inquiries will prove the feminine cheat a rare bird indeed." Whether or not this is true, in Ovid's time it was his belief that women were much more often the ones deceived than the ones deceiving. It seems that, as women writing to their lovers, Penelope, Dido, Ariadne, and the other heroines of the *Heroides* are the perfect audience for Ovid's *Ars*

²⁰ Stowers 1986:27.

²¹ The passages of the *Ars Amatoria* have been translated by Peter Green. 1982. *The Erotic Poems*. New York: Penguin Books.

²² Farrell 1998:313.

²³ Farrell 1998:315.

Amatoria. Because Ovid is writing these letters from the women's point of view, it follows that he might want to convey their thoughts and feelings as honestly and purely as he is able.

Ovid, as a poet in the late Roman Republic and early Empire, had an interesting point of view from which to be writing, a point of view which might have given him a better insight into women's lives and their feelings. Ovid's father had wanted him to take up a career in oratory, but Ovid preferred poetry.²⁴ Although not a marginalized member of society, Ovid was not part of the norm. He was known for his perceptive skills, his intelligence, and his curiosity.²⁵ He came from a wealthy equestrian family, and he might have done well with a political career.²⁶ His choice of career indicates his differences from the values of the political and patriarchal society. Ovid even comments on the insight of poets in his *Ars Amatoria*. He writes,

Adde, quod insidiae sacris a vatibus absunt,
et facit ad mores ars quoque nostra suos...
sed facile haeremus, validoque perurimur aestu,
et nimium certa scimus amare fide.
Scilicet ingenium placida mollitur ab arte,
et studio mores convenienter eunt (Ov. Ars. 3.539-540,543-546).

What's more, there's no place in a poet for stratagems and deceptions: vocation and art combine to fashion forth his essential nature...But we're easily hooked, we burn with vehement passions, and know—too well—how to give unswerving love. Our natures are made more pliant by our gentle art: an attitude to life grows from our studies.

If readers can trust anything that Ovid says in his work on the art of catching lovers, then his confession that poets, like women, hardly ever deceive is important to readers' understanding of the *Heroides*. As a poet, Ovid's nature is more capable of understanding and conveying the true thoughts of men or women, and so the *Heroides* are meant to be a truthful insight into what the

²⁴ Currie 1964:145.

²⁵ Currie 1964:146,147.

²⁶ Mack 1988:14.

heroines might have been feeling.²⁷

²⁷ It is also interesting to note that Ovid was put in a position quite like that of the heroines in his *Heroides* when he was exiled to Tomis. He was separated from his wife and his family, and he was completely helpless and at the mercy of a dominant male figure: Augustus (Rosenmeyer 1997:29). His *Heroides* cannot be said to be influenced by this experience, since they were written somewhere between 25 and 16 B.C., and Ovid was exiled in 8 A.D. However, it can be said that themes and emotions similar to those in the *Heroides* are found in the *Tristia* (a collection of letters written in elegiac couplets during Ovid's exile). More on similarities between the *Heroides* and the *Tristia*, including Ovid's characterization of his wife as a heroine like those of the *Heroides*, can be found in Rosenmeyer's article, "Ovid's *Heroides* and *Tristia*: Voices from Exile."

Ovid's Use of the Feminine Voice in *Heroides* 1

Penelope's story is probably the most well-known of the *Heroides*. She was the wife of Odysseus and the mother of Telemachus. She remained faithful to her husband during the ten years of the Trojan War and the following ten years of Odysseus' absence. Her home in Ithaca was plagued by over a hundred suitors during Odysseus' absence, when many presumed him dead. In the *Odyssey*, Penelope, when told to make a decision about whom she would marry, promised to make a decision once she was done weaving a burial shroud for Laertes, Odysseus' father. Penelope worked on the funeral shroud daily, but in secret at night she undid all her work. In this way, she deceived the suitors and delayed her remarriage. Because of her constancy, fidelity, and her use of deception to delay remarriage, Penelope has been considered an ideal wife for the hero Odysseus and has herself become a symbol of women's faithfulness.

Penelope's voice in the *Heroides* distinguishes itself from that of Homer's Penelope in its range of emotion and her criticism of Odysseus. Ovid uses the first person voice to allow readers to see into Penelope's thoughts and to understand what she is feeling in her husband's absence. The Penelope of the *Heroides* is not as singularly focused as the ever-faithful wife in the *Odyssey*, and it is Ovid's use of the well-known epic and his alteration of Penelope that adds to the *Heroides*' originality. Penelope's letter does not simply express faithfulness or hope in Odysseus' return, but a span of emotions from complaint and jealousy to loneliness and fear.

The paragon of faithfulness, the Penelope of the *Odyssey*, does not normally express a great depth of emotion during Odysseus' absence, but in the letter which Ovid creates, Penelope openly writes about her constant fear and worry to her husband. In the first portion of the letter, Penelope explains how hard it is for her during Odysseus' absence, because her love for him is accompanied by constant fear. *Quando ego non timui graviora pericula veris?/ res est solliciti*

plena timoris amor (Ov. *Her.* 1.11-12). “When have I not feared dangers graver than the real? Love is a thing ever filled with anxious fear.”²⁸ She goes on to describe the *causa timoris*, the Trojan soldiers (Ov. *Her.* 1.13-16). The mere mention of Hector’s name once made her go pale with fear, and whenever any of the Greeks were slain, Penelope’s heart grew colder than ice for fear that Odysseus was one of the fallen (Ov. *Her.* 1.14, 21-22). Penelope contrasts her mindfulness of Odysseus and her constant fear for his safety with Odysseus’ disregard for his family’s well-being when he risks his own life.

Ausus es,—o nimium nimiumque oblite tuorum!—
Thracia nocturno tangere castra dolo
totque simul mactare viros, adiutus ab uno!
at bene cautus eras et memor ante mei!
usque metu micuere sinus, dum victor amicum
dictus es Ismariis isse per agmen equis (Ov. *Her.* 1.41-46).

You had the daring—O too, too forgetful of your own!—to set wily foot by night in the Thracian camp, and to slay so many men, all at one time, and with only one to aid! Ah yes, you were cautious, indeed, and ever gave me first thought! My heart leaped with fear at every word until I was told of your victorious riding back through the friendly lines of the Greeks with the coursers of Ismarus.

Penelope is harsh with Odysseus, and her severity arises from her fear, not only for Odysseus’ life, but also for her own safety and that of Telemachus, which would be compromised if Odysseus never returned.²⁹ Not only does Ovid’s Penelope express an emotional fear not expressed as much by the traditional Penelope, but the reasoning behind her fear and other emotions is more complex than fear just for Odysseus’ life.

Penelope was not only frightened for Odysseus while he was fighting in the Trojan War; now she is afraid of the unknown, because she has no idea where Odysseus is or what delays him. *Scirem ubi pugnares, et tantum bella timerem,/et mea cum multis iuncta querela foret./Quid*

²⁸ All translations come from The Loeb Classical Library edition of Ovid’s *Heroides*, translated by Grant Showerman.

²⁹ Baca 1969:7.

timeam, ignoro—timeo tamen omnia demens,/et patet in curas area lata meas (Ov. *Her.* 1.69-72). “Had they [the walls of Troy] not fallen, I should know where you were fighting, and have only war to fear, and my plaint would be joined with that of many another. But now, what I am to fear I know not—yet none the less I fear all things, distraught, and wide is the field lies open for my cares.” Penelope, by not knowing what to fear, fears all things, and this makes her situation almost worse than Odysseus’, who knows what he must face and where his family is. By using words like *graviora pericula veris* and *fingebam*, which imply that she has feared things far worse than what Odysseus has actually endured, Penelope makes it clear that nothing is worse than not knowing (Ov. *Her.* 1.11, 13).³⁰ Penelope, not Odysseus, has been the real victim and sufferer for the past twenty years.³¹ Ovid successfully characterizes Penelope by writing her fear as something largely internal; she suffers from fear of the unknown, fear for Odysseus’ life, fear for her own sake and her son’s, and fear of the many reasons for which Odysseus delays.

While Penelope often expresses fear and worry, her concern and ignorance of Odysseus’ whereabouts also manifest themselves in jealousy and anger. The Penelope of the *Odyssey* never questioned the causes of Odysseus’ slow return, but Ovid’s Penelope becomes obviously jealous and suspicious of Odysseus’ tardiness. Ovid adds to Penelope’s characterization by “making her rather delightfully ready to become suspicious where her affections are concerned.”³² When contemplating the reasons for Odysseus’ lengthy absence, Penelope invents a scenario in which Odysseus, enthralled by another woman, describes his wife as rustic and only fit for working with wool (Ov. *Her.* 1.75-78). Penelope is sarcastic and biting, especially when describing

³⁰ Jacobson 1974:251, Baca 1969:8.

³¹ Jacobson 1974:251.

³² Haley 1924:21.

Odysseus.³³ *Haec ego dum stulte metuo, quae vestra libido est,/esse peregrino captus amore potes* (Ov. *Her.* 1.75-76). “While I live on in foolish fear of things like these, you may be captive to a stranger love—such are the hearts of you men.” Odysseus, as a man, is fickle, and Penelope tries to chastise him by calling him a “captive” of another woman. While she is obviously frustrated with her situation and Odysseus’ absence, her worry shows through even when she is being sarcastic. She hopes that she is deceived by her own anxious heart and that her charge against Odysseus carries no weight (Ov. *Her.* 1.79-80). Penelope has dealt with a lot of frustration and worry during the twenty years of Odysseus’ absence, but underlying those feelings is the solitude which she has experienced.

Penelope expresses a lot of emotions in her letter to Odysseus, but her loneliness is especially moving. She is constantly distancing herself from Odysseus in her descriptions of his supposed perils abroad, and also with her descriptions of herself as left behind. *Non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto, non quererer tardos ire relictas dies* (Ov. *Her.* 1.7-8). “Then had I not lain cold in my deserted bed, nor would now be left alone complaining of slowly passing days.” The bed described as *deserto* is obviously a transferred epithet, referring to Penelope, who has faithfully lain alone in her bed every night since Odysseus’ departure. The term *frigida* evokes the image of a spouse, accustomed to sleeping with another warm body, dealing with the new chill of sleeping alone, but it is not merely a physical description in this context. *Frigida* often refers to an abandoned lover who spends the night alone or to the “chilling of affections” in general.³⁴ Penelope is chilled by her fear, loneliness, and, more importantly, the fact that she believes Odysseus actively left her behind and continues to stay away.

Penelope not only describes herself as *relictas*, “abandoned,” but also as *vidua*,

³³ Mack 1988:77.

³⁴ Knox 1995:90.

“widowed.” First she describes her nightly ritual of weaving, which is not, as in the *Odyssey*, a symbol of her unshaken fidelity, but is something she does to make the time go by more quickly. Homer’s Penelope keeps the suitors at bay with the promise that she will marry when Laertes’ shroud is finished. ἔνθα καὶ ἡματιή μὲν ὑφαίνεσκεν μέγαν ἱστόν,/νύκτας δ’ ἀλλύεσκεν, ἐπεὶ δαΐδας παραθεῖτο./ὥς τρίετες μὲν ἔληθε δόλω καὶ ἔπειθεν Ἀχαιοῦς (Hom. *Od.* 2.104-106). “Then day by day she would weave at the great web, but by night would unravel it, having had torches placed beside her. Thus for three years she had by her craft kept the Achaeans from knowing, and beguiled them.”³⁵

In Ovid’s *Heroides*, Penelope does not seek to beguile the suitors, but the night itself. *Nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem/lassaret viduas pendula tela manus* (Ov. *Her.* 1.9-10). “Nor would the hanging web be wearying now my widowed hands as I seek to beguile the hours of spacious night.” Again, a transferred epithet is used in which Penelope’s hands are described as *viduas*. Later, Penelope’s bed, in place of Penelope, is described as widowed. *Me pater Icarius viduo discedere lecto/cogit...* (Ov. *Her.* 1.81-82). “As for me—my father Icarius enjoins on me to quit my widowed couch...” Penelope is certainly not widowed, but she has been separated from her lover for so long, and his absence has been so taxing, that she feels as if she is a widow.

When Penelope is trying to shame Odysseus into coming home more quickly, she uses the suitors and the ruin of Odysseus’ home to persuade him. However, she also confesses that her heart, along with Odysseus’ home, is being destroyed. *[I]nque tua regnant nullis prohibentibus aula;/viscera nostra, tuae dilacerantur opes* (Ov. *Her.* 1.89-90). “In your own hall they are masters, with none to say them nay; my heart is being torn, your substance spoiled.” Depending on which way *viscera* is translated, Penelope could be implying that her heart is

³⁵ All translations from the *Odyssey* are from the Loeb Classical Library edition. Translated by A.T. Murray.

destroyed by the suitors' constant presence and her husband's absence.³⁶

Penelope's loneliness and heartbreak fuel her reproach of Odysseus at times, but they also cause her to critique herself and even question her own value. Penelope endures the doubts which creep into her mind, doubts about why Odysseus stays away and doubts about how he will react to her if he does return. While imagining a scenario of Odysseus with another woman, Penelope self-consciously thinks of how Odysseus will describe her to his lover. *Forsitan et narres, quam sit tibi rustica coniunx,/quae tantum lanas non sinat esse rudes* (Ov. *Her.* 1.77-78). "It may be you even tell how rustic a wife you have—one fit only to dress fine wool." While sometimes Penelope conveys frustration with Odysseus' lengthy absence with a sarcastic tone, here she seems sincerely worried that Odysseus "does not have a true notion of her worth."³⁷ Her fear and self-consciousness are enforced by the first word of the next line: *fallar*. She prays that she is mistaken and that Odysseus does not wish to be away from her. As Ovid's audience would know from the *Odyssey*, though, Odysseus did avoid angering Calypso at Penelope's expense.

He said:

‘πότνα θεά, μή μοι τόδε χόεο: οἶδα καὶ αὐτὸς
πάντα μάλ’, οὔνεκα σεῖο περίφρων Πηνελόπεια
εἶδος ἀκιδνοτέρη μέγεθός τ’ εἰσάντα ιδέσθαι:
ἢ μὲν γὰρ βροτός ἐστι, σὺ δ’ ἀθάνατος καὶ ἀγήρως.

‘Mighty goddess, do not be angry with me for this. I know very well myself that wise Penelope is less impressive to look upon than you in looks and stature, for she is a mortal, while you are immortal and ageless.’ (Hom. *Od.* 5.215-218)

Knox states, "The portrait that he paints, of a plain and ordinary woman, although not intended

³⁶ Other scholars translate *viscera* with more of a sexual connotation. For example, Jacobson claims that *viscera* sometimes denotes the sexual organs and that Penelope is claiming that she is no longer in total control of her sexual life (Jacobson 1974:270). He even claims that Penelope might be saying, "I am being sexually assaulted" (Jacobson 1974:270). Baca asserts that Penelope is using these lines (87-90) to make Odysseus jealous, by saying that many suitors attempt to woo her (Baca 1969:8). I prefer Grant Showerman's translation because it conveys the notion that the Romans believed the seat of the emotions to be in the gut, and *viscera* most commonly means "guts."

³⁷ Baca 1969:8.

as criticism in a comparison with the goddess Calypso, is far from flattering.”³⁸ Odysseus in the *Odyssey* certainly has his reasons for not singing Penelope’s praises, but in the *Heroides*, Penelope fearfully imagines that Odysseus degrades her without cause.³⁹ She questions her own value again in the last lines of her letter. *Certe ego, quae fueram te discedente puella,/protinus ut venias, facta videbor anus* (Ov. *Her.* 1.115-116). “As for myself, who when you left my side was but a girl, though you should come straightaway, I surely shall seem grown an aged dame.” Penelope has spent the whole letter attempting to persuade Odysseus to come home, but then she seems to warn him not to expect too much from her, because she has grown old during the past twenty years.⁴⁰ The twenty years filled with waiting for Odysseus, fearing for his safety during the Trojan War and fearing the unknown afterwards, raising her son, and facing the suitors have worn Penelope down; she knows this and regrets it.⁴¹ In reaction to this fear that Odysseus does not value her anymore, Penelope attempts to prove her worth to him throughout the letter.

Penelope’s fear, jealousy, and self-consciousness all manifest themselves in her attempts to prove her worth to Odysseus and make him jealous. First, she claims responsibility for the Greeks’ victory at Troy.⁴² *Sed bene consuluit casto deus aequus amori./versa est in cineres sospite Troia viro* (Ov. *Her.* 1.23-24). “But good regard for me had the god who looks with favour upon chaste love. Turned to ashes is Troy, and my lord is safe.” Her chaste, loyal love is what pleased the gods, which in turn not only saved her husband but allowed the Greeks victory at Troy, and Penelope has received nothing for it in return.⁴³ Besides being valuable as the one who brought about the victory, Penelope makes herself more desirable by describing herself as a

³⁸ Knox 1995:104.

³⁹ Mack 1988:80.

⁴⁰ Knox 1995:89.

⁴¹ Knox 1995:111.

⁴² Baca 1969:7, Jacobson 1974:254, Mack 1988:78.

⁴³ Mack 1988:78.

girl sought after by all of the suitors. Jacobson asserts that Penelope takes Ovid's advice at this point and attempts to ensure Odysseus' jealousy "by making him believe that powerful rivals exist."⁴⁴ She lists a handful of the suitors in order to arouse Odysseus' jealousy and his concern for Penelope, his son, and his household (*Ov. Her.* 1.87-96). Along with trying to tempt Odysseus to return more quickly, Penelope scolds him for his neglect.

In order to shame her husband into coming home, Penelope is often reproachful and somewhat condemning of Odysseus' character, which is something not seen in Homer's *Odyssey*. In *Heroides* 1, Penelope often characterizes Odysseus as forgetful, slow, and cruel. One of the most moving lines occurs when Penelope, overcome by emotion, writes, almost indignantly, *o nimium nimiumque oblite tuorum!* (*Ov. Her.* 1.41). "O too, too forgetful of your own!" In Penelope's eyes, Odysseus has the power to come home, yet he delays. She describes him reproachfully with words of delaying, even rebuking him in the first line of the letter.⁴⁵ *Hanc tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixee* (*Ov. Her.* 1.1). "This missive your Penelope sends to you, O Ulysses, slow of return that you are." The word *lentus* is significant not only in the sense of his slow journey home, but also because *lentus* is often used to describe the less interested lover of a relationship in Latin elegy.⁴⁶ Penelope, in her frustration and loneliness, describes Odysseus as slow, absent, and delaying, rather than detained somewhere. Because of this purposeful delay of his homecoming, Odysseus is also cold as iron, hard-hearted. *Victor abes, nec scire mihi, quae causa morandi,/aut in quo lateas ferreus orbe, licet* (*Ov. Her.* 1.57-58). "A victor, you are yet not here, nor am I let know what causes your delay, or in what part of the world hard-heartedly you hide." Not only is Odysseus absent, delaying, and cold-hearted in these

⁴⁴ Jacobson 1974:260.

⁴⁵ Jacobson 1974:250.

⁴⁶ Knox 1995:88.

lines, but he is also *lateas*, a word which brings to mind a sneaky, cold-blooded snake.⁴⁷ To Penelope, she is the sufferer, the lover, and the faithful one, while Odysseus is delaying, cold-hearted, and probably enamored by another woman.⁴⁸

Despite his apparent disinterest and delay in coming back to her, Penelope still loves Odysseus and remains faithful to him. The language that Penelope uses in her letter shows that, although she has been afraid, jealous, and frustrated, she has loved Odysseus through the drawn-out Trojan War and the long journey homeward. She speaks about her continuous, faithful love as both the cause of all her anxious fear and of the Greeks' success in the Trojan War (Ov. *Her.* 1.12,23). The gods themselves made sure of Odysseus' success at Troy because of Penelope's chaste love, and her love and her unceasing fidelity will probably be responsible for Odysseus' safe return (Ov. *Her.* 1.23-24). Penelope describes herself as *amans*, which at least grammatically shows that her love was not just a thing of the past, but is continuing during Odysseus' prolonged absence (Ov. *Her.* 1.22). Penelope's direct declaration of love and constancy follows her description of her own father telling her to choose a husband from the suitors. *Increpet usque licet—tua sum, tua dicar oportet;/Penelope coniunx semper Ulixis ero./Ille tamen pietate mea precibusque pudicis/frangitur...*(Ov. *Her.* 1.83-86). "Let him chide on—yours I am, yours must I be called; Penelope, the wife of Ulysses, ever shall I be. Yet is he bent by my faithfulness and my chaste prayers..." It is this line where Penelope truly exposes herself and her love for Odysseus and lets down her defenses.⁴⁹ Despite her anger towards Odysseus and her doubts about his whereabouts and his feelings about her, Penelope's love is unwavering. The combination of all of her emotions and her reproachful, yet ever-loving, attitude towards Odysseus, is what brings Penelope to life and sets her apart from the well-

⁴⁷ Mack 1988:79.

⁴⁸ Jacobson 1974:251, 259.

⁴⁹ Baca 1969:8.

known Penelope of the Homeric tradition.

In the *Heroides*, Ovid portrays Penelope as a genuine woman with complicated feelings and realistic reactions to her separation from her husband, and this portrayal results in a Penelope who is significantly different than her Homeric counterpart. Readers of the *Heroides* know Penelope much more intimately than readers of the epic; this results not only from the format of the letter, but also from Penelope's emotional expressions and the sharing of her thoughts.⁵⁰ Although Ovid is using a rich mythological tradition as a backdrop for his letters, he strips away the epic character from the name "Penelope" in order to create a psychologically authentic woman.⁵¹ To some readers, the authentic Penelope might be a diminished, less impressive, and much less heroic Penelope than the one in the *Odyssey*, but this is what makes her more human.⁵² This is precisely what Ovid wanted to do, and Jacobson adds to this by saying that, "One might even think of *Heroides* 1 as a conscious attempt to free the character of Penelope from the shackles which constrained it: to turn the paragon back into a person."⁵³ The Penelope of the *Heroides* is certainly a human, and a woman, with admirable qualities, doubts, fears, and jealous tendencies. Her reproachful attitude toward Odysseus comes naturally from dealing with fear and loneliness for twenty years, not to mention running Odysseus' household. Mack asserts, "Time matters: people get wrinkles, people get bad-tempered; many years of coping with a house full of unwelcome dinner guests, not to mention a growing boy, a father-in-law, and the perennial servant problem are enough to ruin the sunniest disposition."⁵⁴ Penelope is certainly not a Homeric heroine; she is a genuine woman.

Ovid draws on his knowledge of the *Odyssey* and the traditional Penelope to create

⁵⁰ Fränkel 1956:37-38.

⁵¹ Baca 1969:6.

⁵² Mack 1988:81.

⁵³ Jacobson 1974:249.

⁵⁴ Mack 1988:81.

Heroides 1, but instead of molding his character to fit the tradition, he creates a new character who experiences real feelings and problems. The Penelope of the *Odyssey* never questioned Odysseus or imagined that he was purposefully staying away, but the Penelope of the *Heroides* does just that.⁵⁵ She frequently complains about her situation and Odysseus' absence, and she often uses a reproachful tone to address Odysseus.⁵⁶ Ovid's Penelope even doubts Odysseus' heroic role in the Trojan War, when she describes his exploits with Diomedes with the words *somno, dolo, and mactare* (*Ov. Her.* 1.40, 43). These words negatively emphasize the deceit and slaughter which Odysseus conducted in Troy.⁵⁷ Homeric Penelope would never have made such an unpatriotic statement or questioned her husband's war accomplishments.⁵⁸ Ovid's Penelope is not only different in her stern tone and judgmental accusations, but she also is no longer simply a war victim, as Homer's Penelope was. Many scholars assert that she becomes a heroine in her own right, because she remains faithful to Odysseus throughout her trials, fears, and doubts.⁵⁹ Penelope is no longer an epic heroine; now she is a heroine of Latin elegy.⁶⁰ Ovid's unique insight into Penelope's position and the way in which he adds to her character and her emotions makes her more genuine, and more like a real woman dealing with the stress of an absent husband during war.

In *Heroides* 1, Penelope is a good example of how Ovid accurately creates the feminine voice from a tradition in which most women do not have much depth. Women of epic, if characterized at all, are often very virtuous, or simply reflections of their husbands' skills and virtues, but Ovid characterizes Penelope through her emotions rather than her actions, and her

⁵⁵ Jacobson 1974:250.

⁵⁶ Jacobson 1974:251.

⁵⁷ Knox 1995:98, Mack 1988:78.

⁵⁸ Jacobson 1974:257.

⁵⁹ Baca 1969:7, Jacobson 1974:253, Mack 1988:78.

⁶⁰ Mack 1988:81.

thoughts rather than her spoken words. The range of Penelope's feelings is much wider than in the epic tradition, and a variety of factors affects her emotions. Ovid delves into Penelope's mind in order to imagine the reactions Penelope would have to hearing about Odysseus' time during the Trojan War, not knowing where Odysseus is and what he feels, and being separated from her husband for twenty years. As a realistic woman, Ovid's Penelope is quite different from Homer's, but Ovid's Penelope becomes a new type of heroine, a life-like woman with authentic reactions to twenty years spent without her husband.

Heroides 7: Dido

Dido, the queen of Carthage, became famous through Vergil's *Aeneid*, the text with which Ovid is working to write *Heroides 7*. Dido was first married to Sychaeus, the wealthiest man in Tyre, until her brother Pygmalion murdered him in order to gain his wealth (Verg. *Aen.* 1.341-352). Dido then fled to Libya with her husband's wealth and a small company of exiles, and there she founded Carthage. As her city grew in wealth and power, many suitors from the surrounding kingdoms, among them King Iarbas, made it known that they wished to marry Dido and join their kingdoms. Dido, however, refused all offers of marriage, insisting that she would never marry again in order to be faithful to her first husband Sychaeus. Vergil is the first author to introduce Aeneas into Dido's story.⁶¹ After a storm they encountered on their way to Italy, Aeneas and his companions landed at Carthage and stayed there while they gathered strength and fixed their ships. Aeneas' mother, Venus, plotted for her son's sake and sent Cupid to cause Dido to fall in love with Aeneas (Verg. *Aen.* 1.657-688). Dido and Aeneas lived together as if a married couple, until the gods reminded Aeneas of his duty to his country, his gods, and his son. Dido, unwilling to live without Aeneas and with the shame of having broken her promise to Sychaeus, built a funeral pyre and killed herself with Aeneas' sword. The Dido in the *Aeneid* is often pitied by readers because of her tragic death and Aeneas' abandonment, but she is also used to explain why the Punic Wars occurred and to show how devoted Aeneas is to the gods and his country.

Dido gets a chance to tell her side of the story in the *Heroides* with her letter to Aeneas, written as Aeneas and his men prepare to depart Carthage. Despite her persuasive speech, the readers of this letter know that Aeneas will still leave, and so this letter has a more despairing tone than Penelope's. The seventh letter of the *Heroides* is heavily influenced by Vergil's

⁶¹ Spentzou 2003:xiii.

depiction of Dido in the *Aeneid*, especially with regards to Dido's anger and grief.⁶² Ovid's Dido is not so different from the Dido of the *Aeneid* in her anger and sadness, but the combination of those feelings, her unending love for Aeneas, and her own attempts to persuade him, transform her from the *infelix Dido* of the *Aeneid* to a woman who is not only pitied, but right, and one whom Aeneas has wrongfully abandoned. Ovid's Dido adds new arguments to her position, and, in the end, shows a softer side than Vergil's Dido. In addition, while readers of the *Aeneid* get to know Dido in some ways, it is always in the larger context of Aeneas' fated journey. Readers might feel sympathy for Dido in the *Aeneid*, but ultimately the narrator convinces them that Aeneas is the epic hero who must leave her. In the *Heroides*, Ovid gives Dido a voice which gives readers an insight into her despair, her feelings of loss, her fears, her anger, and her questions and doubts about her own self-worth. Ovid's Dido is also able to question Aeneas' divinely-ordered departure without a god or an epic narrator validating his abandonment.⁶³ The Dido of the *Aeneid* does not get very much time to speak, and Aeneas' time with her lasts only for a few books of the epic, but Dido's letter to Aeneas is the longest of the *Heroides*. In Dido's letter, Ovid writes with the voice of a woman who has found love for the first time since the death of her husband and must suddenly have that love ripped away from her, because of a divine order which she hardly understands.

Unlike Penelope, Dido has no hope that Aeneas will come back to her, and so the letter is filled with despair and a strong sense of loss. This despair is apparent in the opening lines of her letter, in which she sets up the letter as her own swan song. *Sic ubi fata vocant, udis abiectus in herbis/ad vada Maeandri concinit albus olor* (Ov. *Her.* 7.1-2). "Thus, at the summons of fate,

⁶² Desmond 1993:56.

⁶³ Readers of Vergil's *Aeneid* will remember that the god Mercury told Aeneas to leave Carthage, validating his departure, and Aeneas' goddess mother, Venus, was the one ultimately responsible for Dido's fatal love of Aeneas. These will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

casting himself down amid the watery grasses by the shallows of Maeander, sings the white swan.” Dido knows her death is near, and yet she writes this letter to Aeneas, condemning his faithlessness and her own foolishness for loving him.

In her explanation of why she writes the letter to Aeneas, she claims that after her other losses, the loss of words is almost nothing. *Sed merita et famam corpusque animumque pudicum/cum male perdiderim, perdere verba leve est* (Ov. *Her.* 7.5-6). “But because, after wretched losing of desert, of reputation, and of purity of body and soul, the losing of words is a matter slight indeed.” When Aeneas came to Carthage, Dido had turned down many suitors from nearby kingdoms, and her choice of a foreigner was just one of the problems that affected her reputation. She also paid no heed to her kingdom and its construction when Aeneas was in Carthage, so consumed with her love of him. Vergil’s Dido conveys a similar sentiment, when she first asks Aeneas to stay in Carthage. *Te propter Libycae gentes Nomadumque tyranni/odere, infensi Tyrii; te propter eundem/exstinctus pudor et, qua sola sidera adibam,/fama prior* (Ver. *Aen.* 4.320-323). “Because of you the tribes of Libya, all the Nomad princes hate me, even my own Tyrians are hostile; and for you my honor is gone and that good name that once was mine, my only claim to reach the stars.”⁶⁴ Epic Dido, like other characters of epic, is concerned with her reputation and her kingdom; with Aeneas gone, not only is her kingdom in danger, but she has also lost the opportunity to be remembered for her fidelity to Sychaeus.

Ovid’s Dido and Vergil’s Dido suffer the same loss of reputation and honor in the eyes of their kingdoms and neighbors, but they approach the loss of their reputations differently. Vergil’s Dido emphatically blames Aeneas with the repetition of *te propter* (Ver. *Aen.* 4.320-321). Her *pudor* is destroyed, taken from her, with the passive participle *exstinctus* (Ver. *Aen.* 4.322). When Ovid’s Dido recounts her loss of reputation, she uses the adjective *merita*, “deserving,”

⁶⁴ Translations from the *Aeneid* were done by Allen Mandelbaum.

and the active verb *perdiderim* (Ov. *Her.* 7.5-6). These two responses seem to clarify their feelings towards Aeneas after his abandonment. In the *Aeneid*, Dido hates Aeneas and wishes him ill for all that he has done to her, but in the *Heroides*, Dido accepts partial responsibility and seems to say that the loss of reputation would be worth it if Aeneas stayed with her. Desmond explains it in this way:

Compared to Vergil's Dido, whose concern for the future of Carthage and the fate of the Carthaginians as a consequence of Aeneas' departure makes possible the tragic scope of *Aeneid* 4, Ovid's Dido emphatically foregrounds her personal concerns and her responses as an individual woman, not a queen.⁶⁵

In the *Aeneid*, Dido is so angry because she and her kingdom have lost the possibility of fame and honor. Throughout *Heroides* 7, however, Dido shows her concern for love and family by focusing on what she and Aeneas could still gain by staying together. Her honor and reputation have been destroyed because of her love for Aeneas, but unlike Dido in the *Aeneid*, here Dido seems willing to put honor and reputation aside if she can still have Aeneas' love. Ovid's Dido still loves Aeneas before all else, but her love is also a source of great pain and anger for her.

Her betrayal of her late husband and her neglect of her kingdom were in vain, and Aeneas' departure after all of her sacrifices makes Dido miserable. Dido refers to herself as *misera Dido*, which is reminiscent of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, in which Dido refers to herself as *mihi miserae* (Ov. *Her.* 7.7,98, Ver. *Aen.* 4.315). Her intense pain from this loss is also exemplified by her comparison of her pain to a wound. *Nec mea nunc primum feriuntur pectora telo; ille locus saevi vulnus amoris habet* (Ov. *Her.* 7.189-190). "Nor does my heart now for the first time feel a weapon's thrust; it already bears the wound of cruel love." As she nears her death and examines Aeneas' sword in her lap, Dido imagines that the sword will not be much different than Aeneas' abandonment.

⁶⁵ Desmond 1993:64.

In the middle of her letter to Aeneas, Dido seems to forget she is writing a letter, and she addresses her own forgotten purity, ashamed that she broke her vow to Sychaeus. *Exige, laese pudor, poenas! Violate Sychaei.../ad quas, me miseram, plena pudoris eo* (Ov. *Her.* 7.97-98). “Exact the penalty of me, O purity undone!—the penalty due Sychaeus. To absolve it now I go—ah me, wretched that I am, and overcome with shame!” Because this is a letter sent to Aeneas, Dido seems to use her own shame and grief to cause Aeneas to feel at fault and to stay a while longer. Even if Dido does not expect Aeneas to return, she wants to make him feel guilty. Her intense sense of shame which she shows to Aeneas has a real basis, though. She uses the words *pudor*, *culpa*, and *noxa* to describe herself and her situation, and the fact that she uses her own self-reproach to convince Aeneas instead of her royal status says something about Dido’s state of mind (Ov. *Her.* 7.104,105,106). Near the end of her letter, Dido seems to lose all self-respect when she begs Aeneas to stay with her, on whatever terms he wishes. *Si pudet uxoris, non nupta, sed hospita dicar;/dum tua sit, Dido quidlibet esse feret* (Ov. *Her.* 7.167-168). “If you shame to have me your wife, let me not be called bride, but hostess; so she be yours, Dido will endure to be what you will.” In trying to prove her love to Aeneas, she claims that he can control what type of relationship they will have. By expounding on her own shame and self-criticism, in her letter Dido comes across as a despairing woman whom Aeneas heartlessly abandoned.

When her appeals to his love and pity seem likely to fail her attempt at persuasion, Dido attempts to strip Aeneas of his honor and make him into a villainous deserter. Her own intense love makes her angry with Aeneas for his coldness and abandonment, and the combination of her unending love, her anger, her belittling of herself, and her despair makes her a much more pitiable character than the unfaithful, hard-hearted Aeneas. She shows Aeneas her anger with him by accusing him, laying out all of his faults, and even questioning the qualities which define

him as an epic hero. Dido refers to him as *hostis, durus, perfidus, sceleratus, and crudelis* (Ov. *Her.* 7.31,62,84,118,133,182). Aeneas is a criminal who is not only hard-hearted, but a deceitful, untrustworthy man. Dido focuses on Aeneas' lies and deception, blaming herself for believing him and accusing him of being false in everything. *Alter habendus amor tibi restat et altera Dido;/quamque iterum fallas altera danda fides* (Ov. *Her.* 7.17-18). "A second love remains for you to win, and a second Dido; a second pledge to give, and a second time to prove false." Dido mocks Aeneas' supposed destiny in Italy by saying it will turn out the same way as his time spent in Carthage. She continues to accuse him of lying and deceiving, even blaming Aeneas for Creusa's death.

Sed neque fers tecum, nec, quae mihi, perfide, iactas,
 presserunt umeros sacra paterque tuos.
 omnia mentiris, neque enim tua fallere lingua
 incipit a nobis, primaque plector ego.
 si quaeras, ubi sit formosi mater Iuli—
 occidit a duro sola relictā viro!
 haec mihi narraras—sat me monuere! Merentem
 ure; minor culpa poena futura mea est (Ov. *Her.* 7.79-86).

Yet neither are you bearing them with you; the sacred relics which are your pretext never rested on your shoulders, nor did your father. You are false in everything—and I am not the first your tongue has deceived, nor am I the first to feel the blow from you. Do you ask where the mother of pretty Iulus is?—she perished, left behind by her unfeeling lord! This was the story you told me—yes, and it was warning enough for me! Burn me; I deserve it! The punishment will be less than befits my fault.

Dido attacks Aeneas where it will hurt; his reputation as *pious*. She claims that he saved neither his household gods nor his father, and that he left Creusa behind without pain to himself.

Vergil's Dido never mentioned Creusa to Aeneas after she heard the story of his flight from Troy and following journeys. Like Homer's Penelope, who was happy to hear about all of Odysseus' travels and stops, Vergil's Dido loved to hear about Aeneas' adventures, no matter what they involved (Ver. *Aen.* 4.1-5). Rather than questioning any of his story or the loss of his wife, the

Dido in the *Aeneid* reinforces Aeneas' heroic status. *Quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes,/quem sese ore ferens, quam forti pectore et armis!/Credo equidem, nec vana fides, genus esse deorum* (Ver. *Aen.* 4.10-12). "Who is this stranger guest come to our house? How confident he looks, how strong his chest and arms! I think—and I have cause—that he is born of gods."

Ovid's Dido, however, accuses Aeneas for his role in Creusa's death, and by doing so she questions his escape from Troy, his honor as a husband, and the patriarchal values, common to epic, which put son and gods ahead of wife.⁶⁶ When the important values of epic are under suspicion, such as fate and the gods, Aeneas' argument for leaving Dido disappears altogether.

In her grief and anger, Dido also refutes Aeneas' claim to honesty, loyalty, and even divine parentage. She characterizes their relationship with the words *coniugis deceptae* and *Phrygia Dido fraude coacta mori* (Ov. *Her.* 7.69, 68). Dido links the leaving ships to Aeneas' broken promises, writing, *Atque idem venti vela fidemque ferent?/Certus es, Aenea, cum foedere solvere naves...?* (Ov. *Her.* 7.8-9). "Shall the same winds bear away from me at once your sails and your promises? Are you resolved, Aeneas, to break at the same time from your moorings and from your pledge...?" He is a faithless, deceitful man, and nothing, not even the bonds of marriage, is sacred to him, and so Dido threatens him with what happens to faithless men on the seas.

Nec violasse fidem temptantibus aequora prodest;
perfidiae poenas exigit ille locus,
praecipue cum laesus amor, quia mater Amorum
nuda Cytheriacis edita fertur aquis (Ov. *Her.* 7.57-60).

Nor is it well for those who have broken faith to tempt the billows. Yon is the place that exacts the penalty for faithlessness, above all when 'tis love has been wronged; for 'twas from the sea, in Cytherean waters, so runs the tale, that the mother of the Loves, undraped, arose.

Dido subtly threatens Aeneas here, and in this way she is very similar to Vergil's Dido.

⁶⁶ Desmond 1993:61.

An essential difference between Ovid's Dido and Vergil's Dido is the way they react to their own anger. Almost immediately after her threat of shipwreck, Ovid's Dido regrets it, showing her genuine love and care for Aeneas. She exclaims, *Vive, precor!* (Ov. *Her.* 7.63). "O live, I pray it!" Vergil's Dido never regretted her death threats to Aeneas, which in some ways legitimizes Aeneas' hurried departure and the future Punic Wars. *I, sequere Italiam ventis, pete regna per undas./Spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt,/supplicia hausurum scopulis et nomine Dido/saepe vocaturum* (Ver. *Aen.* 4.381-384). "Go then, before the winds, to Italy. Seek out your kingdom overseas; indeed, if there be pious powers still, I hope that you will drink your torments to the lees among sea rocks and, drowning, often cry the name of Dido." Dido of the *Aeneid* wishes death upon Aeneas and his descendants, which she shows in multiple death threats and her famous curse (Ver. *Aen.* 4.381-387, 612-621, 622-629, 661-662). Each time she threatens shipwreck, or war, or ill fortune on Aeneas and his people, Dido distances herself from the reader's pity, especially when Aeneas is justified by fate, the gods, and the future kingdom of Rome. Vergil's Dido has switched quickly from loving passion to frenzied rage, but Ovid's Dido, angry as she is, still loves Aeneas. Vergil's Dido is angry, and Ovid's Dido shows some of that anger, but she often immediately regrets it. While Vergil's Dido hopes for Aeneas' ruin and shipwreck, Ovid's Dido thinks of all these things, using them to dissuade Aeneas, while also hoping that they do not happen, even if Aeneas should choose to abandon her.⁶⁷ Dido's lament in the *Heroides*, her half-hearted threats, and concern for Aeneas and his son erase the extremely vicious hatred of her epic counterpart, the same hatred which seems to validate Aeneas' departure.⁶⁸ All she wants is for Aeneas to lose what she has lost: a good reputation. She is outraged at his departure and abandonment, but she still loves him.

⁶⁷ Jacobson 1974:85.

⁶⁸ Desmond 1993:59.

After Aeneas' betrayal, Dido seems to be trying to comfort herself with imaginary scenarios in which Aeneas regrets his actions towards her. She first imagines that Aeneas' ship will wreck in a storm, and that she will be in his last thoughts.

Finge, age, te rapido—nullum sit in omine pondus!—
turbine deprendi; quid tibi mentis erit?
protinus occurrent falsae periuria linguae,
et Phrygia Dido fraude coacta mori;
coniugis ante oculos deceptae stabit imago
tristis et effusis sanguinolenta comis.
Quid tanti est ut tum “merui! concedite!” dicas,
Quaeque cadent, in te fulmina missa putes? (Ov. *Her.* 7.65-72)

Imagine, pray, imagine that you are caught—may there be nothing in the omen!—in the sweeping of the storm; what will be your thoughts? Straight will come rushing to your mind the perjury of your false tongue, and Dido driven to death by Phrygian faithlessness; before your eyes will appear the features of your deceived wife, heavy with sorrow, with hair streaming, and stained with blood. What now can you gain to recompense you then, when you will have to say: ‘Tis my desert; forgive me, ye gods!’ when you will have to think that whatever thunderbolts fall were hurled at you?

Dido does not want Aeneas to die in a storm, but she seems to find comfort in the thought that if he did, she would be his last regret. Even here, Dido seems to be stuck in an illusion. If Aeneas has the ability to leave her and her love, surely his last thoughts would be for the reasons why he left her: his son, his future kingdom, his destiny. These thoughts that she entertains in Ovid's *Heroides* are much different than her hopes for Aeneas in the *Aeneid*.

‘...si tangere portus
infandum caput ac terris adnare necesse est,
et sic fata Iovis poscunt, hic terminus haeret:
at bello audacis populi vexatus et armis,
finibus extorris, complexu avolsus Iuli,
auxilium imploret videatque indigna suorum
funera; nec, cum se sub leges pacis iniquae
tradiderit, regno aut optata luce fruatur,
sed cadat ante diem mediaque inhumatus harena.
haec precor, hanc vocem extremam cum sanguine fundo.’ (Ver. *Aen.* 4.612-621)

If it must be that he, a traitor, is to touch his harbor, float to his coasts, and so the fates of Jove demand and if this end is fixed; yet let him suffer war and struggles with audacious nations, and then—when banished from his borders and torn from the embrace of Iulus—let him beg aid and watch his people’s shameful slaughter. Not even when he has bent low before and unjust peace may he enjoy his kingdom, the light that he has wished for. Let him fall before his time, unburied in the sand. These things I plead; these final words I pour out of my blood.

Dido’s curse conveys her hatred of Aeneas and his companions, and it sets up what will be the future wars between the Romans and the Carthaginians. She shows no remorse for this curse, and it seems that her love for Aeneas is not strong enough to overpower her growing hatred for him. Dido’s burning hatred for Aeneas in the epic somewhat justifies his departure, and she needs to be portrayed as hating him and cursing him in order to validate the foreshadowed Punic Wars. Ovid’s Dido curses Aeneas and calls him unfaithful and cruel, but her love and genuine concern softens these blows, making her seem critical, but not hateful.

In the *Heroides*, Dido’s fantasies do not always include death. She tries to persuade Aeneas to enjoy her fantasy of their life together; she hopes that by showing him what their life could be like, he will abandon his plans instead of her.

Ilion in Tyriam transfer felicius urbem
resque loco regis sceptraque sacra tene!
si tibi mens avida est belli, si quaerit Iulus,
unde suo partus Marte triumphus eat,
quem superet, nequid desit, praebebimus hostem;
hic pacis leges, hic locus arma capit (Ov. *Her.* 7.151-156).

Transfer your Ilion to the Tyrian town, and give it thus a happier lot; enjoy the kingly state, and the sceptre’s right divine. If your soul is eager for war, if Iulus must have field for martial prowess and the triumph, we shall find him foes to conquer, and naught shall lack; here there is place for the laws of peace, here place, too, for arms.

While she tempts Aeneas with safety, wealth, a happy place for Ascanius to grow up, she makes them into a “we” who perform actions together—*praebebimus*. She longs for them to be

together, and she fantasizes about their life together. As she tempts Aeneas, she seems to slip into a daydream. Towards the end of her letter, she ceases daydreaming about her life with Aeneas and returns to fantasizing about his regret. *Adspicias utinam, quae sit scribentis imago!/scribimus, et gremio Troicus ensis adest,/perque genas lacrimae strictum labuntur in ense/quasi iam pro lacrimis sanguine tinctus erit* (Ov. Her. 7.183-186). “Could you but see now the face of her who writes these words! I write, and the Trojan’s blade is ready in my lap. Over my cheeks the tears roll, and fall upon the drawn steel—which soon shall be stained with blood instead of tears.” Perhaps Dido thinks that if Aeneas could see her in this state, he would regret abandoning her. However, Dido knows well that she is lying to herself and living in an illusion. *Fallor, et ista mihi falso iactatur imago* (Ov. Her. 7.35). “Ah, vain delusion! The fancy that flits before my mind is not the truth.” The words Dido uses here to describe Aeneas’ love are also fitting for her fantasies about her life with Aeneas and Aeneas’ regret at her death. Although at times in her letter she recognizes that Aeneas is not coming back, and she is resolved to kill herself, she still relies on fantasies for comfort and relief.

Dido needs these fantasies of Aeneas’ regret, because she feels like he hates her. She believes that her foolishness is the cause, not of his abandonment, but of her affair with a man who cannot be trusted. She constantly uses words of shame to describe herself, and Aeneas’ departure makes her question her own self-worth. *Et quo, si non sim stulta, carere velim;/non tamen Aenean, quamvis male cogitat, odi* (Ov. Her. 7.28-29). “And were I not fond I should be willing to have him go; yet, however ill his thought of me, I hate him not.” Dido uses the word *stulta*, “foolish,” to describe herself, and she is under the impression that Aeneas *male cogitate*, “thinks badly,” of her. In her mind, she was foolish enough to love a foreigner who has already left one wife behind, and he must hate her if he is willing to leave so quickly. As Dido attempts

to persuade him to wait at least until the weather is better to depart, she pathetically says that she is not worth his death if he should die in a storm, fleeing her.

Non ego sum tanti—quid non censeris inique?—
ut pereas, dum me per freta longa fugis.
Exerces pretiosa odia et constantia magno,
si, dum me careas, est tibi vile mori (Ov. *Her.* 7.45-48).

I am not worth enough—ah, why do I not wrongly rate you?—to have you perish flying from me over the long seas. 'Tis a costly and a dear-bought hate that you indulge if, to be quit of me, you account it cheap to die.

She is using this line to try and persuade him to stay, but she is trying to persuade him with her own “little worth” – he should not flee not because she is worth him staying, but because she is not worth his death. If Dido did not question her own worth anywhere else in the letter, these sentences would seem to be simply a persuasive tool, used in making Aeneas feel guilty. As it is set in the letter, it seems that Dido is using this line to persuade Aeneas to stay longer, but she also fears these things in the back of her mind.

Although Dido blames herself for many things, foolishly believing Aeneas, putting him before her city, and breaking her vow to Sychaeus, she feels that her love is constant and true, and Aeneas will not be able to find that anywhere else.⁶⁹ She has committed no crime against Aeneas. *Quod crimen dicis praeter amasse meum?* (Ov. *Her.* 7.164). “What can you charge me with but love?” Towards Aeneas she has been faithful and constant, everything that Aeneas has not.

Uror, ut inducto ceratae sulphure taedae,
ut pia fumosis addita tura focis.
Aeneas oculis semper vigilantis inhaeret;
Aenean animo noxque diesque refert (Ov. *Her.* 7.23-26).

I am all ablaze with love, like torches of wax tipped with sulphur, like pious incense placed on smoking altar-fires. Aeneas my eyes cling to through all my waking hours; Aeneas is in my heart through the night and through the day.

⁶⁹ *Unde tibi, quae te sic amet, uxor erit?* (Ov. *Her.* 7.22). “Whence will come the wife to love you as I?”

Dido is overcome with love for Aeneas, and he is constantly on her mind. More than that, though, Dido compares herself to *pia tura*, “pious incense.” Whereas she describes Aeneas as *impius*, unworthy to touch the statues of his household gods, she herself is *pia* like the holy incense (Ov. *Her.* 7.130,24). Whereas the Aeneas of Vergil’s *Aeneid* is one who must fulfill his duty and obey the gods, the Dido of the *Heroides* turns him into an unfeeling liar, not even worthy to find his Trojan gods a new home.

Ovid uses the *Aeneid* for the context of Dido’s letter, but he often rewrites Dido’s arguments to make them more persuasive and moving; with Ovid’s version, Dido makes a convincing argument that Aeneas has cruelly and wrongfully abandoned her. Ovid’s Dido makes a compelling argument because she shows her genuine concern, and her virtues, not Aeneas’, are represented. For example, in the *Aeneid*, the gods used Ascanius as a reason for Aeneas to search for a place to settle in Italy, but in her letter, Dido uses Ascanius as a reason for Aeneas to stay (Ov. *Her.* 7.75). In the *Aeneid*, Mercury tells Aeneas, ‘...*Si te nulla movet tantarum gloria rerum/nec super ipse tua moliris laude laborem,/Ascanium surgentem et spes heredis Iuli/respice, cui regnum Italiae Romanaque tellus/debentur*’ (Verg. *Aen.* 4.272-276). “For if the brightness of such deeds is not enough to kindle you—if you cannot attempt the task for you own fame—remember Ascanius growing up, the hopes you hold for Iulus, your own heir, to whom are owed the realm of Italy and land of Rome.” In comparison, Ovid’s Dido emphasizes not fame and fate, but safety and home. She begs Aeneas to forgo his journey so that Ascanius may not have to be subjected to the dangerous sea again (Ov. *Her.* 7.75-78). Ovid’s Dido is much more concerned for Aeneas and his family, showing her love of him – in the *Aeneid*, Dido wanted Aeneas to delay for her benefit, but in the *Heroides*, it is for her psychological recovery as well

as Aeneas' and Ascanius' safety (Ver. *Aen.* 4.431-434, Ov. *Her.* 7.73-75).⁷⁰ She also tells Aeneas that Ascanius can live out his life happily in Carthage. ...*et damni sit modus illi tui, / Ascaniusque suos feliciter inpleat annos...* (Ov. *Her.* 7.160-161). "So may that be the limit of your misfortunes, and so may Ascanius fill happily out his years." While in one argument, Ascanius is the heir to a great destiny and a future ruler, in the other, Ascanius is the object of motherly concern as Dido attempts to evoke Aeneas' own fatherly concerns for Ascanius' safety and happiness.⁷¹

In another instance, Dido's argument changes concerning her hope of bearing Aeneas' child.⁷² In the *Aeneid*, Dido wishes she had a little Aeneas to comfort her after Aeneas' departure (Ver. *Aen.* 4.327-330). In the *Heroides*, however, Dido describes the possibility of her pregnancy to Aeneas in order to pull on his paternal instincts and make him feel guilty, not only for Dido's death, but his child's as well (Ov. *Her.* 7.133-138). In trying to persuade Aeneas, Dido does not take the angle of glory and destiny, but love, happiness, and security. Dido's arguments do nothing for her, but her letter to Aeneas might challenge readers' opinions of her and of Aeneas' choices which were formed by the *Aeneid*.

In *Heroides* 7, Dido questions Aeneas' excuse of a divine command, and Ovid's use of the first person point of view gives the readers a look into her unbelief. '*Sed iubet ire deus*' (Ov. *Her.* 7.139). "But you are bid to go—by your god!" Dido's incredulous tone gives the audience a further insight into what she must be feeling. Aeneas has told her he must leave because a god told him to, but she has no evidence of this and some part of her is questioning Aeneas' real reasoning. She has contempt for his supposed destiny, even mocking it at times, and she cannot

⁷⁰ Jacobson 1974:86.

⁷¹ Jacobson 1974:79.

⁷² Jacobson 1974:77.

come up with a reason for his departure except his hatred of her. Vergil's audience was aware of another cause of Dido's sad fate: Aeneas' mother.

At Cytherea novas artes, nova pectore versat
Consilia, ut faciem mutatus et ora Cupido
pro dulci Ascanio veniat, donisque furentem
incendat reginam, atque ossibus implicet ignem (Ver. *Aen.* 1.657-660).

But in her breast the Cytherean ponders new stratagems, new guile: that Cupid, changed in form and feature, come instead of sweet Ascanius and, with his gifts, inflame the queen to madness and insinuate a fire in Dido's very bones.

Dido is unaware of the part Venus plays in her sad end, but readers of the *Aeneid* are easily able to pass the blame from Aeneas to his mother. In Ovid's account, Venus is never mentioned in this way, and so the readers must take Dido's rebukes of Aeneas and his actions much more seriously.

In the *Aeneid*, Dido's appeals to Aeneas are easily denied because of his duty to his son, his future country, and his gods. Nugent claims, and quotes Glazewski for support, that Aeneas' heroic character is exemplified in his abandonment of Dido: "It is only when Aeneas...is able to resist the entreaties of Dido that we see his character begin to be fully and persistently what one would expect to find in the founder of a new nation."⁷³ Dido's distress and position are quickly acknowledged, in a way, only to be refuted by the epic narrator and Aeneas' piety. In the *Heroides*, Dido's arguments, written from her point of view, are persuasive and appealing, without the epic values overwhelming her strongest claims.

In her letter to Aeneas, Ovid's Dido shows the readers, Vergil's and Ovid's audiences, that she was good to Aeneas and does not deserve to be abandoned without good cause. This new look at Dido is not enough to change Aeneas' mind, but it may be enough to change readers'

⁷³ Nugent 1992:275.

minds and make them question the heroic values of the *Aeneid*.⁷⁴ With *Heroides* 7, Ovid makes Dido the central character, a loving, feeling woman, rather than Aeneas, the virtuous man driven by fate. Desmond comments that by taking this feminine viewpoint, Ovid is “decentering Aeneas as the thematic focus of the *Aeneid* story and essentially disrupting the imperial theme that Aeneas ostensibly represents.”⁷⁵ Without the values of the empire or the epic, fate, destiny, the gods, reputation, and country, Aeneas’ excuses for abandoning Dido have no weight. Jacobson adds that, with this departure from the epic point of view, “Vergil vindicates Aeneas, Ovid vindicates Dido. In *Heroides* 7 all Aeneas’ positions seem untenable. In contrast, Dido is reasonable, loving, sensible, and without malice. There can be no question here as to who is right and who is wrong.”⁷⁶ Her despair, justified anger, self-criticism, useless arguments, and enduring love create a vision of a real woman, wronged and maybe wrong herself at times, but whose faithfulness, love, and concern should be enough for any man who has committed himself to her and her kingdom.

⁷⁴ Knox 1995:202.

⁷⁵ Desmond 1993:58.

⁷⁶ Jacobson 1974:93.

Heroides 10: Ariadne's Voice

Ariadne was a princess of Crete, the daughter of King Minos and Pasiphae, who herself was the daughter of the god Helios. When Theseus went to Crete to kill the Minotaur, Ariadne's half-brother, Ariadne fell in love with him and gave him a ball of thread to lead him back out of the labyrinth. When Theseus had killed the Minotaur and found his way out of the maze, Ariadne left Crete with him, hoping to be his wife in Athens. They stopped for a night on the island of Dia, or Naxos, and when Ariadne woke in the morning, Theseus' ships were already sailing away, leaving Ariadne completely alone.⁷⁷ Soon after Theseus abandoned her, Dionysus came to make Ariadne his immortal bride. There are other versions of Ariadne's story, but this is the one made famous by Catullus 64, a poem sharing enough characteristics with epic to be called an epyllion.

The story of Theseus and Ariadne is told in many places, but the one from which Ovid draws the most is Catullus' account.⁷⁸ The stories are the same, as with Penelope's and Dido's letters, and the details are what make the Ariadne of the *Heroides* different from Catullus' Ariadne. Ariadne's situation is unique, not because she is abandoned by a man, but because he leaves her completely isolated, with no civilization, transport, or human beings in sight. This causes Ariadne to respond to her abandonment in a more original way. Unlike Penelope and Dido, and very unlike Catullus' Ariadne, Ovid's Ariadne does not focus on trying to earn back Theseus' love; she is focused on surviving and the possibility that she will not escape the island. She uses her letter to explain to Theseus the horror of being left completely alone, and she harshly scolds him, simply wanting him to come back so that she can join the world or so that he can bury her properly.

⁷⁷ Spentzou 2003:xi.

⁷⁸ Knox 1995:233, Jacobson 1974:213.

Ariadne's angry first words in her letter compare Theseus to wild beasts, setting the tone for how she addresses Theseus throughout. To her, Theseus is a cold-hearted, scheming man who left her helpless on the island of Naxos. *Mitius inveni quam te genus omne ferarum;/credita non ulli quam tibi peius eram* (Ov. *Her.* 10.1-2). "Gentler than you I have found every race of wild beasts; to none of them could I so ill have trusted as to you." Theseus is worse than the savage animals, which draws a significant comparison because of Ariadne's later description of her fear of the animals on the island. Ariadne makes it clear that Theseus has no excuse for what he has done: he is wicked and cruel. *In quo me somnusque meus male prodidit et tu,/per facinus somnis insidiate meis* (Ov. *Her.* 10.5-6). "[The shore] on which my slumber, and you, so wretchedly betrayed me—you, who wickedly plotted against me as I slept." Later in the letter, she expounds on this cruelty, which she encounters everywhere now that she has been abandoned.

Crudeles somni, quid me tenuistis inertem?
 Aut semel aeterna nocte premenda fui.
 Vos quoque crudeles, venti, nimiumque parati
 Flaminaque in lacrimas officiosa meas.
 Dexter a crudelis, quae me fratremque necavit,
 Et data poscenti, nomen inane, fides! (Ov. *Her.* 10.111-116).

Ah, cruel slumbers, why did you hold me thus inert? Or, better had I been weighed down once for all by everlasting night. You, too, were cruel, O winds, and all too well prepared, and you breezes, eager to start my tears. Cruel the right hand that has brought me and my brother to our death, and cruel the pledge—an empty word—that you gave at my demand!

With Theseus gone, Ariadne must also place the blame for her abandonment and her loneliness on the inanimate things around her: sleep, wind, and breeze. The cruelty she has transferred from Theseus can be placed on no other person, because she is all alone. With no one to console her, alone on the unfeeling island, Ariadne can sense the hostility of nature.⁷⁹ This transference of

⁷⁹ Jacobson 1974:220.

Theseus' cruel nature to the natural elements continues throughout the letter: *ventis crudelibus; multa mihi terrae, multa minantur aquae* (Ov. *Her.* 10.29,94). Behind her anger and accusations, there is almost no evidence that Ariadne still loves Theseus, unlike Penelope and Dido who both continued to love their men.⁸⁰ Ariadne seems to realize that her short-lived romance with Theseus is over, and she simply wants to be saved from the island, or to be buried properly. This contrasts with Catullus' version of Ariadne, who thinks only of Theseus once he has left her (Cat. 64.68-71). Whatever her feelings for Theseus besides anger, they are overshadowed in the moment by her fear and intense loneliness.

As she recounts to Theseus his crime, she dwells on her fear and isolation, which also give her cause to fear for her life. As she tells her side of the story to him, she slowly works up to the moment during which she discovered he was gone. First she writes about the songbirds, the peaceful moments when, half-asleep, she had not realized Theseus had gone. *Incertum vigilans a somno languida movi/Thesea prensuras semisupina manus—nullus erat! Referoque manus iterumque retempto,/perque torum moveo bracchia—nullus erat!/excussere metus somnum; conterrita surgo* (Ov. *Her.* 10.9-13). "Half waking only, languid from sleep, I turned upon my side and put forth hands to clasp my Theseus—he was not there! I drew back my hands, a second time I made essay, and o'er the whole couch moved my arms—he was not there! Fear struck away my sleep; in terror I arose." Ariadne's account captures the instant, heart-chilling fear which she must have felt in those early sleepy moments. She reached out, hopeful and glad to wake to songbirds and Theseus by her side, but all she felt was empty air and cold sand. Jacobson adds to this, claiming "Her ineffectual grasping for Theseus is vividly presented in a long frustrated sentence in which *Thesea* appears early, but *manus* is delayed to the end, leaving

⁸⁰ Jacobson 1974:226.

us, like Ariadne, waiting and waiting for the outcome.”⁸¹ Ariadne’s storytelling is written in such a way to make the reader feel the panicked fear which she experienced firsthand. Another word Ariadne uses to describe her fear is *frigidior*, the same word which Penelope used to describe her fear. *Ut vidi haut dignam quae me vidisse putarem,/frigidior glacie semianimisque fui* (Ov. *Her.* 10.31-32). “As I looked on a sight methought I had not deserved to see, I grew colder than ice, and life half left my body.” When she sees Theseus’ ship sailing away, Ariadne goes numb and lifeless at the realization that she is all alone on a deserted island. The initial heart-stopping shock and numbness eventually give way to a different kind of fear, a fear of the horrible things she might meet on the island, a fear of her own death.

Ovid’s Ariadne distinguishes herself from Catullus’ Ariadne, who emphasizes her loneliness without Theseus, by emphasizing her fear and panic, particularly concerning the ways she could die.⁸²

Occurrunt animo pereundi mille figurae,
 morsque minus poenae quam mora mortis habet.
 Iam iam venturos aut hac aut suspicor illac,
 qui lenient avido viscera dente, lupos.
 Quis scit an et fulvos tellus alat ista leones?
 forsitan et saevas tigridas insula habet.
 Et freta dicuntur magnas expellere phocas!
 Quis vetat et gladios per latus ire meum? (Ov. *Her.* 10.81-88).

There rush into my thought a thousand forms of perishing, and death holds less of dole for me than the delay of death. Each moment, now here, now there, I look to see wolves rush on me, to rend my vitals with their greedy fangs. Who knows but that this shore breeds, too, the tawny lion? Perchance the island harbours the savage tiger as well. They say, too, that the waters of the deep cast up the mighty seal! And who is to keep the swords of men from piercing my side?

These nearby dangers make Ariadne feel even more alone, and she cries out, shouting to Theseus to get her off the island.

⁸¹ Jacobson 1974:219.

⁸² Ferguson 1960:346.

As Ariadne's mind runs wild with fear, she tells Theseus all the possible ways she could die on the island, and she begins grieving for her impending end. From the beginning it was clear that Theseus would not return, and from the beginning Ariadne acts as if a mourner at her own funeral, beating her breasts and pulling her hair. *Protinus adductis sonuerunt pectora palmis, utque erat e somno turbida, rapta coma est* (Ov. *Her.* 10.15-16). "Straight then my palms resounded upon my breasts, and I tore my hair, all disarrayed as it was from sleep." As soon as she gets up and realizes that Theseus is nowhere near, she becomes panicked and in distress she beats upon herself. Again in her letter she recounts to Theseus how she acted knowing that he had left her; she shouts his name, not with promises of love, but with a scolding.

'Quo fugis?' exclamo; 'scelerate revertere Theseu!
flecte ratem! numerum non habet illa suum!
Haec ego; quod voci deerat, plangore replebam;
verbera cum verbis mixta fuere meis (Ov. *Her.* 10.35-38).

'Where do you flee?' I cry aloud. 'Come back, O wicked Theseus! Turn about thy ship! She hath not all her crew!' Thus I did cry, and what my voice could not avail, I filled with beating of my breast; the blows I gave myself were mingled with my words.

Sometimes Ariadne is an excited mourner, and at other times she is lifeless and numb. She becomes "as much a stone myself as was the stone I sat upon." *Quamque lapis sedes, tam lapis ipsa fui* (Ov. *Her.* 10.50). She also describes herself as *frigida* and *semianimis*, feelings not caused by losing Theseus' love, but by losing her place on his ship and being left to die alone.⁸³

Ariadne's complete isolation is what makes Theseus' abandonment that much more horrible, and Ariadne makes it clear in her letter that she has never felt more alone. Ovid's Ariadne uses the word *sola* to describe herself, and the placement of the words in each line add to the descriptions. "After a succession of plurals (*lumina, vela, diffuses capillis*), we are struck

⁸³ Ov. *Her.* 10.49,32.

by the singular *sola*, which isolates Ariadne within a circle of multiplicity.”⁸⁴ Besides *sola*, Ariadne also uses the words *vacat*, *nusquam*, and *exul*, all of which emphasize the emptiness around her, and that she has no place to call home.⁸⁵ Ariadne has not only lost her lover, as Penelope and Dido did, and she has not only been separated from her family, like other heroines of Ovid’s *Heroides*, but she has also lost any contact with human beings or civilization.⁸⁶

In Catullus’ poem, the story of Theseus and Ariadne ends with the readers’ knowledge that Dionysus will rescue Ariadne (Cat. 64.251-253). Although this does not justify Theseus’ abandonment, it lessens the readers’ sympathy for Ariadne. *Heroides* 10 ends with Ariadne still in a panic, telling Theseus to come back and give her a proper burial. *Flecte ratem, Theseu, versoque relabere vento! si prius occidero, tu tamen ossa feres!* (Ov. *Her.* 10.151-152). “Turn about your ship, reverse your sail, glide swiftly back to me! If I have died before you come, ‘twill yet be you who bear away my bones!” Neither Ariadne nor the readers are assured at the end of this letter that it will turn out well for the princess, and so the readers have a clearer insight into Ariadne’s fear and worry. This complete, chilling isolation is what marks Ariadne’s story, and the way which Ovid’s Ariadne reacts to her sudden and complete abandonment is how she distinguishes herself from Catullus’ Ariadne.

In *Heroides* 10, the point of Ariadne’s letter to Theseus is to convey her complete solitude to him, in hopes that he will have pity and come back either to take her away or to bury her properly. This is how Ovid’s Ariadne differs from Catullus’. Ariadne of the *Heroides* has no time to focus on the loss of Theseus’ love, and in the face of her overwhelming isolation, his love seems to be one of the last things on her mind. In Catullus’ version of Ariadne’s abandonment, on the other hand, Ariadne’s only thoughts are for Theseus and the fact that she is without him.

⁸⁴ Bolton 1994:47.

⁸⁵ Ov. *Her.* 10.59,61,66.

⁸⁶ Bolton 1994:45.

Sed neque tum mitrae neque tum fluitantis amictus/illa vicem curans toto ex te pectore, Theseu,/toto animo, tota pendebat perdita mente (Cat. 64.68-70). “Not that she noticed the headband or the veil floating beside her, for it was you that she thought of, Theseus: the wretched girl clung to you in complete desperation!”⁸⁷ While Catullus’ Ariadne would do anything to reunite with Theseus, even to the point of becoming his servant, Ovid’s Ariadne does not ask for love or a relationship of any kind.⁸⁸ In Catullus’ poem, Ariadne exclaims, *at tamen in vestras potuisti ducere sedes,/quae tibi iucundo famularer serva labore,/candida permulcens liquidis vestigia lymphis/purpleave tuum consternens veste cubile* (Cat. 64.160-163). “Nevertheless you could have brought me into your palace as a servant, whose pleasure it would have been to humbly attend you, bathing your white feet in clear water and laying the purple coverlet out in your chamber.” In the *Heroides*, Ariadne refutes this desperate plea; the last thing she wants is to be a slave.

Tantum ne religer dura captiva catena,
 neve traham serva grandia pensa manu,
 cui pater est Minos, cui mater filia Phoebi,
 quodque magis memini, quae tibi pacta fui! (Ov. *Her.* 10.89-92).

But I care not, if I am but not left captive in hard bonds, and not compelled to spin the long task with servile hand—I, whose father is Minos, whose mother the child of Phoebus, and who—what memory holds more close—was promised bride to you!

Ariadne’s pride in her parents and her family stops her from stooping to beg Theseus to be his slave. Ariadne is alone, and afraid, but she remembers being a princess.

Ovid’s Ariadne does not think of herself only as an innocent, passive victim; she is a princess, and she is an acting character. Where Catullus’ Ariadne is purely a victim, Ovid’s

⁸⁷ Catullus 64 is translated by Charles Martin. 1979. *The Poems of Catullus*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁸⁸ Jacobson 1974:225-226.

Ariadne claims credit for part of Theseus' success and she feels guilty for her part.⁸⁹ In Catullus, on the other hand, Ariadne shows no sign of guilt, and she is not implicated in either her family's betrayal or Theseus' success.⁹⁰ In the *Heroides*, she actively takes part, and her emotions reflect that.

As Ovid writes Ariadne's letter to Theseus from her point of view, she becomes a real woman, not just a character who cries over lost love. Ovid's Ariadne feels the weight of her loneliness, and she takes credit for her part which got her there. The Ariadne of the *Heroides* is not like most of the other heroines, because she does not seem to want to reunite with Theseus, but Ariadne's letter is a good example of how Ovid can twist a well-known myth by letting the woman of the story tell it.

⁸⁹ Ov. *Her.* 10.69-72.

⁹⁰ Jacobson 1974:225.

Conclusion

Heroines in traditional myths normally do not get to tell their side of the story. Readers may try to understand the women from the narrator's perspective, but the women are almost never the focus of the work. In his *Heroides*, Ovid gives the women a chance to write to their lovers, and to the readers, and to share their true feelings—their anger, their love, their fear, their loneliness, and more. The range of emotions, the passivity, and the concern for family all identify the voices in the *Heroides* as feminine, but it is the details which make each of the women unique.

Ovid's characterizations of these women through their letters are accurate descriptions of how these women could have reacted in their situations. His Penelope is no longer simply the paragon of faithfulness or an epic wife; along with being faithful and worrying about Odysseus, she accuses him and questions his delay. Ovid's Dido gets angry at Aeneas' abandonment, but she shows a softer side than her epic counterpart when she voices her love for Aeneas and shows concern for his and his son's safety. She is not the fearsome queen who justifies Rome's later war with the Carthaginians; she is a loving woman who does not deserve to be abandoned for the sake of fate and destiny. His Ariadne experiences a fear not completely touched upon in Catullus' rendition of the story, and because of her fear all thoughts of love for Theseus are driven away. These women and others of the *Heroides* get to tell the stories from their point of view, without the heroic values and omniscient narrators refuting or belittling their feelings and experiences. The format of the letter and the way Ovid changes slight details of the original stories enhance the characterizations of the women, and even though Ovid is a man, he shows insight and sympathy when he gives these women their voices. With his *Heroides*, Ovid gives readers insight into the possible thoughts and reactions of mythical women to their abandonment,

and he gives all of the heroines realistic voices which allow the readers to finally know the women of the myths and to understand their feelings, thoughts, and motives.

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