Introduction

Scholarship on the *Heroides* generally characterizes them as more-or-less ineffectual letters written by abandoned women to the men who abandon them. Yet this characterization, while not wholly incorrect, is limited; not only do some of the letters fall outside of this description, but to look at the women who write the individual letters as *only* abandoned deprives them of much of their authorial power. For the *Heroides*, despite their unpopularity in recent centuries, have been immensely influential on other authors.[1] And, as my Chapter 2 epigraph from the *Lettres Portugaises* suggests (below, p. 40), a reading of the *Heroides* that judges solely on the basis of whether the man to whom each letter is addressed returns to the author of that letter reinscribes the tiresome equation of women's personal and professional lives that will be familiar to students of other female artists. More importantly, it misunderstands the aim of poetic composition.[2]

The *Heroides* are epistles putatively designed to persuade, but although they often fail to persuade their mythological addressees, they have persuaded countless generations of their actual readers to view them as works of literature worthy of imitation. The women of the *Heroides* are successful in the same way as other elegiac Augustan poets – they may never "get their man" but they create intricate *personae* and lasting poetry. In fact, the heroines are, because of their very abandonment, perfectly situated to become (like) male Augustan elegists: for both, desire creates

[1] And readers (Kennedy 2002: 222). Exemplary studies of Heroidean influence include Hexter 1986 and McKinley 2001 on *Heroides* commentaries, Brownlee 1990 (on the Spanish *novela sentimental*), Winsor 1963 and Dean 1967 (both on Chaucer), Harvey 1989 (on Donne), and Kauffman 1986 (on the epistolary novel).

[2] See Boym 1991: *passim* on texts read metonymically for poets and Hardie 2002: 36–7 on how Ovid himself provokes this reading. My refusal to focus on the heroes should not undermine the usefulness of earlier studies like Jacobson; his conception of the letters as "psychosynthesis" is very influential upon my own (indeed, upon most) readings of the *Heroides* (1974: 374).

poetry.[3] Indeed, my focus on how the heroines attempt to refashion their stories because of their membership in a poetic community – the fictional community created by their shared presence in a poetic book – is predicated upon the notion that they themselves create influential texts.

This book, which focuses on issues of communal reading and writing, explores the ways in which the Ovidian heroines – *puellae doctae* – are excessively literary and so self-consciously fashion themselves as alluding authors influenced by what they read.[4] Yet the heroines' "source-texts" are often within the *Heroides* themselves, and it is therefore difficult if not impossible to determine who references whom. This suggests that the abandoned women may usefully be compared to the masculine elegiac community, composing their texts together and with reference to the poetic issues of that community (among which are prominently featured a limited/limiting set of scenarios, played out to exhaustion). At the same time, the heroines curtail themselves even more significantly than their male elegiac counterparts, focusing almost exclusively on the poetics of abandonment.[5] Further, the heroines' poetic affinity seems predicated more on genealogy or other superficial factors – since they often adopt and adapt the stories of their family members – than on conscious choice.[6] So, restricted by their sex and the circumstances that surround it, they are perhaps less adventurous than male elegists.

My view of the *Heroides* is thus substantially different from those who see them as failures of communication because they do not effect the returns of their addressees. While the heroines' struggle to rewrite their own destinies is indeed, as many note, circumscribed by their own limitations, as well as their textual pasts and futures, I choose to focus on the struggle itself, unsatisfying and limited as it may sometimes seem, rather than on its outcome. The success of the heroines' efforts should not be judged solely in terms of erotic

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[3] Cf. Hardie 2002: 30–1 and 50–2 on the portrayal of desire in the Ovidian corpus, who notes that (amatory) elegy predicates itself upon an "absent presence"; this is particularly the case in a letter (34). On intertextuality "within a literary coterie," see Edmunds on the neoterics (2001: 20).

[4] Of the ever-growing bibliography on allusion and intertextuality in Latin poetry, Conte 1986, Lyne 1994, Hinds 1998, and now Edmunds are essential reading; the latter notes that the term was originally coined to explain how a text comes into existence (2001: 1; see too his formulation of the difference between the Contean and the Kristevan views of intertextuality on 9). For the *Heroides*, see Jacobson on the "relationships" and "cross-referencing" between individual poems (1974: 376, 379). On intratextuality see Miner (1986: *passim*) and Sharrock in Sharrock and Morales (2000: 1–39).

[5] But see Rosenmeyer, who notes of the *Heroides* and the exile poetry that the repeated act of writing serves to emphasize the isolation of the writer; she sees this "community" as necessarily failed (1997: 39). Cf. the stimulating discussion of "poetry of abandonment" in Lipking 1988: 23–31. On a circle of poetic friends similarly invoked in Ovid's poetry, see Citroni 1995: 433.

[6] As Larmour notes in a discussion of the *contaminatio* of tragic texts into the *Metamorphoses*, this cross-influence is particularly effective when it stems from genealogical roots (1990: 140).

persuasiveness; more importantly, it is also not clear to me that "success" is the most useful way of reading: what is gained by ascertaining that Penelope's letter (e.g.) is *better* than Laodamia's?

As a prelude to this study of the heroines as authors who affect the women in their environments, let me draw the reader's attention, if only in passing, to a peculiar sentence in Plutarch: the *Life of Theseus*, after detailing Theseus' abandonment of Ariadne, notes that the women of Naxos forged and delivered letters from Theseus to Ariadne (20.5); Plutarch does not speculate on their motivation. Let us conceive, for a moment, of these women as writing in response to a letter from Ariadne herself (perhaps even *Heroides* 10). We can then, metaphorically, imagine them as the "first readers" of the *Heroides*. If Ariadne's letter, unsatisfactory as it is to many modern readers, is capable of generating a response – *not* from Theseus, but from other women, who are familiar with the standard plot about abandoned heroines – then she will have been powerful indeed. I do not suggest that Plutarch was alluding to the *Heroides* in this passage, but the fact that his anecdote features *women* responding to a female-authored text opens up a space for the model of reading that will be the focus of this book: we will search through and beyond traditional narratives in order to recuperate a feminine poetics of abandonment that bears both resemblances to and startling differences from the masculine elegists' pose of servitude.[7] Master narratives therefore play an important role in my study, but they will be given second place to the heroines' use of material from one another.

The heroines frequently find themselves in similar situations; their letters therefore share many common features, a fact that has led some readers to label them monotonous.[8] Yet this repetition brings us to the heart of what many find both fascinating and frustrating about the *Heroides*. Much *Heroides* scholarship sees this feature of the poems – and, indeed, of elegy as a whole – as an elegiac kind of "repetition-compulsion," suggesting that Ovid is communicating something about

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[7] Spentzou similarly notes, "each heroine's struggle for control over her own gloomy destiny is also a female artist's effort to (re)write her story against the will of the classical authorities" (2003: 11).

[8] For a summary, see Kennedy (2002): 219–20, and cf. (famously) Wilkinson 1955: 106, Jacobson 1974: 65 and 381–404; even Verducci, generally sympathetic, notes the "disconcerting elasticity" with which heroines are assimilated to one another (1985: 245). On my reading, this is precisely the point; I leave aside the question of whether "monotony" is necessarily displeasing. Lindheim too seeks to recuperate this sameness, viewing the heroines as trapped within a masquerade of their own making. Jolivet's formulation of the *Heroides* as "voracious" vis à vis myth is a helpful way to resolve the differences (2001: 3–4).

the (necessarily?) endless reiteration of love in an elegiac milieu,[9] or, alternately, that the reduplication is designed to undercut sympathy for the women who write; we may be less tolerant of the flaws of the last letter than of the first.

As with much of Ovid's *oeuvre*, however, "repetitive" themes show themselves, on careful examination, to differ in subtle but crucial ways. The women of the *Heroides*, like Odysseus in the *Ars Amatoria*, are accustomed to saying the same thing in different ways (*referre aliter saepe solebat idem*, 2.128), an ability which in the *Ars* is seen as the height of erotic skill. Further, the scenarios in each letter are quite different, despite the fact that Ovid often seems to have altered them to accentuate similarities. Most importantly, the stories are so much alike not because Ovid repeated himself (although there is no doubt that he did), but because he seems to have conceived of his heroines as sharing not only the situation of abandonment and the use of the epistolary form, but also common vocabularies and sets of poetic influences.[10] This is a move that should not surprise us, both because poets traditionally conceive of women abandoned by their lovers as variations on a single theme, and because these particular women have renowned literary genealogies (with which they often seem familiar).[11] Where Ovid innovates is in letting the women share in the knowledge of their entwined filiation. What Kauffman terms the "correspondences between the correspondents" (1986: 42) are key to understanding the poetics of the *Heroides*, and repetitiveness is not a flaw of the collection but rather constitutes the women as members of the same authorial circle.

I will argue throughout this book that Ovid conceived of his literary creations as incorporating prior and contemporary texts into their poetry and that, like himself, some of them are remarkably sophisticated and astute readers. Often, however, inexperience and a tendency to privilege family connections lead them to allude to texts dissimilar to their own in key respects or to construe literature in dangerous and misleading ways. Reading, then, figures centrally in the corpus insofar as the heroines base their own words on their interpretations of the stories of other abandoned

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[9] Barchiesi 1992: 12 on the heroines' composition by "analogia"; Lindheim 2003: *passim*. See Fulkerson 2004: *passim* on the inescapability from elegiac love portrayed in the didactic works.

[10] Conte 1996, building on Slater, sees Petronius' Encolpius as a character who, given a few similar external circumstances, cannot resist fashioning himself as an epic hero. Wilamowitz first noted that Seneca's Phaedra was conscious (as is his Medea) of her literary predecessors (1906: 10). See below for other ancient fictional characters who read and Rabinowitz on literature's presumption that its reader knows the rules (1986: 121).

[11] The most famous example is the Vergilian Dido, who depends on Euripides' and Apollonius' Medea, Catullus' Ariadne, and perhaps Callimachus' Phyllis (Barchiesi 1993a: 352).

women in their community. To this extent they read "resistantly," seeking from canonical poetry information it does not offer.[12] Yet at the same time, to use a different critical vocabulary, they also "misread" (a Bloomian sign of the powerful poet).[13]

The heroines' ways of reading can be seen as illustrating a "feminine" way of reading and writing, for in the *Heroides*, women of mythology are finally given a chance to tell their side of the story, and it is man-centered only on the surface. The *Heroides* present a *fiction* of the female voice that cannot but be provocative in light of the women's distinguished history as characters in (male-authored) master narratives. I return to the women's own voices, mediated as they inevitably are by Ovid, precisely because his "female voice" has seemed so authentic to so many of his readers.[14] Before that underexplored and fascinating female space is foreclosed in the interests of biological accuracy, it deserves to be the center of attention; in keeping with the dictates of embodied authorship, however, the final chapter will bring us back to Ovid's own role in the creation of female poets and female poetry, and there I will offer my answers to the questions theoretically minded readers will have been asking themselves throughout.

It will be obvious by this point that to the feminist question "can/does Ovid write like a woman?" my answer would be yes, precisely because he has seemed to do so to many of his readers throughout the ages, both male and female. I am simultaneously aware that devoting further attention to a "gender-troubled" male poet at the expense of women writers can be seen as a step in the wrong direction. This work is, and must be, post-feminist; I remain unconvinced by claims that biological women (itself an increasingly disputed category) have a monopoly on the feminine.[15] At the same time, while gender concerns will necessarily play a major role in my interpretations – indeed, I see gender and authorship in the *Heroides* as not fully distinguishable – I read the heroines' writing as a function of the choices they exercise rather than deriving simply from their femininity. That is,

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[12] See Fetterley 1978, who offers a way for women to read "male" literature through a feminine lens.

[13] Bloom's "anxiety of influence" has been criticized for being too psychological; while I do not dispute this, it is nevertheless useful shorthand for many of the issues involved in studying the *Heroides*. Spentzou 2003: 53–60 is good on the heroines' "troubled rite of passage into writing," but sketches an overly pessimistic portrait of the consequences of literary skillfulness. Kauffman 1986: 44 is key on underreading and overreading in the *Heroides*.

[14] The poems have been viewed by some readers as "case studies" in female psychology come to life; Ovid's skill at "female ventriloquism" and the difficulties this creates for feminist readers have been well studied by De Jean 1989, Harvey 1989, and Rimell 1999. See too the 1990 *Helios* volume devoted to the issue of whether feminists should eschew Ovid in favor of material realities.

[15] On these issues, see Spentzou 2003: 1–3 and 25.

I am interested in how gender plays into the construction of (authorial)
power rather than in gender for its own sake (Kennedy 2002: 226–8).

A main advantage of my approach is that it offers a way out of certain
critical impasses that often preclude an understanding of these letters: accept-
ing the "community" model and viewing one heroine as reading the text of
another first allows the reader to grant these women an all-too-rare moral
agency[16] and, on a metapoetic level, it dispenses with the need to condemn
Ovid for *contaminatio* of plot. On the contrary, Ovid has articulated a fictional
poetics that mirrors contemporary practices of writing poetry; the writing of
the heroines may serve as a microcosm for contemporary Roman authorial
communities, as the final chapter will discuss. In fact, my reading of the
women of the *Heroides* as authors offers a way of understanding Ovid's own
relationship to his poetry and to his reader. Their struggles for authorial voice
may be less successful than his, but they do not differ in kind.

Because of my interest in reading *through* traditional stories, each chapter
begins by outlining the standard mythological background; this provides a
starting point for my own readings, which are less comprehensible without the
context of secondary literature. This background should also help the reader to
understand why viewing the women as a metaphorical community is fruitful:
several of the poems that have been seen as critical failures can be shown to be
quite the contrary once they are read in light of the other poems of the
collection; rhetorical moves and "misinterpretations" become explicable.

At the same time I am wary of giving too much authority to those stories;
one of the main goals of this book will be to explore what happens if we do
not assume that, where master narrative and heroine diverge, the latter
must be getting it wrong (or that Ovid is taking this opportunity to mock
the heroines). Because of our tendency to stick to the version of the myth
we already know – this despite the necessarily *un*static nature of myth and
mythmaking – we regularly refuse to the heroines the opportunity to create
a different ending. I am not suggesting that we begin teaching mythology
differently, making the story of Briseis and Achilles end with a wedding
and return to Phthia. My point is that by our knowledge (knowledge that,
like the heroines, we have gained by reading) we limit the possibilities of
these women, foreclosing their "happy ending."[17]

Like several recent feminist-oriented studies of the *Heroides*, I tire of
criticism that makes the women inferior to poet and reader. Yet even those
most willing to listen to the heroines will not grant them the power to affect

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[16] See Foley 2001: *passim*, but especially chapter 3, on women in tragedy as moral agents.
[17] The case of Sappho is perhaps most interesting in this light; her letter gives no clues to its end.

their worlds (Barchiesi 1992: 19, Spentzou 2003: 29, 31). This study will do so, leaving the "end" more open-ended than it usually is. For instance, what makes us so sure that Penelope's letter to Odysseus, a brilliant example of intertextuality (Kennedy 1984), has no effect on our reading of Homer? Listening to Penelope, granting the possibility that she may know more than Homer, adds to the portrayal of the reunion scene in Book 23 of the *Odyssey*. The Homeric Odysseus' acceptance of Penelope's claim that, because she has not moved the bed, she has been faithful to him, is peculiar. In fact, she has proved nothing, but if Odysseus has already read *Heroides* 1 (or one of the many other letters Penelope has written, 1.61–2), he will understandably have fewer doubts about her fidelity.

This study builds upon much inspiring and careful work, and I trust that my vast intellectual debts will be apparent.[18] At the same time, there has been no systematic treatment of the mechanics of how the women of the *Heroides*, as a whole, engage with each other's writing. By reading the poems of the *Heroides* in light of one another, I aim to show that their remarkable similarities of content derive not (or not significantly) from Ovid's habit of repeating himself, but primarily from the mythological women's duplication of the poetic principles and literary community of their creator. I will further argue that the *Heroides* can be seen as Ovid's meditation on the dangers (to him and other authors) inherent in assuming an authorial role.

RECENT APPROACHES TO THE *HEROIDES*

As scholars of Ovid and other Augustan poets have documented, the poetry of this period is not only steeped in the poetry of prior and contemporary authors, but also requires from its readers a close familiarity with that tradition. This polymathy does not conflict with the oral performance context of most poetry; Augustan poetry presupposes a reader who is capable of paying attention to an entire collection of poetry at once, even if that (ideal/idealized) reader has never existed.[19] The composition of the "poetic book" has been explored to good effect, but such studies have not

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[18] See, most succinctly, the groundbreaking statement in Barchiesi that "Ovid's heroines . . . are conditioned by an intertextuality which is not simply mythological, but is specifically literary" (1993a: 346). Lindheim's reading of the "repetitiveness" of the heroines as rooted in their need for rhetorical self-presentation is immensely influential upon my own.

[19] On "literary competence" (the rules the reader must bring to bear in making sense of a text), cf. Culler 1975 *passim* and Rabinowitz 1986: 121–4. Fantham notes that the existence of a poetic book presupposes an expert readership with continued access to the poems (1996: 64). Winkler illustrates the vital importance of readership in ancient texts, and Edmunds offers powerful arguments for assuming a text-based audience for much Roman poetry (1985: 95–107; 2001: 108–16). See too Conte

been done on the *Heroides*. This book innovates in its introduction of community to the model of learned allusiveness, insofar as the heroines seem to create for themselves a shared space of poetic composition that is parallel to but different from the mythic world they inhabit. Perhaps the clearest example of their departure from the world of reality is the difficulty of putting the letters in order of relative composition: notions of chronology external to the poems do not apply within them – the heroines write in a timeless (Irigarayan?) continuum of female authorship.[20] In the masculine world, wars happen and heroes go on quests, but in the "feminine space" in which these poems are composed, nothing ever changes: women are always being left, but more importantly, are always reading and writing the same texts.

The prior scholarly neglect of the *Heroides*' complex blend of the elegiac, the epistolary, and the mythic has amply been rectified, as the depth and breadth of recent work on the corpus demonstrates. The best of the new scholarship examines individual poems (rather than approaching the collection with a monolithic understanding),[21] explores issues of irony, gender, genre, and intertextuality within individual passages, and mirrors the move in classical studies as a whole toward approaches that incorporate multiple methodologies. Yet some of the *Heroides* remain understudied, and scholarly concentration on individual, well-known poems often precludes an understanding of the whole. More work is needed to map patterns of allusive irony throughout the collection. Without such studies, the understanding of even the most frequently studied poems cannot be complete, since the poems are in constant dialogue with one another.

Literary studies of the *Heroides* tend to concentrate on three aspects of the poetry. The first seeks to explore the intertexts of the corpus, to find verbal or situational parallels in other poems outside the collection.

1986: 61 and Smith 1994 (both key) on readership within the *Heroides*. In this book I privilege "reading" over "performance" (although the two are not truly distinguishable in antiquity; Gamel 1998: 87) because the *Heroides* are letters and not simply poetry. There is some debate about whether the *Heroides* were themselves performed (Cunningham 1949: 100), and a performance-based study of them would doubtless yield useful results. On performance in elegy, see Quinn 1982 and Gamel 1998 (the latter on gendered performance). For the ways the "doctitude" of elegiac poetry (especially epistolary) presumes a community, see Habinek 1998: 12, 152–4, 163–4.

[20] A brief summary of Irigarayan (feminine) language: it is private, coopted from public discourse and so sharing certain elements of it; more importantly, it is a language that particularizes women as essentializes Woman, emphasizing both the difference between women and difference of Woman. See, most concisely, Moi 1985; Chapter 7.

[21] For instance, the notion that the *Heroides* are *suasoriae* has, thanks to Oppel 1968, been replaced by a much more profitable exploration of how the rhetorical elements of individual poems (drawing upon *suasoriae* and *ethopoiiae*) contribute to their effectiveness. See too Von Albrecht 1981: 207–8 on the importance of communication (and thus, to the Roman mind, rhetoric) in readership.

The second approach consists of genre studies, explorations of the epistolary[22] or elegiac[23] aspects of the poems. The third approach, perhaps the single most promising way to read the *Heroides*, discusses individual poems within their mythological context and explores the ensuing results. Each of these three methods is fruitful, but in order to be most useful, they are best integrated. One of the long-favored ways of reading the *Heroides* is an examination of their "source-texts" because each poem seems designed to refer the reader to a specific literary predecessor. The intertextual ironies explored by this process have provided much of the meat of *Heroides* scholarship in recent years; interesting work has also been done on the (probable) source-texts we do *not* have.

Much of the older scholarship on the *Heroides* had assumed their status as letters to be an extraneous (and unfortunate) complication,[24] but recent studies have placed the letter squarely back into the equation.[25] Indeed, on my reading, the letter form is appropriate even when it seems most inappropriate, because the women who write do so, in a sense, to and for one another (and are themselves voracious and highly suggestible readers of texts). The mechanics of composition and transmission are clearly not meant to be closely examined:[26] as is often pointed out, Ariadne would have had trouble finding a mailbox on the apparently deserted island of Naxos. Further, it might have made more sense (and, I shall suggest, preserved her own life) if Canace were to have spoken to her brother instead of laboriously writing to him in elegiac couplets, pen and sword in hand. Yet the fact that these women write poetic letters serves not only Ovid's needs but also their own, and reinforces the desirability of a study of

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[22] E.g. Kauffman 1986: 30–61, Kirfel 1969: 11–36, Rahn 1958, Rosati 1992; see Malherbe 1988: 12ff. on ancient epistolary theory in general. Hintermeier details epistolary, elegiac, and dramatic elements of the double letters (1993: 152–89).

[23] Spoth's 1992 study is fundamental. The best of this work studies how certain of the heroines manipulate (or fail to manipulate) elegiac conceits to serve their own ends or the ways they betray their "truly" tragic, epic, or pastoral nature. Labate captures the paradox of Ovidian elegy, noting that the poet insists on the unique character of her love while simultaneously placing herself into a network of generic convention (1984: 107). An aspect of this topic that has been touched upon by many but not well explored is elegy's connection with "plaintive lament and pity" (Hinds 1987a: 104). But cf. Barchiesi 1992: 21–2 on ways the *Heroides* are *not* typically elegiac.

[24] Despite the fact that Ovid himself calls attention to their epistolary nature, not only in the corpus itself, but also in *Am.* 2.18, where the terminology is specifically epistolary. See, e.g., Bradley 1969: 159 on the fruitlessness and sterility of the letters *qua* letters, and Vessey, who thinks that in *Heroides* 9, the epistolary form is "thrown away" (1969: 355).

[25] Kennedy draws attention to the epistolarity of the corpus, but suggests that *Heroides* 1 is a near-unique case (1984: 416–17). Lindheim focuses on the rhetorical aspects of the letter form.

[26] See, e.g., Vessey on the implausibility of Briseis' writing in a pre-literate society (1976: 91). On the other hand, Ovid himself is not interested in these mechanics; cf. *Ars. Am.* 3.617–30, which insists that letters will always find a way to reach their addressees.

them as not simply women who are unhappy in their personal lives, but as authors. Their status as letters, then, is key to a nuanced understanding of the *Heroides*. Epistolarity most profitably takes into account the situations of the heroines as they compose, asking *why* they write letters and exploring their relationships to their readers and intended addressees (not necessarily the same people). Some of the letters draw attention to their own epistolarity or to the physical circumstances of their composition, but critics often neglect the epistolarity of the remaining poems.[27]

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the *Heroides*, intimately related to the fact that they are letters, is the authority they grant to their reader, whether that reader is their addressee, who is given innumerable choices, about whether to read and how to read, or the external reader, who must decide whose version of events to believe – the traditional story or the new "feminine" reading offered here.[28] In the first of two basic ways of conceptualizing reading, the author is seen as superior or aggressive and the reader is compelled to enact an already written script (so Svenbro 1993 and, for instance, Acontius [see below, pp. 135–7]), while the other entails the reader's active creation of meaning (a meaning that may or may not correlate with the meaning the author was hoping to generate). As Gamel and other students of performance have shown, the latter model is closer to how antiquity viewed reading (1998: 89 and *passim*); indeed my final chapter will discuss precisely the issue of authorial inability to control meaning.

In addition to focusing on epistolarity, recent scholarship has also – often disturbingly – implicated the external reader in the troubled world of readership in these poems. If it is improbable that the letter Ariadne writes on Naxos will reach Theseus, how much more unlikely is it to reach us, who hold it (or, as I will suggest it does, to reach Phaedra)? Multiple layers are created in the *Heroides* by the fact that we, as external readers, intercept the letters and thus eavesdrop on a conversation clearly marked as private.[29] Further, the fact that the heroines draw attention to properties of their

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27 *Her.* 1–5, 7, 10–15 contain reference to their own "writtenness." The letters themselves seem at times to ignore their own epistolary composition (as the *Amores* sometimes ignore their status as written poems), but the critic can never do so.

28 Lindheim 2003 too is concerned with the power the heroines give away; for them writing often becomes yet another method of submission. Spentzou, by contrast, sees the heroines as "circumventing" the model of the powerful reader (2003: 39–40).

29 Farrell 1998: 315–16, 334–6. Cf. Carson 1986: 97 and Rosenmeyer 2001: 67 and 95 on the inherently erotic nature of all letters and the wooing of the eavesdropping external reader in fictional letters. Spentzou well observes that the text's precarious journey from heroine to us emphasizes the possibility of "interceptive readings" and the "collection's eager need for intermediaries" (2003: 28).