

Full details can be found in the edition of Munari, *op. cit.* (n. 19). There are two excellent translations of the *Amores*: A. G. Lee, *Ovid's Amores* (London, 1968) and Christopher Marlowe, *The Elegies of Ovid* (c. 1597). The latter will be of special interest to those interested in Ovid's influence upon English literature – see chapter VII below.

JW Bums (ed.)
Ovid (London 1973)

The Heroides

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The Heroine as an Elegiac Figure

sic ubi fata vocant, udis abiectus in herbis
 ad vada Maeandri concinit albus olor.
 nec quia te nostra sperem prece posse moveri,
 adloquor: adverso movimus ista deo.
 sed merita et famam corpusque animumque pudicum
 cum male perdiderim, perdere verba leve est.
 certus es ire tamen miseramque relinquere Didon,
 atque idem venti vela fidemque ferent?
 certus es, Aenea, cum foedere solvere navcs,
 quaeque ubi sint nescis, Itala regna sequi?

(*Heroides*, VII. 1–10)

(It is in this way, when death calls, that the white swan, lying in the damp grass beside the Maeander River, sings its last song. Not that I might hope that you could be moved by my plea; the prayer I have set in motion goes to a hostile deity. But after I have wasted so ignobly good deeds, reputation, and chaste body and soul, wasting words is a trivial matter. Are you determined to go, however, and to abandon poor Dido; and will the same winds carry off your ship and your sacred trust? Are you determined, Aeneas, at the same time to free yourself from your oath and your ships from Carthage, then to hunt out the Italian kingdom about whose location you are totally ignorant?)

Ovid opens his seventh *Epistle* with six lines that establish the mood of the speaker and prepare us, once we hear the name of Dido in line 7, to define the dramatic situation. In the opening couplet the speaker compares herself to the dying swan and

alludes to the familiar ancient belief in the 'swan song'. If the analogy has any precision, we may expect that the speaker regards herself either as dying or as ready for suicide, and the elegiac form of verse takes on the plaintive note appropriate to its age-old use in funereal situations. The second couplet opens up a gap between swan and speaker. Whereas the swan sings without reference to audience, with no expectation of changing its doom, this speaker is addressing someone and trying to move him, although she voices little hope. Her professed hopelessness acts in spite of her words, or rather because of the very choice of terms, to stir our sympathy; and we may suspect that she is calculating on some sympathy from her addressee. It is not hard to discern the psychological motives here: she protests a little too obviously.

Line 4 causes the translator and commentator some difficulty. Ovid has repeated the verb *movere* and evoked a second time the prayer-context, and we ignore the echo at our peril.¹ My suggested translation clarifies the context: 'the prayer I have set in motion.' But there is an added point to make, I believe. By re-using *movere*, by changing it from passive to active, Ovid is revealing the true psychological motivations of the speaker. Despite her pose of hopelessness, she actively combats her fate, setting words in motion that subconsciously she hopes will move her addressee. Ovid has a distinct interest in showing how spoken words reveal intentions that belie or seriously/amusingly qualify the professions of his speakers.

A few words about the ablative phrase *adverso deo*. We all know what the two words mean, that all the activity in *movimus* is futile because a god opposes its success. So the commentators concentrate on defining the god: he must be Cupid, god of love. Yes, in retrospect we might well adopt this limitation on Ovid's generalized phrase. However, if we press the correspondence between lines 3 and 4 (which is all that we have to go on at this early stage in the poem), we should be tempted to interpret the so-far-unnamed addressee as the deity. Dido prays to him as a god in line 3, disclaiming hope; she explains the hopelessness in 4 by calling the god *adversus*. In this prayer context and the ambiguity of *adverso deo*, I suggest, Ovid has initiated one of the fundamental paradoxes of this *Epistle* (as well as of other *Heroides*): the woman looks up to the man with pleading, devoted love, as to a god, while at the same time she struggles with her

awareness of the man's ungodlike, even inhuman behaviour towards her. Her words vacillate wildly among prayer, complaint and imprecation. When in line 7 we learn that the speaker is Dido, we must revise *our* estimate of the dramatic situation and the godhead of the addressee. But Dido continues to pray movingly to Aeneas (cf. *precor* 63, 163).

Having disclaimed any hope of moving the addressee, the speaker is now bound to justify her words. This she does in an effective manner which Ovid has enhanced by wit. Ostensibly she gives no real justification; she merely states that she has words or, as we might put it, time to waste. That would seem to reinforce her sense of hopelessness and doom. When, however, Ovid lets her combine the ideas of wasting words and wasting values, he not only increases her pathos, but he also insinuates a discordant note that functions as the transition to the next couplet. Why list all those things she has wasted – good deeds, reputation, chastity? Partly to make *perdere verba* effective by contrast: in rhetorical terms, Ovid has contrived a brilliant anti-climax. Partly, however, she is also reminding the addressee of how he has caused her to waste these values, and, as she reminds him, her own memory harks back to earlier days and stirs her indignation. She cannot grasp how her 'god', to whom she has sacrificed so much, can now be hostile, and by these very words to him, which she labels 'wasted', she obviously wants to stir his compunction. In the end, though, we shall recognize that her expressed words are right. Because the gap between past deeds and sacrifices and present suffering is too great to bridge, for all her pleading words the speaker cannot persuade her addressee: her cause is hopeless; she is wasting those emotional words.

Now at last Ovid is ready to reveal who his speaker is, in a set of angry questions that protest plaintively against Aeneas' decisive return to duty from his idyllic love. She calls herself 'poor Dido', her self-pity calling for pity from Aeneas. How can he leave her alone to her misery after all she has done for him? If he abandons her, he will have violated his promises, she claims; but she voices her dismay with the rhetorical device of zeugma, whereby the one verb *ferent* functions jointly, though in different senses, with its two objects. (Note the alliteration in 8 also.) From Dido's point of view, Aeneas' departure for Italy cannot be justified: it is the rejection of her love, the breaking of his trust.

And what is he seeking? Worse than nothing, in her terms: Italian kingdoms in some unknown region. Once again, in 9-10, Ovid allows her to balance the damage Aeneas causes against the futile goal he pursues. If, by sailing, Aeneas breaks his oath and achieves no positive results, everything must be done to stop him, and Dido rightfully claims our and his pity.

Thus, in ten lines, Ovid has introduced us to a situation and the woman who is struggling to combat it. Although she feels herself doomed, she is too strong a personality to give up yet, and she hurls herself into an energetic effort to stop Aeneas from leaving. Out of her hopelessness she creates an appeal to Aeneas' pity and sense of duty towards her. Building up her own case, stressing Aeneas' immoral behaviour towards herself and his senseless pursuit of an impossible goal in Italy, she tries to prevent the departure which, as she knows only too well, will result in their permanent separation, the end to her hopes that she so dreads.

I need hardly remind my reader that Ovid was placing his audience in a highly familiar drama. Not long after Virgil died in 19 B.C., Augustus saw to it that the *Aeneid* was published and available to the Roman world. We can well imagine that the appearance of Virgil's epic, recognized as a superlative work of genius at the first reading, enhanced the celebration of the Secular Games of 17 B.C. Within a decade it was so well known in Rome that Ovid, fitting the story of Dido to the general plot of the *Heroides*, could exploit his audience's familiarity with Virgil in order to make something new of Dido's wretched fate.

In Virgil's account of *Aeneid*, IV, Dido discovers that the Trojans are preparing to sail, and she angrily accosts Aeneas. Aeneas tries to calm her down, while insisting on the necessity of his departure, and she replies with even wilder wrath, so wild that she faints before completing her tirade. This is the last time the lovers are together. When she recovers consciousness and finds the Trojans still intent on sailing, she makes further attempts, in desperation resorting to messengers like her sister Anna or, as Ovid imagines, a letter such as the elegiac poem we are considering:

ire iterum in lacrimas, iterum temptare precando
cogitur et supplex animos summittere amanti,
ne quid inexpertum frustra moritura relinquat.

(*Aen.*, IV. 413-15)

(Again she is forced to tears, again driven to try prayers, to surrender her pride to passion and beg, so that she might not leave any possibility untried – a woman doomed to die in vain.)

It is from these lines and their dramatic situation that Ovid starts his poem. Dido does not tell us that she is weeping here; but near the end of her letter she refers to her tears and tries to make one final pathetic argument from them (185-6). She does refer to her prayers; she regards herself as *moritura* in the swan-analogy; and the hopelessness she voices so pathetically catches the sense of Virgil's *frustra*.

I said, however, that Ovid makes something new of the Virgilian situation. There are two chief differences between Ovid's and Virgil's Dido, one of which makes itself felt in these first two lines and throughout the *Epistle*, the other of which, barely adumbrated in line 10, gradually impresses us. The best way of defining the first main difference is to point to the style that Ovid has given his character. She manipulates words with an elegance and rhetorical mastery that suggests a supreme self-consciousness, a desire to dramatize her emotions and her deserts effectively, perhaps more than to voice them directly. Thus, instead of making an immediate plea, she starts by comparing herself beautifully with a dying swan. After we let our imaginations stray to that lovely pathetic picture, we hear her use the rhetorical ploy of negating her true purpose in order to present ironically a false purpose: she has no objection to wasting words! It is easy to let ourselves be trapped by those carefully weighed – not wasted – words. However, as I noted earlier, Ovid likes to characterize through direct speech, to reveal subconscious motivations behind a speaker's words. Thus, for all her professed hopelessness and vividness as a dying swan, for all her claim to throw away words lightly, Dido acts as though these words are her very *raison d'être*, the last link with Aeneas and with life. Indeed her words provide the sole means Ovid employs to give his character being; no background details, no dramatic introduction, commentary or epilogue in any way fill in the portrait.

Now some men object to an articulate woman, and many Ovidian critics – all men, of course – object strenuously to a Dido who manipulates rhetoric so ably and so cleverly works upon the

sympathies of Aeneas (and us). Virgil's Dido, they correctly observe, is so immersed in her tragedy that she not only never wastes words in any sense, but also she never seems to pause to calculate effects, to try to arrange details and pictures so as to dramatize herself. It is a triumph of Virgilian poetry that his Dido, who speaks with great power, strikes us as simple, direct, and frequently inarticulate, quite genuinely at the mercy of her emotions. Thus, when before her last plea to Aeneas he describes her as *moritura*, destined to die, we feel that the incoherence and impetuosity of her words belong to a woman who will soon be a suicide. Not that Virgil abandons rhetoric in giving words to his Dido, far from it. But his rhetoric springs integrally from his poetic intentions, which are to represent a woman overcome by emotions, a woman and not the self-controlled queen who so calmly and regally welcomed the Trojans in *Aeneid*, 1. Whatever she says, he has circumscribed it with his narrative frame, and no audience should – although more than one has succumbed – surrender its objectivity and view the epic situation as Virgil's Dido does.

Ovid's purposes are different, and his articulate Dido aims at and can – if we hear her rightly – achieve a success that bears no relation to epic values or the power of a tragic heroine. Take the tragic element. Virgil shows us how Dido falls from queen to mere woman, then follows her to her bitter suicide and death. Ovid abstracts his Dido from that total drama, and freezes her in a single moment. When she opens her letter, she regards herself as a dying swan, and, as she ends it, she self-consciously evokes *scribentis imago* (183), the picture of herself as letter-writer, Aeneas' sword on her lap dripping with tears. Naturally we are to assume that she will use the sword on herself soon, but that is outside the letter. Her mood has not appreciably changed in the course of writing the letter, and the final funereal allusions, repeating the initial ones, also constitute part of her argument against Aeneas' departure. She is using the threat of suicide to weaken Aeneas' resolution; Virgil's Dido never acted so deliberately, and consequently her suicide seemed to be the gradual result of despair, not a dramatic plan that she first formed to win back Aeneas. Ovid's Dido, then, does not pull us into a tragic situation or the character of a tragic heroine caught at the moment of self-realization; his Dido pulls us into a dramatic situation

entirely by her own words, and, by her obvious desire to dramatize herself, invites us to pity her artistically contrived character, but at the same time to admire the artistry which she (and Ovid) used to contrive it. She does not die in Ovid's drama; she remains forever a woman arguing with facts, offering love affectively. One responds to that woman differently from the way one does to Virgil's tragic heroine.

Let me put it another way. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil separates his effects so that, whereas Dido speaks directly out of her tragic situation and makes on us a clear, undivided impression of a broken woman, the poet has created a dramatic frame for her that enables us to put her words in perspective, judge her character, and in the end accept her suicide as sad but appropriate. In his *Epistle*, on the other hand, Ovid combines his effects. His Dido speaks from her situation, but with such conscious art and within such circumscribed limits that, at the same time as we start to respond with the pity she demands, we are stopped by our awareness that she is exploiting that pity, and we end up by being charmed, I think, by the tension this one woman produces in us. Since the poet does not frame Dido's speech or qualify it by any direct intrusion, we are invited to exercise our own judgment and sophistication and to discern, on the basis of our own experience, where Dido ceases, so to speak, to be the purely pathetic character she represents herself to be and becomes also the clever woman. We neither go so far in sympathy for Ovid's Dido as we do for Virgil's, nor on the other hand do we feel obliged in the end to condemn her. Rather, Ovid seems to be intent on showing us a familiar feminine personality, warm, articulate, self-conscious and self-deceiving at the same time. This appeal to our sophisticated humanity, not to the high seriousness evoked by Virgil's tragic epic, is one major effect that Ovid aims at and achieves by his first main innovation, his adoption of an entirely un-Virgilian style for his Dido.

I believe that many Romans responded favourably to Ovid's new way of letting Dido speak, that, although he may not have pleased Augustus or the more confirmed members of the Establishment, he won applause from a large audience that was capable of the sophisticated response he required. Such sophistication, however, is not available to all ages, and Ovid's Dido has met far less consistent appreciation than Virgil's. Chaucer and

Shakespeare would have understood her, and I have hope that our era, precisely because of its complexities, its odd sense of humour, and its new, hard-won attitude towards women, can see and accept Ovid's Dido for what she is. The effects of Romanticism and late-Victorian prejudices have just about worn off, and we should be prepared to realize that spontaneity in art is nonsense, that the *impression* of direct emotion is but one of many optional values. It is not necessary to labour the point about Romanticism's disservice to Roman literature and to Ovid in particular. Instead of citing an obviously horrible example of Victorian incomprehension, let me remind my reader of the experience of John Dryden, who, having translated Ovid's *Epistle* and then later Virgil's *Aeneid*, voiced his open hostility to the former. Wouldn't one have expected better from a leading poet of the Restoration? Shouldn't intelligent Joseph Addison have protested against such prejudice?

In Number 62 of the *Spectator*, which appeared on 11 May 1710, a decade after Dryden's death, Addison quoted with approval some observations of the former, in order to support his contention that poets who lack 'the strength of genius to give that majestic simplicity to nature, which we so much admire in the works of the ancients, are forced to hunt after foreign ornaments, and not to let any piece of wit, of what kind soever, escape them'. Ovid serves Addison as his primary example of such weak genius and misplaced wit, Dryden as his main authority, in the following passage:

Mr Dryden makes a very handsome observation on Ovid's writing a letter from Dido to Aeneas, in the following words: 'Ovid (says he, speaking of Virgil's fiction of Dido and Aeneas) takes it up after him, even in the same age, and makes an ancient heroine of Virgil's new-created Dido; dictates a letter for her, just before her death, to the ungrateful fugitive; and, very unluckily for himself, is for measuring a sword with a man so much superior in force to him on the same subject. I think I may be judge of this, because I have translated both. The famous author of the Art of Love has nothing of his own; he borrows all from a greater master in his own profession, and, which is worse, improves nothing which he finds: nature fails him,

and being forced to his old shift, he has recourse to witticism. This passes, indeed, with his soft admirers, and gives him the preference to Virgil in their esteem.'

It is plain that neither Dryden nor Addison is a 'soft admirer' of Ovid's Dido.

From what I have said earlier, the reader will understand that both critics were, in my opinion, using the wrong critical weapons when they attacked Ovid for lacking strength of genius, for letting Nature fail him, and for desperately resorting to any shred of wit in order to cover up his deficiencies. Ovid is most definitely not making the slightest effort 'to give that majestic simplicity to nature, which we so much admire in the works of the ancients'. (Parenthetically let it be said that we might admire other features, such as sophistication, in certain ancients if we appreciated more accurately the contributions of Hellenistic and Roman literature to our total view of 'the ancients'.) But perhaps the best way to make the point – and at the same time to review our evaluation of Ovid's style – is to show how Dryden struggled with his prejudices when he translated Ovid's *Epistle* for an edition of the *Heroides*, rendered by several poets, that appeared in 1680. Here are Dryden's lines which parallel the opening passage that I have less artistically translated, then discussed in detail:

So, on Meander's banks, when death is nigh,
The mournful swan sings her own elegy.
Not that I hope (for, oh, that hope were vain!)
By words your lost affection to regain;
But, having lost whate'er was worth my care,
Why should I fear to lose a dying prayer?
'Tis then resolv'd poor Dido must be left,
Of life, of honour, and of love bereft!
While you, with loosen'd sails and vows, prepare
To seek a land that flies the searcher's care.

For all its elegance, this translation makes some interesting changes in the original Latin and in Ovid's organization that, in combination, alter Ovid's effects and imply Dryden's embarrassment with the Roman poet. Since the Latin contains no 'mournful' and no reference to elegy, Dryden has started by overstressing the pathos of the scene which Ovid renders by

more concrete details (e.g. *udis abiectus in herbis, albus olor*). In the next three couplets, which Ovid isolated from each other, Dryden drastically revises the organization. Thus, whereas Ovid made careful use, we saw, of the prayer motif in 3-4, Dryden eliminates that in favour of a sentimental parenthesis and the use of 'words' (taken from *verba* 6), but introduces the motif in 6 as a 'dying prayer' (where *verba* had been). What is the result? The attenuation of the very wit which so much offended Dryden for its 'unnatural' quality.² Instead of a general supplication, for which we as yet can provide no precise context – an unknown 'you' being implored, as Ovid wrote it – Dryden limits the situation with 'your lost affection to regain'. The clever anticlimax contrived by Ovid, in which the key Roman values of *merita, famam, corpus*, and *animum pudicum* are then capped by *verba*, disappears. In its place, Dryden balances a vague 'whate'er was worth my care' against 'a dying prayer', and indeed tips the balance in favour of the more precise and pathetic prayer. In lines 7 and 8, the same strategy seems to determine Dryden's moves. Ovid used witty zeugma, in his alliterative clause *venti vela fidemque ferent*, to render the simultaneity of effects: the same winds will carry off ship and sacred trust. Apparently unable to stomach the breach of taste, Dryden ignores the Latin and borrows some of the precise terms from 6, to produce an eloquent climactic triad that again asserts too strongly Dido's love and her determination to die. Only in line 9 does Dryden permit Ovid's wit to emerge, when he faithfully renders 'with loosen'd sails and vows'. But even there he reduces its effect by ignoring the anaphora *certus es* and then, in the magnificent metaphorical version of 10, abandoning *nescis*; thus, Dido's sardonic contrast between Aeneas' determination to leave and his uncertainty about his destination vanishes.

What Dryden has done here, whether conscious of it or not, is to revise Ovid's stylistic techniques so as to remove the 'faults' Dryden sensed in the letter: the translator eliminates or reduces 'unnatural' witticism in order to give Dido the 'natural' diction he believes appropriate, or, as Addison described it, 'to give that majestic simplicity to nature, which we so much admire in the works of the ancients'. Far from being unusual, the treatment of these ten lines agrees closely with Dryden's manner of translation throughout the letter. Thus, to note but a few additional

examples, Dryden masks the parenthetical force of 25, where Ovid lets Dido's passion erupt into expression, by connecting the line directly with the wife (*uxor*) of 24 and talking of a love that burns bright 'with purer light'. In 29-30, Ovid contrives a witty evocation of Catallus' famous *odi et amo*:

non tamen Aenean, quamvis male cogitat, odi:
sed queror infidum, quæstaque peius amo.

Dryden gratuitously replaces 29 and produces the following couplet:

Myself I cannot to myself restore;
Still I complain, and still I love him more.

In 31-2, Ovid allows Dido to break the illusion and wittily address Venus and Cupid: in the Latin, Aeneas is to play the soldier in Cupid's camp (*castris militet ille tuis*). Dryden shuns this coquettish female and so puts in her mouth a pathetic reference to 'my bleeding heart', then totally alters the soldier-image to achieve: 'And pierce thy brother's (sc. heart) with an equal dart.'³ Whatever the poetic merit, the result in each case is to make the passage less Ovidian.

The critical terminology with which Dryden and Addison were operating – and which unfortunately still continues in use with too many classicists today – opposes witticism or wit to nature. What Addison required of Dido was natural simplicity; what he found in Ovid's Dido was unnatural artificiality in the form of wit. Without going into the somewhat biased definition of 'nature' used by Addison and Dryden, I propose to enlarge the scope of this Dryden-Ovid antithesis and get at the second major difference between Virgil and Ovid, to which I referred earlier. We might best start from that phrase 'majestic simplicity to nature', where, for our purposes, the key word is *majestic*. It is quite correct to call Virgil's portrait of Dido majestic, whereas that adjective cannot fit Ovid's Dido. If we accept the judgment and prejudice of critics like Dryden and Addison, then we can easily introduce a series of laudatory epithets parallel to *majestic* (e.g. grand, heroic, tragic, epic, powerful) to describe Virgil's highly successful portrait of Dido; but we see Ovid as a mere Virgil manqué, either trying and failing to make Dido majestic because of his lamentable witticism or trying to do something different from Virgil and making a silly, unnatural woman of

the queen, a trivialized Dido. The problem lies in attributing such value to *majestic* that it becomes the criterion against which Ovid's achievement must be judged. I should rather view Ovid's Dido on his own terms, as unmajestic perhaps, but more importantly as fulfilling Ovid's new conception of the character, for whom he has created appropriate diction and a suitably limited dramatic context. Thus, instead of talking of Ovid's Dido as the negative or faulty version of Virgil's, I should prefer to use neutral terms for both and talk of a contrast between a *heroic* and a *charming* Dido.

Although Virgil's Dido does not confine herself to the decorum set by the Homeric heroines Andromache and Penelope, anyone would agree that his Dido is magnificent, heroic. He allows her occasionally to speak in unheroic terms (for example, when she voices the vain hope that she might have borne a *parvulus Aeneas*, to play in her palace after Aeneas leaves), and thereby he invites us to inspect the values for which Aeneas is supposed to stand, to which she is being sacrificed. The heroic is not for Virgil unequivocally good; it must be criticized and accepted only by conscious decision. For all that, however, Virgil regards it as central to his conception of Dido to insist that she is a queen as much as a woman. So long as she remains faithful to her responsibilities as queen it seems that she is also a successful and happy woman: she is both beautiful (*forma pulcherrima*, *Aen.*, I. 496) and happy (*laeta*, I. 540, *laetissima*, I. 685 – with some irony). Once, however, she succumbs to passion, Virgil emphasizes her unhappiness (*infelix*, *miserrima*, starting at the end of Book I in line 749) and ignores her beauty.⁴ There is no gratification in Dido's love; whereas her womanhood is not enhanced, her status as queen is dramatically undermined. The creative activities which define the building of her realm cease; rumours divide the Carthaginians; and neighbouring enemies see an opportunity to attack. When she makes her pleas to Aeneas, Virgil's Dido recognizes fully that she is a fallen queen as much as a fallen woman. In her judgment, she has lost all right or chance to continue in power, and accordingly she makes her appeals in order to hold on to the man for whom she gave up so much. However, after it becomes obvious that Aeneas will not alter his plans, Virgil allows his Dido to face her despair with grandeur, so that she strikes us as tragically majestic at the time of her suicide.

In her later speeches Dido expresses the national hatred of her Carthaginians for the Romans (IV. 622ff.), and she declares, after estimating her accomplishments, that she still retains *magna mei imago* (IV. 654). Thus, on one important level, Dido's death clearly points to the ultimate destruction of mighty Carthage by the Romans, one great power by another. Virgil is not exclusively interested in the personal pathos of Dido, nor does he concentrate solely on that aspect. Dido functions in subordination to the themes of the epic, which include personal motives and emotions in a larger framework that, in a crisis, requires personal to yield to public values. Moreover, he contrasts Dido's with Aeneas' pathos, her failure with his qualified success. Whereas she forsakes her queenly responsibilities to pursue her passion, Aeneas reluctantly forsakes his lover's duties to pursue his kingdom. Virgil never lets go of these heroic themes or the heroic characters that embody them.

If Virgil moves some distance from Homeric heroism in the direction of fuller psychological perception of his characters and so allows an uneasy tension to exist for a while between Dido the queen and Dido the woman, Ovid, on the other hand, moves right out of the heroic framework. His Dido emerges simply as a woman, a famous woman, but otherwise not to be distinguished from any woman about to be abandoned by the typically selfish male. As she views herself, the fact that she is a queen of Carthage has virtually no significance at the moment; she recognizes no responsibilities either for herself or Aeneas except those of love. Arguing for her love, she expresses a variety of emotions. Since, however, Ovid frees her from the grandeur and majesty Virgil sought, her arguments tend to produce an impression of a charming, even coquettish woman of passion. Nothing matters for her apart from her love for Aeneas. If she carries out her threat of suicide, it will be without shame for her un-queenly behaviour, without concern for her dead husband Sychaeus. Aeneas alone is to blame, she claims, with a final epigram that is more witty than pathetic: *praebuit Aeneas et causam mortis et ense* (195) (Aeneas provided both the reason for death and the weapon).

Because Ovid deliberately circumscribes the range of Dido's interests and emotions, it is obvious that he produces a clash with Virgil's Dido that his Roman audience was expected to appreciate. By making the heroic queen into a charming woman,

he pulls Dido out of her distant epic world and brings her to Augustan Rome. I do not think that we need assume that Ovid therefore negates the epic world and its value, but that he is amused, and expects to amuse us, by his humane and courtly representation of majestic Dido. Whether we emphasize the greater psychological concern of Ovid's portrait or use generic terms to argue that elegiac qualities have replaced the epic, the fact remains that Ovid was not 'measuring a sword' with Virgil (*pace* Dryden), but playing with Virgil's *Aeneid* and extracting from it, as from a capacious source, whatever might be useful. Consider two instances. It was a conventional fashion of conveying another's inhumanity to assert that no human mother bore him but that he was produced by savage beasts or the like. Virgil's Dido reacts violently to Aeneas' defence of his departure by erupting with such a charge of inhumanity (*Aen.*, iv. 365ff.). Ovid's Dido is, as we have noted, less violent and less majestic, so he handles this *topos* differently. In 29-30 Dido reports her dilemma of *odi et amo*. Then, under the spell of love, she appeals to Venus for help. But Ovid plans on using Venus in a double manner: as the goddess of love and as the mother of Aeneas. (Virgil avoids the ambivalence; his Dido appeals to Juno, never to Venus.) Arrogating to herself a false position, Dido asks Venus to spare her 'daughter-in-law' (Dido). She then avails herself of another double relation: Cupid as god of love and brother of Aeneas. (I have indicated above how this wit offended Dryden and was drastically attenuated in his translation.) All this is an innovation on Virgil, yet all the details lay ready in the *Aeneid* for Ovid's novel use. After she has played with these conceits Dido suddenly checks herself (35-6), denies the truth of Aeneas' divine origin and veers off for a while into the opposite extreme of hatred. A couplet suffices to accuse Aeneas of inhumanity (37-8) in Virgilian terms. However, again seeing a clever way of innovation and transition, Ovid adds one final term to the list of inhuman 'parents' and so dazzles us by his inventive transition

aut mare, quale vides agitari nunc quoque ventis,
quo tamen adversis fluctibus ire paras. (39-40)

(... or the [stormy] sea, such as the one you now watch stirred up by the winds, on which in spite of the hostile waves you are preparing to depart.)

Dido's charge vanishes as soon as she mentions the dangerous sea, for it connotes more powerfully to her the peril Aeneas faces. Her own love instinctively denies that the sea could be related to her lover, for then it would logically be his ally and assist him in his escape. Whereas Virgil's Dido remains in the mood of tragic violence which she first expresses in the hyperbolic assertion that Aeneas was born of savage beasts in a wild region, Ovid's Dido reaches this extreme only for a moment, then reverts to her gentler mixture of love and complaint.

Again, one of Dido's most memorable appeals in the *Aeneid* comes, located with maximum effectiveness, at the end of her first attempt to dissuade Aeneas from leaving. 'If only I had had a child by you, a baby Aeneas crawling happily about the palace to remind me of you, that would be some comfort' (*Aen.*, iv. 327-30). Virgil has dramatically reduced Dido thereby to the position of greatest humility, most basic humanity; and consequently the terms in which Aeneas must reply, self-controlled, polite, tepidly grateful, legalistic, capture sympathy for Dido and seem to justify her outburst against Aeneas' inhumanity. Ovid turns this all around, to produce a momentary effect which then, by an ingenious transition, he manipulates in a new manner. For his Dido, having a baby by Aeneas represents no consolation for desertion or for being exposed to surrounding enemies. Rather, she converts it into a manifestly hypothetical argument for holding Aeneas. 'Perhaps, you wretch,' she says, 'you are leaving me pregnant' (133). That works into further innovations. She pictures, not the happily playing *parvulus Aeneas*, but a *miserabilis infans*, exposed to the same dangers as herself and dying pathetically with her before birth! (135-6). Before this detail becomes fixed in us, however, she rushes on to an entirely new device, questioning the truth of Aeneas' divine guidance.

We may say, on the basis of these two passages and many others like them, that Ovid converts every usable detail, whether from narrative or direct speech, into an argument for his Dido. This means that his Dido emerges as a woman signally endowed with rhetorical ability, not at all incoherent and violent like Virgil's Dido. It also means that we in the audience enjoy the cleverness with which she manipulates details that, we know, have been used differently in the source from which Ovid borrows. In fact, the more one reads the *Heroides*, the more one realizes that Ovid's

speaker has regularly become a modern woman with a gift for artful argument instead of an antique heroine, and the more one relishes the way Ovid has drawn from noble subjects of epic and tragedy the charming portraits he has created. His is the art both of learned allusion and playful anachronism. Thus, he exploits Homer for the portraits of Penelope (*Epist.*, i) and Briseis (*Epist.*, iii), Apollonius and his Roman imitators for Hypsipyle (*Epist.*, vi) and some of Medea (*Epist.*, xii), Euripides for other facets of Medea and for Phaedra (*Epist.*, iv) and Sophocles for Deianira (*Epist.*, ix), Catullus for Ariadne (*Epist.*, x) and probably Laodamia (*Epist.*, xiii), and, I think, Horace, *Odes*, iii. 11 for Hypermnestra (*Epist.*, xiv). When reading Homer we would never imagine his Penelope or Briseis speaking in this Ovidian manner; indeed, it is a special *tour de force* for Ovid to have made a character out of Briseis, who in the *Iliad* plays a very subordinate role and speaks a mere fourteen lines – and those over Patroklos' corpse (*Il.*, xix. 287ff.). But when we listen to Ovid, these famous characters from literary tradition spring to life in a charming new manner.

I said above that there is no need to assume that Ovid calls into question the heroic values of the *Aeneid*, and the same can be said when the source is Homeric epic or Greek tragedy. Ovid's women are not anti-heroic; they are represented as unaware of heroic criteria. It would have been relatively easy for Ovid to put words in his Dido's letter that would effectively attack Aeneas and expose him as the scoundrel that so many Romantics think him to be. After all, Virgil had amply sketched out the lines for such an attack. But Ovid was not interested in Aeneas except in so far as Dido understands him; and it is plain to us that Dido does not have the capacity to comprehend him. Therefore, even though she is writing a letter to him, she is not communicating with him because her words and ideas are basically beside the point. Another poet might take this situation, that of a great woman vainly trying to communicate her deepest feelings to a great man, and make it into noble poetry. Ovid, however, has made sure that we do not react to Dido or his other women as 'great'. As we have seen, his Dido is not viewed as a queen; and similarly she does not try to grasp Aeneas' heroic purposes. Instead, she is a woman of fears, anxieties, tears and complaints, pursuing her love with every feminine means, not by magni-

loquent appeals. Hopeless though her effort may be, so long as she speaks our attention concentrates on the vitality of this speaker, so clever, so changeable and by implication so hopeful.

Formally speaking, of course, the *Heroides* are composed in elegiac couplets. It would also be true to say that the concerns of these poems are appropriate to the elegiac genre: the irrelevance of heroism, the tearful, plaintive mood, the essential plot of unhappy love. I am not one, however, who believes that elegy and epic are two irreconcilable entities and that one explains all by labelling an Ovidian *Epistle* as elegy. It is obvious that Ovid was fascinated by the task of making grand poetry serviceable for his purposes. And he was not the first. Propertius before Ovid had repeatedly introduced examples from heroic myth into his love elegies in order to playfully 'dignify' his amatory passions and experiences with a heroic quality. That witty combination of pathos and humour which results from such an effort to heroize a mundane sentiment, a hallmark of Propertian elegy, explains in part our reactions to the *Heroides*. But Ovid has changed the tactics of contemporary elegy (including those of his own *Amores*) in two respects: he has concentrated on the girl's feelings instead of those of the poet-lover, and he has chosen to modernize a heroic situation instead of heroizing an everyday erotic situation. Both these changes result in the withdrawal of the presence of the poet-interpreter, who is so dynamically present in Ovid's other poetry.

If Ovid contrives to let the woman speak every line of the poem it is plain that he cannot intrude directly with commentary that influences our reactions. All he can do is to make the woman speak in such a way as to affect our interpretation. Thus the self-conscious and witty aspects of his Dido move us quite differently from the suicidal passions of Virgil's majestic figure. Moreover, since the woman speaks from an experience whose general outline is fixed by well-established myth, the poet cannot tamper radically with the plot. Nor does Ovid want to. That well-established myth serves him excellently: his interest lies in colouring the features of antique myth and early literary renditions with modern sophistication: to give charming eloquence to Homer's simple, faithful Penelope; to put coquettish words into the mouth of Briseis who, in the *Iliad*, had no character whatsoever; to make Phaedra seductive instead of the vengeful tragic female drama-

tized by Euripides and later Seneca. So Ovid's audience had the pleasure of encountering epic and tragic heroines as elegiac lovers who woo and complain about their lost loves with the typical strategies found in the elegists from Gallus to Ovid in the *Amores*.

In order to make these poems uninterrupted, unIntroduced monologues, in which we come to know the female speaker exclusively through our reactions to her words and without any help from the narrator, Ovid resorted to the fiction of a letter. We are reading the letter, or, to be more accurate, we are peeking over the woman's shoulder as she is writing it. Sometimes the fiction is transparent, or even breaks down. Penelope's letter to Ulysses is apparently one of those she gives to almost every passing sailor, in the hope that it will reach her husband (*Epist.*, I. 61-2); but Ulysses never receives it. Ariadne writes to Theseus without even having someone at hand to deliver the letter. And Deianira, realizing that she has brought about Hercules' death, apparently breaks off her unsendable letter to him in order to express her despair before committing suicide; but the epistolary form remains unaffected.⁵ A good part of Ovid's art consists in creating the illusion that we are indeed meeting these women directly; that the letters they write express their feelings with total spontaneity. And although we remain aware of his clever fiction, we are easily trapped into responding sympathetically to their unhappiness in love, especially because we know that these letters will not change in any way the situation that prompts their writing.

In the typical love elegy, the poet-lover, for all his complaints, sputtering anger and unhappiness, is close to a comic figure. He is in love with a dream of his own creation; and when the real woman who has inspired the dream turns out to be all too human (accordingly unfaithful or nasty or selfish or expensive), his disillusion and irrational attempts to cope with cruel reality are ineffective and silly. It is entirely true of Roman love elegy, to borrow the words of Rosalind in *As You Like It*, that no poet-lover ever dies of love. On the other hand, the *Heroides* cannot be called simply comic. I have said that we are charmed by Dido and her fellow letter-writers because we appreciate the clever way Ovid has modernized and humanized (in his special fashion) the ancient female figures of myth and early literature. For a variety

of reasons, e.g. the Homeric avoidance of verbalizing feelings, the stereotyped attitude towards women, the decorum of epic and tragedy, none of Ovid's letter-writers was fully realized as a woman before the *Heroides*. Yet even if we recognize the elegiac fitness of viewing Dido's predicament as analogous to that of the lover-poet, and even if we relish the sophisticated argument that she puts together, we cannot completely forget the prescribed dramatic outlines within which, for a brief moment, she seems to move so freely. We admire the energy which a Dido can expend to preserve her love, but the myth prescribes that all that striking vitality is doomed. So Ovid has introduced a new note of genuine dramatic pathos into this novel kind of elegy. Dido, Phyllis and Phaedra will die for love as no poet-lover can do. All the heroines suffer radically, not merely in a silly juvenile way.

The closest analogue to Ovid's *Epistles* that we now possess is *Elegy*, IV. 3 of Propertius, in which the poet imagines a Roman wife, Arethusa, writing to her soldier husband in the East, expressing her deep loyalty to him. Like many critics, I consider it the prototype for Ovid's collection. We can see the powerful effect of the inventiveness in Propertius' Book IV not only in the *Heroides* but also in the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. What particularly excited Ovid in the Arethusa elegy, it seems, was the dramatization of a woman's emotions through a total monologue, to express not the stereotyped Euripidean female fury but the softer sentiments of unhappy but still active love. Ovid then devised a new 'heroic' setting for his letters and a situation that stirs more pathos: instead of the everyday separation of husband and wife because of the man's military duties, we have an ingenious evocation of two mythological lovers, either precariously married or not married at all, whose separation is now usually a hopelessly unbridgeable chasm (as we know from the myth, though the 'heroine' clings to her fond hopes).⁶ The antique 'heroic' setting keeps these elegies from being merely comic monologues. On the other hand, the many elegiac tactics which Ovid carried over from his *Amores*, his manifest wit and his patent display of ingenuity in the manipulation of Virgilian or Homeric nuances prevent the 'heroic' situation from effacing Ovid's characteristically sophisticated note. The fifteen monologues, therefore, represent a first productive blend of elegiac

and grand poetry for Ovid, anticipating by as much as two decades the final masterpiece of blending, the *Metamorphoses*. But long before proceeding to that ultimate development, Ovid experimented with a new and also creative way of extending the range of the *Heroides*.

The Double Letters

Although there is considerable uncertainty as to precisely when Ovid wrote and published the *Heroides*, we are, I think, on safe ground in assuming that he composed the epistle of Dido within a decade of the *Aeneid*'s appearance and that *Heroides*, I–XV were available to the public (perhaps in an edition of three books) by 4 B.C.⁷ During the next five years Ovid explored the role of *praeceptor amoris*, Master of Love, and brought out his various didactic works, three books of *Ars Amatoria*, the *Medicamina faciei femineae* and the *Remedia*, all in elegiacs. It is likely, too, that Ovid made his plans during this same five-year period for the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*, but that most of the composition of these major poems took place within the six-year period A.D. 2–8, the years before Ovid was abruptly exiled by Augustus. These are years, then, of amazing creativity. And yet we must also find a place in the same period for six additional epistles that Ovid wrote and published as three pairs. Most scholars today assume that these 'double letters' were produced while Ovid was also involved with the *Fasti* and the *Metamorphoses*. There seem to be enough differences between *Heroides*, I–XV and XVI–XXI to warrant the hypothesis of a definite hiatus of time between the groups, and the expansiveness and narrative techniques of XVI–XXI seem to reflect qualities evident in the later *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*.⁸

Much scholarly time and effort have been poured into the controversy of whether these double letters are genuinely the work of Ovid.⁹ We must not smile contemptuously and declare that all such effort was wasted. However, much of this controversy has been characterized by unpoetic imagination and philological myopia. In defence of the advocates pro and contra genuineness, we may say that the same nineteenth century that concentrated on this kind of problem could hardly tolerate Ovid the poet because of his un-Romantic attitudes, and accordingly, although

these scholars laboured in a largely sterile field, at least they did, if for the wrong reasons, keep reading Ovid. Now that *Heroides*, XVI–XXI can be safely credited to Ovid, it is possible – and some beginnings have been made – to appreciate the innovative art that Ovid there displays.¹⁰

In order to get at what is new in XVI–XXI, we may first summarize the salient aspects of I–XV in terms of a series of elegiac *topoi*. These dramatic monologues are, we recall, letters written by heroines who find themselves in generally similar circumstances: they are separated from the man they love, to whom they have entirely committed themselves, whether as legitimate wife, would-be wife, or lover. Although the reasons for separation vary, the heroines tend to respond to it similarly, feeling abandoned, complaining about the coldness and slowness and cruelty of the absent male. In his *Metamorphoses* Ovid produces an incisive epitome of the situation and the principal *topoi* for the case of Ariadne:

protinus Aegides rapta Minoide Diam
vela dedit comitemque suam *crudelis* in illo
litore destituit. *desertae et multa querenti*
amplexus et opem Liber tulit. (*Met.*, VIII, 174–7)

(Immediately Theseus seized Ariadne and sailed to Dia [Naxos], where he cruelly abandoned his companion on the seashore. As the deserted girl complained long and loud, Bacchus came to her with kisses and help.)

It is plain that Ovid shows little sympathy for Ariadne's plight in this sketch, but he does not need to. His audience should easily catch the allusions to elegiac *topoi* from *Heroides*, x. The basic tone of *Heroides*, I–XV is complaint; the verb *queror*, which regularly emerges from the lips of the heroines, occurs more frequently in the *Heroides* than in any other Ovidian work. This accords with the standard mood of elegy which, because of its formalized plaintiveness, could be generically defined by Horace, Propertius and Ovid with the word *querela*.¹¹ The plaintive heroine regards herself as alone, deserted, abandoned (*sola, deserta, relict*a). Deep in her memory is fixed the scene of her parting from her beloved. More often than not, he left after long moments of passionate kisses and fervent promises to return; but occasion-

ally the circumstances were different. Nevertheless, all the heroines believe that they have a claim on the man: an explicit or implicit *foedus* or bond links the two, which imposes *fides*, loyalty, on them both. The heroines have remained faithful (*fida*) and regularly represent themselves as still loving (*amans*), but the long absence of the man, perhaps also information about his disloyal behaviour, leads to complaints, unhappy charges that he is anywhere from slow to respond (*lentus*) and iron-hearted (*ferreus*) all the way to cruel (*crudelis*), criminal (*sceleratus*) and faithless (*perfidus*). The heroine hopes, usually in vain as we know, by these complaints to stir the conscience of her beloved and so bring him home, to re-create the *foedus* and the once-glorious context of reciprocal passion.¹²

In *Heroides*, xvi–xxi Ovid creates situations that differ among themselves as well as from the earlier letters, and the basic tone does not match the complaints of i–xv. Moreover, instead of the monologue of an unhappy woman he now devises a context in which first a male writes to a female, then she responds. For xvi and xvii he produces an exchange of letters between Paris and Helen, supposedly written while Paris was a guest in Menelaus' house and just beginning his efforts to seduce his lovely hostess. His letter sounds like that of one who has mastered the lessons of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, whereas her reply reveals a clever, reasonably loyal wife who understands fully the character of Paris and will resist his advances for some time. In xviii and xix, on the other hand, Ovid studies two young people who are sincerely in love. Leander writes to Hero to explain why he has been unable to spend another passionate night with her – because of the terrible weather that makes swimming the Hellespont fatally dangerous – and she replies with complaints. We know that her complaints against Leander are groundless and that they will produce the paradoxical result of sending him into the treacherous water and bringing him to Hero as a corpse. None of the *Heroides*, i–xv ever reached its destination or had any effect, least of all this fatal result of a 'tragic return'. Again, xx and xxi take a different direction and concentrate on a young man, Acontius, who for some time has loved Cydippe without her realizing it – she is far less experienced and observant than Helen – and has enlisted the powers of Diana to overcome her resistance, and the girl Cydippe whose letter represents the response of a virginal

young maiden to the sudden and totally unexpected declaration of love from a man. She complains because Acontius has caused her to fall sick and she is physically miserable. But she definitely feels none of the emotional torment of Hero, let alone the earlier cast of forlorn women in i–xv. The men's letters, then, are totally new, and the women's letters, because addressed to a tangibly close man, written in reply to his advances and reflecting that early stage of love where the woman has some or all the advantages, must adopt a different manner from that of the complaining abandoned female (*desertae et multa querenti*) in *Heroides*, i–xv.

It is generally noted, and quite correctly, that in these letters which are planned as pairs the poet has subordinated the man's letter to the woman's. Neither Paris nor Leander nor Acontius finds himself in a complex situation, and consequently none of them utters very complicated or penetrating feelings. The main purpose of the man's letter is to propel the woman into a dynamic situation where her feelings must be complex, where, at least in the case of Helen and Cydippe, she must struggle towards a difficult decision in her reply. Although she complains about the pressure to which she is being subjected, about the improper importunities of the male, she obviously does not experience that near-tragic unhappiness of the deserted women of *Heroides*, i–xv, for those very importunities constitute a pleasant experience, too. In some respects, then, Ovid has taken Helen and Cydippe and placed them now in the dominating position of the unresponsive men, addressees of the letters in i–xv. They are making a crucial decision for love, not desperately trying to recapture a love that has long escaped them. Inevitably, then, as Ovid correctly planned it, our interest focuses on the complex way in which the women respond to new and exciting pressures.

The situation of Hero and Leander differs considerably from that of the other pairs, and indeed bears some superficial resemblance to that of the earlier letters. Therefore, before we concentrate on the more complicated emotions of Helen and Cydippe, let us first consider Hero, in order to establish more precisely what new directions Ovid has chosen in these double letters. Leander, who has enjoyed the passionate love of Hero, has left her and promised to return. But he has failed to keep his promise. If we summarize the background in that manner, it

might seem that Hero's complaint would fit ideally with those in the earlier elegies. However, we have obviously distorted the situation. In the first place, the lovers have not been separated months or years, but a mere week (cf. XVIII. 25). Secondly, Leander is more than eager to rejoin Hero and resume their passionate embraces. It is not his fault, but the violent weather on the Hellespont prevents him from reaching his beloved. Accordingly one result of his letter is to establish beyond question what the myth demanded, that Leander continues to burn with passion for Hero. Thirdly, because their love is so fresh and constant, both tend to remember its supremely happy moments, not its pathetic scenes. Each, in a rapturous portion of his letter, recalls how Leander arrived at Sestos, emerged naked and glistening from the water and rushed into the arms of Hero there on the shore, how arm in arm they moved to her tower and a long night of joyous passion. This emphasis sharply contrasts with the standardized narrative sequence of the earlier letters: the sad parting of lovers at the shore and the woman's misery as she watches her beloved's ship disappear on the horizon. The high-point of Leander's letter recapitulates this glorious arrival (XVIII. 55ff.), starting from the moment he plunged into the tranquil waters beneath a romantic moon. I quote the happy lines that record his landfall and union with Hero:

cum vero possum cerni quoque, protinus addis
spectatrix animos, ut valeamque facis:
nunc etiam nando dominae placuisse laboro 95
atque oculis iacto bracchia nostra tuis.
te tua vix prohibet nutrix descendere in altum
– hoc quoque enim vidi, nec mihi verba dabas –
nec tamen effecit, quamvis retinebat euntem,
ne fieret prima pes tuus udus aqua. 100
excipis amplexu feliciaque oscula iungis,
oscula, di magni! trans mare digna peti,
eque tuis demptos umeris mihi tradis amictus
et madidam siccas aequoris imbre comam.
cetera nox et nos et turris conscia novit, 105
quodque mihi lumen per vada monstrat iter.

(When I can be seen, too, then you give me inspiration and strength as you watch. Now I strain to please my beloved by

swimming, and I vigorously move my arms before your eyes. Scarcely can your nurse prevent you from plunging into the water – I saw that; you didn't just pretend – and even though she grabbed you, she could not stop you from getting your feet wet in the breakers. You welcome me in your arms and give me rapturous kisses, kisses – o wow – worth a swim across the ocean! You take a shawl from your shoulders and give it to me, then dry my dripping hair. As for the rest, the night and we and the familiar tower know all, as does also the light which shows me the way to you through the waves.)

That memory, which to Leander is still so vivid that he narrates it as a present experience, is matched in Hero's letter by her vivid dream (XIX. 57ff.), a passionate complaint that reveals her own vivid feelings:

forsitan invitus mecum tamen, improbe, dormis
et, quamquam non vis ipse venire, venis:
nam modo te videor prope iam spectare natantem,
bracchia nunc umeris umida ferre meis, 60
nunc dare, quae soleo, madidis velamina membris,
pectora nunc iuncto nostra fovere sinu.
multaque praeterea linguae reticenda modestae,
quae fecisse iuvat, facta referre pudet.
me miseram! brevis est haec et non vera voluptas; 65
nam tu cum somno semper abire solis.

(Even though perhaps you are unwilling, you wretch, you still sleep with me; even though you don't want to come, you do. For I seem to watch you as you are swimming ever closer, then feel your wet arms go around my shoulders, then, as I always do, put my shawl on your dripping body and warm you against me as we hug each other. And there are many other things which a modest tongue must not say, a pleasure to have done but shameful to recount. Poor me! It's a brief insubstantial pleasure, because you always vanish with my sleep.)

What Ovid represents, then, with Hero and Leander is genuinely happy, passionate love, not despair. The absence which Hero complains about above has been brief and involuntary, and all the plaintive terms she uses that seem to echo

the earlier heroines (e.g. *improbe* 57, *lente morator* 70, *socii desertor amoris* 157) serve rather to reveal Hero's misunderstanding of the situation, the result of her consuming passion. Yet it is from these very complaints that Ovid extracts, with supreme irony, the motivation for the death of Leander. No other account of this love story develops this way: we are simply told that Leander eventually met heavy seas that were too much for his swimming and so drowned. Ovid ingeniously makes Hero's half-sincere complaints work so effectively on the already eager Leander that he foolishly commits himself to the stormy Hellespont and is drowned, thus fulfilling the foreboding that both he and Hero have had.¹³ Their genuine passion results in a fatal reunion.

Ovid's ingenuity in shaping the story of Hero and Leander is matched by the cleverness with which he adapts the story of Acontius and Cydippe. Scholars have long known that Ovid was working with a very successful elegy that the great Alexandrian poet Callimachus had included in Book III of his *Aetia*. Since the *Aetia* ostensibly accounted for certain ritual practices, odd statues, sayings, and the like, scholars suspected that Callimachus did not concentrate exclusively on a love affair, but also explained something, possibly the use of apples in love or possibly the origin of a clan on the island of Ceos. With the recovery of some valuable papyri from Egyptian Oxyrhynchus it has been possible only in this century to see what Callimachus did with his story. Two extensive fragments, one of fourteen lines from the beginning, the other of seventy-seven lines from the end, help us to reconstruct a typically charming Callimachean narrative. For our purposes the most important fact to know is that Callimachus did not take much interest at all in the personality of Cydippe, and he did work with Acontius in such a way as to make him the typical romantic hero.¹⁴ Cydippe was the standard beauty whom every mother wants for her son, but little else about her was relevant to the Greek elegy. Thus in the long fragment we plunge into the predicament caused by her repeated illnesses on the eve of her wedding. Callimachus merely reported the sickness; he ignored her feelings, if any, and he did not invite us to hear her speak or speculate on her thoughts. Rather than allow Cydippe the chance to reveal her inclinations for Acontius and promote their marriage by some decisive action of her own,

Callimachus gave all the action and decision to her father. Accordingly, when Ovid decided to use the earlier elegy as the basis for double letters, he found ample area in which to exercise his ingenuity.

Ovid makes the occasion of the exchange of letters the period when Cydippe has been sick a third time and her father has sent off to Delphi for advice. Acontius seizes his chance to write to her and reveal his love and the cruel way Diana is punishing her for neglecting her unintentional promise to marry him. The letter does him little credit. He betrays no moral sensibility, few compunctions about the suffering he has caused Cydippe, but we do at least believe that he loves the girl. In his egotistic fashion he acts as though Cydippe must know who he is, and he urges her to confide in her mother how she first met him:

ordine fac referas ut sis mihi cognita primum,	205
sacra pharetratae dum facis ipsa deae,	
ut te conspecta subito, si forte notasti,	
restiterim fixis in tua membra genis,	
et, te dum nimium miror, nota certa furoris,	
deciderint umeris pallia lapsa meis.	210

(Be sure you tell her in sequence how I first became acquainted with you, while you were sacrificing to Diana, how, as soon as I saw you, in case you noticed, I stood still, my eyes riveted on your limbs, and, while I admired you extravagantly, a sure sign of passion, my mantle slipped off my shoulders.)

In this cleverly indirect description of that standardized situation, love at first sight, Acontius calls to Cydippe's imagination what of course she never noticed earlier.

Whereas Acontius pursues without distraction the simple goal of winning Cydippe, she finds herself in an awkward and painful situation. She has a perfectly eligible fiancé chosen by her father, whom she has been ready to marry without objection until these strange attacks of sickness. And now another man suddenly writes to her to claim her as his rightful bride, guaranteed to him by Diana because of the promise he has tricked from the girl's lips. Cydippe's letter shows how she faces her difficulties. Her first

reaction is surprise and indignation, and she attempts some withering wit:

haec nobis formae te laudatore superbae
contingit merces et placuisse nocet?
si tibi deformis, quod mallet, visa fuisset,
culpatum nulla corpus egeret ope. (xxi. 35-8)

(Is this the reward for my proud beauty when you praise it; is it dangerous to have pleased you? If I had seemed ugly to you, as I would prefer, my blemished body would now need no doctor.)

How can he hurt the woman he claims he loves? (59) Then she reviews the unhappy events which have led to Acontius' advantage over her (67ff.). She never admits to having seen him there on Delos. And she protests at this underhand method of 'conquering' her:

improbe, quid gaudes et quae tibi gloria parta est,
quidve vir elusa virgine laudis habes? (117-18)

(Wretch, why do you exult, what glory have you won? What fame do you possess, a man who has tricked a girl?)

She vigorously rejects the legal claims that Acontius has attempted to assert over her.¹⁵ Still, afraid of Diana, she piteously tells of her agony and appeals for sympathy to both goddess and lover. Another bitterly witty paradox acts as transition to a new sequence:

cur, quae succenset, quod adhuc tibi pacta puella
non tua sit, fieri ne tua possit, agit?
omnia de viva tibi sunt speranda: quid aufert
saeva mihi vitam, spem tibi diva mei? (185-8)

(Why does Diana, who is angry that your beloved is not plighted to you as yours, bring it about that she cannot possibly become yours? All your hopes depend on my living. Why does the savage goddess rob me of life and you of the hope of possessing me?)

There may be some indication in these words that Cydippe is beginning to take some interest in Acontius' hopes. At any

rate, we next hear her protesting at the false impressions Acontius cherishes about her fiancé (191ff.). While she has been sick in bed, her fiancé has visited her, but she has never encouraged him to take the slightest liberties! Indeed she has turned her back on him and made the poor simpleton believe that she is angry at him. Perhaps she has been disappointed with his timidity; perhaps she now contrasts it unfavourably with Acontius' impetuosity. Aware, however, that she has betrayed her inclinations for Acontius (206), she coyly plays with the etymology of his name, acts coquettishly about her beauty – as if he might now spurn her after her wasting sickness – and finally surrenders: *doque libens victas in tua vota manus* (I freely surrender myself to your will – 242). In short, Ovid has through her letter created a dramatic portrait of a woman slowly responding to love, at first spirited and indignant, then piteous, and finally melting. None of the heroines in 1-xv achieves this range of emotions.

Ovid permits Acontius to use a witty reference to Paris that indicates how similarly these two lovers behave:

non sum, qui soleam Paridis reprehendere factum,
nec quemquam, qui vir, posset ut esse, fuit. (xx. 49-50)

(I am not one to criticize the deed of Paris, nor indeed anyone who was a man in order that he might act the part of a man.)¹⁶

Paris, in the first of the double letters, aims simply and ruthlessly at the same goal as Acontius: to make Helen his wife regardless of her wishes and prior commitments. He, too, talks confidently of the favour of a goddess, for Venus has promised him Helen when he declared her more beautiful than Juno or Minerva. He, too, deprecates the woman's prior responsibilities to another man, even though, in this instance, that man is Helen's husband and Paris' generous host, Menelaus. Naïvely trusting his guest and his wife, Menelaus has gone off on necessary business to Crete. And Ovid imagines that Paris makes his first direct assault on Helen's loyalty in this letter. Since his tactics follow pretty much the familiar ones of Acontius and the earlier *Ars Amatoria*, and since Ovid organized the letter more to set off Helen's reply than to evoke much interest in Paris, let us concentrate our attention, as expected, on Helen.

The portrait of Helen is probably the most sympathetic to emerge from antiquity. This woman, who is about to commit adultery with a mere libertine and thereby bring on an international war that costs incalculable suffering and waste, emerges, in her letter, a sensitive, clever, morally aware, sensual, responsive woman, one whom it is difficult not to like. Unlike Cydippe, she does not weaken, partly because of the obvious pressure of the goddess, for she has experienced none of the debilitating illnesses of the younger girl. And she is not unaware of Paris' intentions nor so naïve as Cydippe in reacting to the man's bold admiration and designs on her virtue. However, when she has discredited most of Paris' arguments, she still cannot veil her interest in the man and encouragement of his advances, for she sees something in Paris that may not in fact be there, but represents what she needs and wants, her idea of love. Ovid in no way defends her adultery; he does attempt to understand her motivations as fully as possible and to show that she was acting from some of the better human principles. To put it somewhat strongly, her inclinations for love entitle her to the role of heroine along with Ovid's other women of the *Heroides*.

Like Cydippe, Helen starts off by complaining about the pressures Paris is exerting on her virtue, but she puts it with greater sophistication:

nec dubito, quin haec, cum sit tam iusta, vocatur
rustica iudicio nostra querela tuo. (XVII. 11-12)

(I have no doubt, in your judgment, my complaint would be called rustic, despite its justice.)

As she well knows, Paris will use the typical courtly arguments of Augustan times and try to 'shame' her into compliance by calling her rustic, saying, in our terms, that she is 'not with it'. But she knows how to hold firm against such cavalier devices. Chastity is more important than being 'with it'. Nor does Paris move her by his all too familiar male assertion that other women yield to love: she knows what counts (41ff.). Nor does she feel the slightest excitement over Paris' noble ancestry, his royal family, and the tremendous wealth of Troy (51ff.). What counts with her is feeling and personal commitment, not superficial things like money and reputation. And at this point she betrays a possible interest in

the person of Paris, if his trivial arguments, once dispelled, leave behind a man capable of winning her passion:

sed si iam vellem fines transire pudoris,
tu melior culpa causa futururus eras.
aut ego perpetuo famam sine labe tenebo,
aut ego te potius quam tua dona sequar. (67-70)

(But if I wanted to overstep the limits of chastity, you would have been a better reason. Either I shall keep my reputation forever unblemished, or I shall follow you, not your gifts.)

She has noticed Paris, which means she has appreciated his handsome appearance and been both annoyed and excited by his indelicate and indiscreet attempts to attract her attention even when Menelaus was present (75ff.). While admitting that, however, she insists on her loyalty to her husband. Of course, if she were unmarried, she would prefer him to any suitor, to any of the thousand suitors who once wooed her (including Menelaus).

ut tamen optarem fieri tua Troica coniunx,
invitam sic me nec Menelaus habet. (109-110)

(Even though I might wish to be your wife at Troy,
Menelaus has me now not at all unwillingly.)

But her protests ring hollow: she feels unwilling in her marriage. Thus, though she dismisses Paris' casuistry in regard to Menelaus' departure (155ff.), she encourages him fearfully to take advantage of her husband's gullibility (*simplicis viri* 176).

et libet et timeo, nec adhuc exacta voluntas
est satis: in dubio pectora nostra labant. (177-8)

(I am simultaneously inclined towards you and afraid of you,
and my wishes are not yet fully worked out: my heart is
divided, undecided.)

The rest of the letter elaborates on this hesitation. She wonders how Paris will treat her in the long run, once he knows she can be adulterous. She questions her reception in Troy. She rejects his specious claims that there will be no war or, if war comes,

that Troy will easily prevail. Certainly, Paris will prove no military hero:

apta magis Veneri, quam sunt tua corpora Marti:
bella gerant fortes; tu, Pari, semper ama.
Hectora quem laudas pro te pugnare iubeto:
militia est operis altera digna tuis.
his ego, si saperem pauloque audacior essem,
uterer; utetur, siqua puella sapit.
ast ego deposito faciam fortasse pudore
et dabo cunctatas tempore victa manus. (253-60)¹⁷

(Your body is more fit for love than war. Let heroes wage war; Paris, devote yourself to love at all times. Ask Hector, whom you praise so highly, to fight for you. A different service suits your talents. And if I had sense and were a little bolder, I would take advantage of those talents; any sensible girl would. Perhaps indeed I shall do so, abandoning my chastity, surrendering to you after long hesitation.)

Thus, like Cydippe, she is almost ready to capitulate at the end of her letter.

Helen has a line which may unwittingly allude to the fundamental situation of *Heroides*, 1-xv and mark the innovations Ovid achieves in his double letters:

nec quod *abest* hic me tecum mirare *relictam*. (173)

(Just because he is away, don't be surprised that I am left with you.)

The earlier heroines lamented inconsolably because their lovers were away and they were left *alone* to their misery. In their despair they tried to argue for a love to which they had fully, often tragically, committed themselves, with a man who sooner or later felt free of such commitment. When he planned the double letters Ovid wanted to explore this commitment to love, the fundamental theme of almost all his great poetry, from a different perspective, namely, at its initial stages. So Hero is dealing with a lover who has been away for a week, against his will, and her letter breathes strong physical passion, not the despair of long privation. And Helen is caught in a triangle,

which Ovid has emphasized in the line cited above by the grouping of the three pronouns. The absence of Menelaus leaves her not with her despair, but with the all-too-attractive Paris. And that means that she is caught in the kind of tension between chastity and love, *pudor* and *amor*, that Ovid finds increasingly worth studying in his years of greatest achievement. For my part, I read her letter with greater admiration for her and her poet-creator than I do the letter of Dido or her complaining sisters of *Heroides*, 1-xv. It may be that I merely respond more readily to scenes of hopeful love than I do to sentimental pictures of lost love, but I tell myself, at least sometimes, that Ovid has indeed made advances in the way he understands the process by which people do commit themselves to worthwhile feelings regardless of practical considerations and social taboos. In my opinion, he is now mature enough to produce his finest stories of the *Metamorphoses*. In that long poem, he would use the epistolary form to enhance one narrative, the love of Byblis (*Met.*, ix. 515ff.). And he would have been lucky if that had been his last poetic epistle. Little did Ovid realize that he himself would soon be separated from all he loved, forsaken in exile on the Black Sea, forced to speak once again by epistle in the plaintive tone of hopelessness in order to bridge the unbridgeable distance between himself and his wife and friends, between bleak Tomi and vital Rome.¹⁸ Fate and unappreciative Augustus would reduce him to the despair of the women in *Heroides*, 1-xv which he had once imagined so brilliantly.

Notes

- ¹ The able nineteenth-century editor, Arthur Palmer, felicitous in textual criticism but confined by Victorian constraints on poetic imagination, worked hard to dispose of the line's difficulties. Earlier critics had voiced disapproval of the pair *moveri-movimus* because, although the manuscripts solidly guaranteed the readings, the critics, unable to extract special meaning from the repetition, assumed that their prejudice was right and the reading of *movimus* wrong. So they set about emending. An easy change to *novimus* makes no sense; but a change almost as easy to *vovimus* plainly asserts the prayer-context. Heinsius, the greatest Ovidian scholar of all time, adopted *vovimus*. Now when Palmer reviewed the emendation, he rightly rejected it, but for the wrong reasons. He declared: 'There is little likelihood in the conjecture *vovimus*; no prayer has been mentioned.' An incredible comment, made all the worse by Palmer's proposed translation of the received text:

- 'I begin this letter.' Line 3 has explicitly referred to a prayer (*prece*), and knowing the way Ovid handles his couplets, we have good reason to expect him to continue the context. There is, however, a difference between *prex* and *votum* which justifies the rejection of *vovimus*. The speaker is simply pleading, supplicating, here; she is not trying to bribe the deity by vowing an offering (*votum*) so that he will grant her a favour. Therefore, while rejecting *vovimus* for its wrong kind of prayer, we must try to make sense of *movimus* in the context of supplication. See A. Palmer, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Heroides* (Oxford, 1898), 339, in his note on line 4.
- 2 Dryden relied on a text rendered popular by Heinsius. He read *vovimus* in 4 and marked no questions in 8 or 10.
 - 3 Throughout his translation Dryden reduces Ovidian wit (e.g. at 61-2, 73, 149) and expands the Latin in order to stress a pathos not in the original (e.g. at 91, 95, 99).
 - 4 Only to emphasize how once-beautiful Dido has disgraced herself does Virgil refer to her as *pulchra* after the end of Book 1 (in iv. 192).
 - 5 For the change in Deianira, see *Epist.*, ix. 143ff.
 - 6 For a valuable comparison of Propertius' techniques in iv. 3 and Ovid's in *Epist.*, xiii, see H. Merklin, 'Arethusa und Laodamia', *Hermes*, 96 (1968), 461-94.
 - 7 The second edition of Ovid's *Amores* appeared in 4 B.C. In ii. 18. 21ff. of that collection, Ovid refers to *Epistles* 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 15.
 - 8 The fundamental work on the relative chronology of i-xv and xvi-xxi remains that of W. Kraus, 'Die Briefpaare in Ovids Heroides', *Wiener Studien*, 65 (1950), 54-77; now reprinted in *Wege der Forschung* (1968), 461-94.
 - 9 See, for example, W. Zingerle, *Untersuchungen zur Echtheitsfrage der Heroiden Ovids* (Innsbruck, 1878); S. B. Clark, 'The Authorship and the Date of the Double Letters in Ovid's Heroides', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 19 (1908), 121-55; B. Latta, *Die Stellung der Doppelbriefe (Heroides 16-21) im Gesamtwerk Ovids* (dissertation, Marburg, 1963); E. Courtney, 'Ovidian and Non-Ovidian Heroides', *Bulletin Institute of Classical Studies*, 12 (1965), 63-6; and now V. A. Tracy, 'The Authenticity of Heroides 16-21', *Classical Journal*, 66 (1971), 328-30.
 - 10 See especially E. J. Kenney, 'Liebe als juristisches Problem: Über Ovids Heroides 20 and 21', *Philologus*, 111 (1967), 212-32.
 - 11 In his elegiac works Ovid employs the verb *queror* as follows: *Amores*, ten times; *Ars*, nine; *Fasti*, eleven; *ex Ponto*, fifteen; *Tristia*, ten; but *Heroides*, forty-one. There are twenty-six instances of *queror* in the *Metamorphoses*, of which some, such as the lines quoted from viii. 174ff., refer to a standard lament of amatory elegy (cf. x. 76). For *querela* in a generic sense, see Horace, *Odes*, ii. 9. 18, Propertius, i. 6. 11.
 - 12 There are of course exceptions to this typology: Phaedra (*Epist.*, iv) has never enjoyed Hippolytus' love, but attempts to seduce him through her letter; Canace (*Epist.*, xi) makes no accusations against Macareus as she prepares to kill herself in obedience to her father's command; and Hypermnestra, who has saved Lynceus (*Epist.*, xiv), obviously

cannot accuse him of deserting her. Any typology involves distortions, as can be seen in the otherwise valuable article of H. Dorrie, 'Die dichterische Absicht Ovids in den *Epistulae Heroidum*', *Antike und Abendland*, 13 (1967), 41-55.

- 13 Cf. xviii. 191ff. and xix. 191ff.
- 14 We know from surviving Callimachean fragments and from the imitative account of Aristaeus that the Greek elegy portrayed Acontius languishing for love in the forest, writing Cydippe's name on the trees. This emphasis would be natural if, as seems likely, Callimachus was accounting for the Akontidae on Ceos.
- 15 Kenney has ably analysed this theme in the article cited above in note 10.
- 16 Ovid uses *vir*, in two senses, to refer to man with respect to bravery and boldness and to allude to the sexual rights of a husband (also *vir*). My translation attempts to preserve the wit.
- 17 In 259 I accept the emendation *ast* of Bornecque and in 260 *cunctatas* of Palmer.
- 18 On the *Tristia* and *ex Ponto* as a continuation of themes from the *Heroides*, see H. Rahn, 'Ovids elegische Epistel', *Antike und Abendland*, 7 (1958), 105-20.