

THE TRAGIC PAGE: THE *HEROIDES* AND THE THEATER OF THE EPISTLE
Dan Curley, Skidmore College

1. *Ovid's Medea, Fragment 1:*

servare potui — perdere an possim rogas?

I had the power to save — now you ask whether I can destroy?

2. *Ovid's Medea, Fragment 2:*

feror huc illuc vae, plena deo.

O how I am carried here and there, full of the god.

3. *Quintilian on the Medea (Institutio oratoria 10.1.98):*

Ovidii *Medea* videtur mihi ostendere quam ille vir praestare potuerit, si ingenio suo imperare quam indulgere maluisset.

I think Ovid's *Medea* shows his potential for excellence, had he preferred to control rather than indulge his cleverness.

4. *Tacitus on the Medea (Dialogus de oratoribus 12):*

nec ullus Asinii aut Messalae liber tam illustris est quam *Medea* Ovidii aut Varii *Thyestes*.

No other work of Asinius or Messala is as famous as the *Medea* of Ovid or the *Thyestes* of Varius.

5. *Ovid on the Medea (Tristia 2.553f.):*

553 et dedimus tragicis scriptum regale cothurnis,
quaecque gravis debet verba cothurnus habet.

To the tragic actors' shoes I gave a work fit for a king, and the heavy shoes had appropriately heavy words.

6. *Ovid on writing for the theater (Tristia 5.7.27):*

27 nil equidem feci — tu scis hoc ipse — theatri.

I composed nothing at all for theaters — you yourself know this.

7. *Ovid on tragedy, and innovation within elegy (Amores 2.18.13ff.):*

sceptra tamen sumpsit curaue tragoedia nostra
crevit, et huic operi quamlibet aptus eram.
15 risit Amor pallamque meam pictosque cothurnos
sceptraque privata tam cito sumpta manu;
hinc quoque me dominae numen deduxit iniquiae,
deque cothurnato vate triumphat Amor.
quod licet, aut artes teneri profitemur Amoris
20 (ei mihi, praeceptis urgeor ipse meis).
aut quod Penelopes verbis reddatur Ulixi
scribimus et lacrimas, Phylli relictas, tuas,
quod Paris et Macareus et quod male gratus Iason
Hippolytique parens Hippolytusque legant,

I nevertheless took up the scepter and under my care a tragedy grew up, and I was as qualified for this job as anything. Cupid laughed at my tragic cloak and shoes, and at the scepter so hastily taken up in my empty hand; from here also the power of my unjust mistress led me away, and Cupid triumphs over the poet in tragic shoes. Because it is allowed, I either profess the arts of tender Love, or I write what Penelope wrote to Ulysses, and your laments after you were abandoned, O Phyllis; I write what Paris and Macareus and ungrateful Jason read, and what Hippolytus' father and Hippolytus himself read; I

25 quodque tenens strictum Dido miserabilis ensem
dicat et Aoniam Lesbis †amata† lyram.

write what poor Dido or what the †beloved† woman
of Lesbos said, as she held the sword or the Aonian
lyre.

8. *Medea reports the cries of Jason's wedding procession (Heroides. 12.143):*

143 turba ruunt et "Hymen," clamant, "Hymenae!"...

The crowd rushes and shouts, "Hymen, Hymnaeus!"

9. *The end of Medea's letter (Heroides 12.209-212):*

210 quo feret ira, sequar! facti fortasse pigebit —
et piget infido consuluisse viro.
viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat!
nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!

Where anger will lead I shall follow. Perhaps I will
regret what I do — indeed I already regret having
consideration for a faithless husband. The god who
now sets my heart in motion will have seen those
things! My mind, to be sure, is at work on something
bigger.

THE TRAGIC PAGE: THE *HEROIDES* AND THE THEATER OF THE EPISTLE
Supplement

8. *Penelope appropriates the Telemacheia* (Her. 1.65-67):

65 nos Pylon, antiqui Neleia Nestoris arva,
misimus; incerta est fama remissa Pylo.
misimus et Sparten; Sparte quoque nescia veri.

I have inquired of Pylos, the homeland of old Nestor,
formerly Neleus', and have gotten no reliable news
from there. I have inquired of Sparta, but Sparta, too,
knows nothing of the truth.

9. *Deianira learns of the poisoned Hercules* (Her. 9.143-44):

143 sed quid ego haec refero? scribenti nuntia venit
fama, virum tunicae tabe perire meae.

But why rehash the past like this? While I write
word has come that my husband is dying from the
poison I placed on the cloak.

10. *Hypsipyle curses Medea* (Her. 6.151-54):

151 quodsi quid ab alto
iustus adest votis Iuppiter ille meis,
quod gemit Hypsipyle, lecti quoque subnuba nostri
maereat et leges sentiat ipsa suas.

But if somehow from on high Jupiter attends my
prayers with justice, may she, the rival of my bed,
lament what Hypsipyle laments and be subject to her
own precepts.

11. *Ariadne weighs her options* (Her. 10.59-60, 63-64):

60 quid faciam? quo sola ferar? vacat insula cultu.
non hominum video, non ego facta boum....
64 finge dari comitesque mihi ventosque ratemque —
quid sequar? accessus terra paterna negat.

What am I to do? Where am I to go on my own?
The island is uncultivated. I see no signs of people,
nor even of cattle.... Suppose I did muster a crew
and winds and a ship — what path am I to follow?
My homeland forbids my approach.

12. *Laodamia hopes for the safety of Protesilaus* (Her. 13.65-66):

65 Hectora, quisquis is est, si sum tibi cura, caveto:
signatum memori pectore nomen habe!

If I matter to you at all, look out for Hector, whoever
he is. Keep his name stamped in your memory!

THE TRAGIC PAGE: THE *HEROIDES* AND THE THEATER OF THE EPISTLE
Supplement

8. *Penelope appropriates the Telemacheia* (Her. 1.65-67):

65 nos Pylon, antiqui Neleia Nestoris arva,
misimus; incerta est fama remissa Pylo.
misimus et Sparten; Sparte quoque nescia veri.

I have inquired of Pylos, the homeland of old Nestor,
formerly Neleus', and have gotten no reliable news
from there. I have inquired of Sparta, but Sparta, too,
knows nothing of the truth.

9. *Deianira learns of the poisoned Hercules* (Her. 9.143-44):

143 sed quid ego haec refero? scribenti nuntia venit
fama, virum tunicae tabe perire meae.

But why rehash the past like this? While I write
word has come that my husband is dying from the
poison I placed on the cloak.

10. *Hypsipyle curses Medea* (Her. 6.151-54):

151 quodsi quid ab alto
iustus adest votis Iuppiter ille meis,
quod gemit Hypsipyle, lecti quoque subnuba nostri
maereat et leges sentiat ipsa suas.

But if somehow from on high Jupiter attends my
prayers with justice, may she, the rival of my bed,
lament what Hypsipyle laments and be subject to her
own precepts.

11. *Ariadne weighs her options* (Her. 10.59-60, 63-64):

60 quid faciam? quo sola ferar? vacat insula cultu.
non hominum video, non ego facta boum....
64 finge dari comitesque mihi ventosque ratemque —
quid sequar? accessus terra paterna negat.

What am I to do? Where am I to go on my own?
The island is uncultivated. I see no signs of people,
nor even of cattle.... Suppose I did muster a crew
and winds and a ship — what path am I to follow?
My homeland forbids my approach.

12. *Laodamia hopes for the safety of Protesilaus* (Her. 13.65-66):

65 Hectors, quisquis is est, si sum tibi cura, caveto:
signatum memori pectore nomen habe!

If I matter to you at all, look out for Hector, whoever
he is. Keep his name stamped in your memory!