

## THE EPISTOLARY MODE AND THE FIRST OF OVID'S *HEROIDES*\*

In April 1741 there appeared a slim volume entitled *An Apology for the Life of Mrs Shamela Andrews* by a certain Mr Conny Keyber, whose name is generally supposed to conceal that of the novelist Henry Fielding. *Shamela*, to give the book its more familiar title, was a parody of Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Pamela: or Virtue Rewarded*, which had been published to great acclaim the previous year. In a series of letters purportedly sent to each other by the main characters, the story unfolds of the honest servant-girl Pamela, her efforts to avoid seduction by her master Mr B., and her eventual marriage to him. Fielding's chief target was the morality of the book (Pamela's virtue contains a disturbingly large element of self-interest), but in passing he drew cruel attention to some of the pitfalls of the epistolary form as a vehicle for narrative. One passage in particular deserves quotation, from Letter VI, which Shamela writes to her mother at (so we are duly informed at the top of the letter) twelve o'clock on Thursday night:

Mrs Jervis and I are just in Bed, and the Door unlocked; if my Master should come – Odsbods! I hear him just coming in at the Door. You see I write in the present Tense, as Parson Williams says. Well, he is in Bed between us, we both shamming a Sleep, he steals his Hand into my Bosom, which I, as if in my Sleep, press close to me with mine....

Decorum forbids the quotation of any more. Shamela's master clearly has his hands full, and if we are rash enough to ask what is in Shamela's hand at this moment, in view of the epistolary form of this account, we can only conclude: a pen is.

Shamela's letter illustrates many of the difficulties that accompany the use of the epistolary mode. The restrictions it imposes are immense, and very few works which use it can claim to be successful in overcoming them, still less in turning them to advantage. I should like to concentrate upon two considerations whose observance or neglect can be of vital importance in any literary text which presents itself as a letter. The first is that a letter is the product of a specific time, the second is the motivation for the epistolary form from the dramatic context. Shamela is in bed at midnight about to receive the not unwelcome attentions of her master: it is implausible that she should even think of writing to her mother, let alone in the circumstances actually be doing so. If the epistolary form is to be adopted as the vehicle for telling a story without straining the reader's belief that what he is reading is a letter, then it is imperative that the motivation for the writing of a letter at any particular stage in that story should be felt to arise naturally out of the events depicted, and, ideally, the resulting letter should be seen to be itself an agent in the forward movement of those events. This is extremely difficult to sustain over a series of letters and is where many epistolary novels falter. Pamela's letters to her parents are largely first-person narratives punctuated periodically for the sake of the form by opening and closing epistolary conventions. The letters she writes play only a sporadic part in the development of the plot. By contrast, the epistolary form of Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) is central to its plot. Every exchange of letters is subtly motivated by the progress of

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events it depicts and then provides its own impetus to the subsequent development of the plot, until finally the accumulated correspondence of the leading characters itself leads to their downfall.<sup>1</sup>

Ovid's paired epistles (*Heroides* 16–21), those in which hero writes a letter to heroine and receives a reply from her, clearly contain the potentiality for the kind of dramatic development that can be seen in the best epistolary novels, and Ovid pays careful attention to the purported time of composition and the motivation for the writing of the letters from the dramatic context. In the absence of an omniscient third-person narrator, we the readers must reconstruct for ourselves the dramatic context of the exchange from details mentioned in passing by the two correspondents. The letter of Paris to Helen (*Her.* 16) and her reply to it (*Her.* 17) represent his declaration of love and her cautious encouragement of it, and so form the prelude to the most famous of all elopements. Paris, it appears, is writing to Helen actually within the palace of Menelaus in Sparta,<sup>2</sup> which stated baldly sounds implausible – in normal circumstances one rarely has cause to write to anyone staying under the same roof – but it emerges that Paris' covert attempts to declare his love in person have been rebuffed (*Her.* 17. 75 ff.),<sup>3</sup> and he has also failed to suborn Helen's companions (16. 259 ff.). Now that Menelaus has departed to Crete, Paris sees his best hope of winning Helen's heart as she lies in her solitary bed (16. 317) in an account of the origins and growth of his passion for her. As he remarks at the outset (16. 13 f.), the very fact that she is reading his letter has given him the entrée he needs. In the specific dramatic context adroitly engineered by Ovid from the outlines of the traditional story, the exchange of letters we read seems to be a natural outcome of the story so far, and it also emerges as the agency which precipitates subsequent events.

The exchange of letters between Acontius and Cydippe (*Her.* 20 and 21) is again plausibly embedded by Ovid in the details of the story he inherited from Callimachus (fr. 67–75Pf.). Acontius fell in love with Cydippe when he caught sight of her at a festival of Diana on the island of Delos. Inscribing 'I swear by Diana to marry Acontius' on an apple, he rolled it towards her, and she, reading the words aloud,

<sup>1</sup> On these considerations see in general Vivienne Mylne, *The eighteenth-century French novel: techniques of illusion* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1981), pp. 149–55, 234–6. Most recent research on the literary potentialities specific to the epistolary form has concentrated on the epistolary novel and on Laclos in particular; cf. Jean Rousset, 'Une Forme littéraire: le roman par lettres' in *Forme et signification: essais sur les structures littéraires de Corneille à Claudel* (Paris, 1962), pp. 65–108, François Jost, 'Le Roman épistolaire et la technique narrative au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Comparative Literature Studies* 3 (1966), 397–427, Tzvetan Todorov, *Littérature et signification* (Paris, 1967), Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: approaches to a form* (Columbus, Ohio, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Her.* 16. 129 f., 217 ff., 275 f., 299 f., 17. 7 ff., 159 f.

<sup>3</sup> *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* provides a close parallel to this successful transgression of the logical epistolary convention of separation of writer and addressee. The arch-seducer, the Vicomte de Valmont, does not address a letter to the virtuous object of his attentions, Madame de Tourvel, a fellow-guest staying under the same roof in the absence of her husband, until (Letter XXIV) she has rejected in horror his first approach to her, an event he describes in Letter XXIII. He thus loses the social intimacy he previously enjoyed and must henceforth press his suit by letter. Her reluctant willingness to reply (Letter XXVI), like that of Helen, marks the beginning of her downfall. A coincidence? I know of no treatment of Ovid's possible influence on Laclos (Laurent Versini's otherwise encyclopaedic *Laclos et la tradition* (Paris, 1968), pp. 242–6, mentions Ovid only in the most vague terms), but Valmont's description of his attempted seduction presents us with an unmistakably Ovidian scene and sentiment; cf. Letter XXIII: 'Aussi, en descendant de voiture, elle [Mme de Rosemonde] passa dans son appartement, et nous laissa tête à tête, ma belle et moi, dans un salon mal éclairé; obscurité douce, qui enhardit l'amour timide', and *Ov. Am.* 1. 5. 3 ff., esp. 7 f. 'illa verecundis lux est praebenda puellis|qua timidus latebras speret habere pudor'.

bound herself by the oath. After her return home, her wedding to her formal fiancé had to be postponed three times, as she fell victim to a mysterious illness. Her parents consulted the Delphic oracle, which revealed the truth about the oath, and she duly married Acontius. Ovid sets the exchange of letters after the third postponement of the wedding (21. 257) and just before the response from Delphi is received (21. 231 ff.). As the languishing Cydippe is being kept under close surveillance (21. 17 ff.; cf. 20. 129 ff.), we can accept that the only way the eager Acontius can press his suit is by a smuggled letter (the obvious intermediary being the 'conscia nutrix' of 21. 17), while Cydippe's reply, the epistolary form permitting the gradual revelation of her attraction to his brash and confident manner, gives psychological depth and complexity to the rather mechanical resolution of the problem by the Delphic oracle in the Callimachean version (fr. 75. 20 ff. Pf.).

Ovid's most effective use of purported time of composition and motivation of the epistolary form from the dramatic context occurs in the exchange between Leander and Hero (*Her.* 18 and 19), young lovers separated by the waters of the Hellespont. Every evening to see his beloved, Leander bravely swims across the dangerous straits until, inevitably, one stormy night he drowns. Within this general dramatic context, Ovid sets Leander's letter during a prolonged and violent storm. For seven days now (18. 25) he has been unable to make his accustomed swim, and, although he would much sooner brave the waters, all he can do is to commit his love to a letter (18. 21–4). Even getting this to Hero will prove difficult: only one seaman has been bold enough to put out on to the Hellespont, and he is the one who will deliver the letter (18. 9 f.). Hero is constantly looking out for similar opportunities to send her reply (19. 29 f.). Leander cannot travel with this sailor for fear of discovery, as the port is overlooked and the affair must be kept from his parents (18. 11–14). In the circumstances depicted, the writing of his letter could hardly be better motivated. Hero longs to see him again, and her reply is deeply affectionate. She realises, and is afraid of, the dangers the sea holds for him, but in her impatience she casts just a hint of suspicion on his motives for not attempting the swim (19. 57 f., 95 f., 116). She can remember a time, she writes, when the sea was no less fierce – or at least not much less – and yet he made the swim (19. 85 f.). Where, she asks, is the great swimmer who scorned the waves (19. 90)? That is all the information the letters give us. The correspondence cannot, of course, predict future events, though it does foreshadow them (18. 191 ff.),<sup>4</sup> but we need little imagination to conjecture that Leander's reaction to Hero's imputation that his ardour is cooling will be to attempt the swim in spite of the conditions and against his better judgement. So, not only is the exchange of letters superbly motivated from the dramatic context, but it can also be felt to precipitate the dénouement, and the direct revelation and interplay of character the epistolary form allows grants a tragic dimension to the sad accident which ends this tender love story.<sup>5</sup>

In the double *Heroides*, then, Ovid seems to have worked out the implications of his use of the epistolary form, and to have exploited it to good effect by making the exchange of letters an integral part of the three stories. In the single *Heroides* (1–15) such accommodation of the epistolary form to its dramatic context is harder to find. Within the confines of Ovid's treatment of the story of Phaedra (*Her.* 4), her letter to Hippolytus revealing her passion must be regarded as the motivation of ensuing

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also the bad omens mentioned at *Her.* 18. 81 f., 141 f., 19. 195 ff. The outcome of the story would have been familiar to Ovid's readers at least from Verg. *G.* 3. 258 ff., and probably also from Hellenistic antecedents; cf. D. L. Page, *Select Papyri*, III (London, 1941), pp. 512–4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. W. S. Anderson, 'The *Heroides*' in (ed.) J. W. Binns, *Ovid* (London, 1973), pp. 70–4.

events,<sup>6</sup> and Arthur Palmer made the attractive suggestion<sup>7</sup> that the timing of Dido's letter (*Her.* 7) was prompted in Ovid's mind by Virgil, *Aeneid* 4. 408–15. Few of the poems, however, draw much more than cursory attention to their epistolary status, and by and large it is the apparent inappropriateness of the epistolary form to the dramatic context that has time and time again drawn the critics' fire. In lines 3–4 of the tenth poem, when Ariadne, abandoned on the deserted shore of the island of Naxos, writes 'the words you are *reading*, Theseus, I *send* to you ('*quae legis... tibi... mitto*') from that shore from which your sails carried off your ship without me', it is by no means unreasonable to wonder how Ariadne is going to have her letter delivered, and even where she has managed to find writing materials. At the opening of the third poem, the barbarian Briseis draws attention to the difficulty she has in writing to Achilles in Greek.<sup>8</sup> Incongruous though these situations may be, it is wrong to lay much emphasis on their absurdity. In epistolary fiction, the very implausibility of the circumstances of writing can be a commentary on the writer's character or situation. Thus in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, when Valmont writes a love-letter to Mme de Tourvel in the bed of a favourite courtesan Emilie and uses her bare back as his writing-desk (Letter XLVII introducing Letter XLVIII), we can hardly construe this as anything other than an expression of the utter depravity of his character. Ariadne's words emphasize her isolation and the complete helplessness of her situation, and her belief that her letter will reach Theseus and that he will read it may be the first of the numerous delusions induced by her isolation which we can detect her experiencing in the course of her letter (cf. especially 79 ff.). Briseis' reference to her linguistic shortcomings underlines the difficulty she has in establishing any sort of communication with her stubborn and aloof addressee. These last two cases might be dismissed as special pleading, and it might be concluded, perhaps correctly, that Ovid's realisation of the implications of the epistolary form had not developed completely at this stage. Be that as it may, by ignoring the fact that the *Heroides* are meant to be letters – and Ovid quite categorically regarded them as such<sup>9</sup> – we are in danger of overlooking cases in which Ovid did manage to exploit the potentialities of the form. I have a specific instance in mind, Penelope's letter to Ulysses (*Her.* 1).

Writing of Ovid's adoption of the epistolary framework for the *Heroides*, W. S. Anderson has remarked:<sup>10</sup>

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; but Ulysses never receives it.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Her.* 4. 7 ff. 'ter tecum conata loqui ter inutilis haesit | lingua, ter in primo destitit ore sonus. | qua licet et sequitur, pudor est miscendus amori; | dicere quae pudeat, scribere iussit amor.' Whether this is Ovid's idea or is derived from one of his numerous possible sources for the story of Phaedra remains uncertain; cf. H. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 142 ff., esp. 146 n. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Commentary on *Her.* 7 init.

<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, the amusement that such a flirtation with verisimilitude arouses in exotic contexts seems to aid the suspension of disbelief by emphasizing the playful, literary quality of the text. Zilia, the heroine of Mme de Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1746), abducted from Peru, tells how she recorded her first seventeen letters to her betrothed Aza, a Peruvian prince, on *quipos*, knotted cords of various colours used by the Peruvians for sending messages, until her French was good enough to translate them; cf. Mylne, op. cit. n. 1 above, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Ars* 3. 345 'vel tibi composita cantetur *epistula* voce'; also *Am.* 2. 18, 21 ff., and E.-A. Kirfel, *Untersuchungen zur Briefform der Heroides Ovids* (Noctes Romanae Band 11, Bern/Stuttgart, 1969), esp. pp. 11–36.

<sup>10</sup> Op. cit. n. 5 above, p. 66.

Anderson is referring to lines 59–62 of the poem:

quisquis ad haec vertit peregrinam litora puppim,  
 ille mihi de te multa rogatus abit,  
 quamque tibi reddat, si te modo viderit usquam,  
 traditur huic digitis charta notata meis.

'Whoever turns his foreign ship to these shores departs only when he has been asked many questions by me concerning you, and a letter written by my own fingers is handed over to him to give to you if only he should see you anywhere.' The proposed method of delivery might have sounded less strange to the ancients than it does to us. We may perhaps recall how Iphigeneia recognised her brother Orestes when she asked him to deliver a letter to Greece which was in fact destined for him (Eur. *IT* 727 ff.). At first sight, admittedly, these lines do look like a rather feeble attempt on Ovid's part to justify the existence, as it were, of this poem, but in that he could have glossed over the problem merely by not alluding to it, we should for this very reason take a closer look at the passage, bearing in mind as we do so the two considerations discussed earlier: the purported time of writing of the letter and the motivation for its writing at that point. Penelope claims that she writes a letter to give to each and every sailor who puts in at Ithaca in the hope that one day he may be able to give it into Ulysses' hands. So, when is she writing *this* letter, and to whom is she going to give it?

First, the supposed occasion of composition. Surveying the poem for clues given in passing, we find that Troy has fallen (3), so it is the period of Ulysses' wanderings. This is confirmed in line 25 by the information that the Argolic chieftains have returned, though this is hardly very helpful in that Ulysses wandered for ten years. Much more interesting are lines 37–8. Penelope has to explain how she knows about the celebrations for the return of the Greek leaders to their cities which she has described in lines 25–36,<sup>11</sup> so she mentions in passing that she heard all this from Telemachus, who in turn got it from Nestor. This is very specific indeed: Telemachus relates what he heard on his mission to Pylos and Sparta to his mother on the day after his return in *Odyssey* 17. 108 ff. This would clearly seem to be the period Ovid has in mind, for there are two further apparent references to the mission of Telemachus in lines 63–5 and 99–100. In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus' interview with his mother takes place on the morning of the day before the suitors are killed. That is, Penelope must be writing this letter just before she is reunited with her husband. I am not aware that attention has been drawn before to the purported time of composition of this letter, but once we realise it, much of what Penelope says takes on considerable irony: her appeal to Ulysses not to write back, but to come in person (2), her complaints about how slowly time passes for her (7 f.), about how she does not know where he is (57 f.), and above all the closing couplet of the poem, in which she laments 'I, who was a girl when you left, though you should come home *immediately* (*protinus ut venias*, 116), will seem to have become an old woman'. Penelope will not have to wait very long to find out her husband's reaction to the physical changes the intervening twenty years have wrought in her.

So, the purported time of composition is the very eve of the slaying of the suitors. What prompts her to write *this* letter at *this* point? Returning to lines 59 ff., we find that she claims to write a letter whenever a foreigner arrives who can carry it for her. It so happens that somebody does arrive in the palace on the day before the suitors are killed who fits this description, a beggar who claims he is a Cretan who has fallen

<sup>11</sup> All of Ulysses' men were, of course, killed at one stage or another on the journey home.

on hard times, and indeed, in *Od.* 19. 163 f., Penelope does what she claims in line 60 of this epistle to do in such cases, she questions him at length about her husband. Presumably this particular letter she is now writing she intends to give to him. But we know that this Cretan beggar is actually Ulysses in disguise, so all unknowing, Penelope is about to deliver this letter into the hands of its addressee. *Her.* 1. 59–62, then, far from being an embarrassingly feeble attempt on Ovid's part to convince his readers that what they are perusing is a letter, are an inspired example of motivation of the epistolary form from the dramatic context which infuse the poem with a most delicious irony.

Or are they? A number of considerations enjoin caution. If the situation I have depicted was in Ovid's mind, then his friend Sabinus did not catch on, for we learn from *Amores* 2. 18. 29 that among the replies he composed to Ovid's heroines' letters was one from Ulysses to Penelope; but Sabinus seems to have been oblivious to, or to have been prepared to overlook, the implausibility that any of Ovid's heroines should receive replies from their absent menfolk. More important, the purported time of composition of this letter on which this interpretation hangs is derived entirely from the three apparent references to Telemachus' mission to Pylos and Sparta in lines 37–8, 63–5 and 99–100. It is somewhat disconcerting to find, therefore, that so substantial a critic as Richard Bentley was in favour of ejecting lines 37–40 and 99–100 from the text, thus leaving only 63–5, which on closer inspection do not unequivocally refer to the mission of Telemachus.<sup>12</sup> Bentley's judgement is preserved only in the brackets he put round the lines in question in his copy of the text, but his condemnation of them will not have been based entirely on considerations of linguistic usage.<sup>13</sup> The interpretation I have aired presupposes that Ovid had, and expected his readers to have, a close acquaintance with the *Odyssey*, yet one of Bentley's reasons for wishing to excise 37–40 and 99–100 will undoubtedly have been the marked deviations in these lines from the Homeric account. In 37 (and cf. 63–5) Penelope claims that *she* sent Telemachus to Pylos and Sparta to enquire after Ulysses, whereas in Homer, Telemachus goes to Pylos without telling his mother,<sup>14</sup> and indeed he instructs the old nurse Eurycleia not to do so (*Od.* 3. 373–6). In 99–100, Penelope says that the suitors plotted to ambush Telemachus on his way to Pylos, whereas in *Od.* 4. 701,

<sup>12</sup> 'nos Pylon, antiqui Neleia Nestoris arva, | misimus; incerta est fama remissa Pylo. | misimus et Sparten; Sparte quoque nescia veri.' If these lines refer to the mission of Telemachus, they contradict not only Homer but 99–100 'ille per insidias paene est mihi nuper ademptus, | dum parat *invitis omnibus* ire Pylon.' However, it is surely to complicate matters unduly to postulate a separate mission to these same places not attested in Homer.

<sup>13</sup> Notably the infinitive of purpose *quaerere* after *misso* in 37; 39–40, linked in sense to 37–8, contain further difficulties. Excision is the path of least resistance, but leaves an impossible transition between 36 and 41. Cf. the next note.

<sup>14</sup> Indeed against her wishes, as she says to him on his return (ἐμὲν ἀέκητι, *Od.* 17. 43). The editors have passed on to me the suggestion of reading *iusso* for *misso* in 37, comparing the vv. ll. at *Juv.* 3. 78. This would immediately account for the infinitive *quaerere*. I would hesitate to alter the transmitted text on two grounds: (i) *misso* gains some support from Penelope's insistence (cf. the emphatic repetition of *misimus* at the beginning of 64 and 65) that it was *she* who initiated the journey of Telemachus. (ii) *iusso* immediately reminds us that Telemachus was indeed ordered to go to see Nestor and Menelaus by Athene disguised as Mentes (*Od.* 1. 284 f.), but when Penelope learns of his mission from Medon (4. 701 f.), she is puzzled at what impelled him to go (707 ff.), and she is nowhere told, not even by Telemachus on his return (17. 108 ff.), of the divine instigation of his journey. If the *Odyssey* functions as an 'objective' account of the events which lie behind *Her.* 1 (the central interpretative problem of the poem which I discuss below), Ovid's Penelope, however deviously she may distort those events for her own purposes, strictly speaking should not have access to information which the *Odyssey* clearly indicates she has not been given.

where she first hears of the plot, the herald Medon explicitly tells her that it has been laid to trap him *οἷκαδε νισσόμενον*, travelling homewards.

These are not the only deviations from the Homeric account. In line 15, if the manuscript reading is correct,<sup>15</sup> Antilochus is said to have been killed by Hector, whereas it is stated in the *Odyssey* that he was killed by Memnon,<sup>16</sup> and in line 91 the herald Medon is included among those hostile to Penelope, whereas in the *Odyssey* he is generally presented as loyal to her, although there are two isolated references which suggest the contrary, one in which Telemachus numbers him among the suitors (16. 252) and the other in which the poet describes him as a favourite of the suitors (17. 172 f.). Finally, in lines 41–4, in referring to how accounts of Ulysses' bravery during the Trojan war would fill her with fear, Penelope mentions the night attack made by Diomedes and Ulysses, giving to her husband the chief role in the slaughter of Rhesus and his men, whereas the Homeric version (*Il.* 10. 488 ff.) clearly states that it was Diomedes who did the killing, while Odysseus merely dragged away the bodies. The total number of these discrepancies is disconcertingly large, so large that wholesale excision or emendation on these grounds alone is inconceivable. We might either conclude that Ovid has not been concerned to follow his source closely, and hence will not have expected his readers to bring an exact knowledge of the *Odyssey* to bear on this poem – in which case the interpretation I have suggested becomes less easy to defend –, or we must seek an explanation or explanations for these deviations from Ovid's artistic purposes in the *Heroides*.

To ascertain which of these two conclusions is the correct one, we must examine Ovid's procedure in the two other epistles which seem similarly to be derived from a single major literary source, *Heroides* 3 and 7.

The letter of Briseis to Achilles is a very close adaptation of those parts of the *Iliad* in which she appears – in places, in fact, almost a translation.<sup>17</sup> None the less a couple of deviations are found. In *Her.* 3. 147 f., Briseis cries out to be run through with the sword with which, 'si dea passa fuisset', Achilles would have killed Agamemnon. In *Il.* 1. 198, Athena appears to Achilles alone (*οἷω φαινόμενη*), so strictly speaking Briseis should be unaware of her intervention. It would be understandable if Ovid had overlooked this small detail.<sup>18</sup> More significantly, in *Her.* 3. 23 f., Patroclus is represented as comforting Briseis as she is handed over to Agamemnon. There is no

<sup>15</sup> The transmitted text *Antilochum... ab Hectore victum* was questioned as early as 1489, by Politian (*Miscellanea*, i. 76, a reference I owe to the editors), who suggested either *Amphimachum* (cf. *Il.* 13. 185 ff.) for *Antilochum* (necessitating a similar change in line 16), or *Memnone* (cf. n. 16 below). Housman (*CR* 11 [1897], 102 f. = *Classical Papers*, i. 381 f.) suggested *ab hoste revictum*. He adduced the two main arguments in favour of emendation: (i) the deviation from the canonical Homeric account; this is part of a larger question bearing on the poem as a whole which I shall deal with below; (ii) the inelegance of the repetition of Hector's name directly after 'nomine in Hectoreo pallida semper eram' (14). It could be argued, however, that 'sive... sive...' (15–18), with the death of Patroclus at the hands of Hector forming the second instance, should form two illustrations of Penelope's fear of Hector before she goes on to include all Greek deaths at the hands of Trojans as a cause of fear for her husband's safety (19–22).

<sup>16</sup> 4. 187 f. This is the normal version; cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 6. 28 ff., Dio Chrys. 11. 352, Dict. 4. 6, Quint. Smyrn. 2. 244 f. I cannot satisfactorily account for the deviation in Ovid. Hector is found as the killer of Antilochus elsewhere only in Hyg. *Fab.* 113, but nothing can be inferred from this, as in *Fab.* 112 his killer is said to have been Memnon. Textual corruption in Hyginus has been suspected; cf. Housman, loc. cit. n. 15 above. Another variant, in which Paris killed Antilochus, is recorded in Dares of Phrygia, *De excidio Troiae historia* 34.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Her.* 3. 30–6 and *Il.* 9. 122–30; *Her.* 3. 37–8 and *Il.* 9. 144–7; *Her.* 3. 47–50 and *Il.* 19. 291–6.

<sup>18</sup> Unless Jacobson (op. cit. n. 6 above, p. 36 n. 56) is correct in suggesting that Ovid meant us to understand that Achilles had told Briseis of the incident.

corresponding scene in the *Iliad*, but Ovid has clearly adapted a detail from Briseis' lament for Patroclus in *Il.* 19. 295 ff., in which she recalls how Patroclus comforted her after Achilles had killed her husband and sacked her city.<sup>19</sup> In this case, a reason for the deviation can confidently be advanced, a reason connected with the epistolary form of Ovid's poem. Ovid had a very limited amount of material at his disposal for the portrayal of Briseis. Her letter had to be set before her return to Achilles (*Il.* 19. 246), that is, before the event which brought this about, the death of Patroclus, which prompted her lament for him in the *Iliad*. His kind treatment of her after her original capture was not relevant to her present predicament, Achilles' failure to reclaim her, so Ovid devised a similar scene in which Patroclus promises a quick end to her abduction by Agamemnon, which Briseis can then use to emphasize Achilles' lack of concern for her, the motivating spirit of her letter (21 f.).

In the seventh epistle, Dido refers to the shrine which she maintains to the memory of her dead husband Sychaeus, and she recounts how she has heard a voice inviting her 'Elissa, veni', an invitation she welcomes joyfully. This is clearly based on *Aeneid* 4. 457–61, where Virgil refers only to her seeming to hear 'verba vocantis...viri' (460 f.), and does not describe the effect these words have upon her, though he does include this among the incidents that are driving Dido to the edge of madness (*Aen.* 4. 450–73). Ovid's Dido is trying, as always, to play on the feelings of Aeneas, but Ovid himself has an ulterior purpose in making his Dido welcome the ghostly voice of Sychaeus. His readers remember from the *Aeneid* that she will be reunited with Sychaeus in the Underworld (6. 473–5), but Dido when she is writing this letter cannot, of course, know that. Ovid is trying to foreshadow future events for his readers through her words, a technique that is an important but neglected aspect of the *Heroides*, and one that must be dependent on the knowledge of the story the reader brings to Ovid's version.<sup>20</sup>

It may be granted, then, that while it is impossible to rule out oversight on Ovid's part, in principle an attempt should be made to explain deviations from a major source in terms of some artistic end or other. Recognition of such deviations implies, of course, a close knowledge of the source, and there are instances in Penelope's letter where the point of a passage seems to depend on a fairly exact knowledge of the *Odyssey*. In 75 ff., Penelope remarks: 'perhaps, knowing you men and your desires, you could be in thrall to some exotic love, and perhaps you are telling her what a homely wife you have ('quam sit tibi rustica coniunx', 77)'. It is indeed the case in the *Odyssey* that not only does Odysseus spend a considerable time with Calypso, but in 5. 215 ff. he says that Penelope cannot compare with her, though he does not mean this

<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Achilles is represented as addressing her at this point in Ovid (*Her.* 3. 54).

<sup>20</sup> It is possible that foreshadowing might help to account for the deviation from Homer in Penelope's description of the night attack in *Her.* 1. 41–4 'ausus es, o nimium nimiumque oblite tuorum, | Thracia nocturno tangere castra dolo, | totque simul mactare viros, adiutus ab uno! | at bene cautus eras et memor ante mei!' Is Ovid inviting us to look ahead to events Penelope necessarily cannot know of at the time she is writing this letter, when against large odds Ulysses will play the major part in killing a great number of men at one and the same time, the suitors, and will keep Penelope totally in the dark as to what is to happen? The only snag is 'adiutus ab uno' (43). In *Od.* 22, Odysseus is helped in the slaying of the suitors not only by Telemachus but also by the swineherd Eumaeus, the cowherd Philoetius and, at a later stage, Athene disguised as Mentor, as seems to be foreshadowed in 103 f. 'hac faciunt custosque boum longaevaue nutrix, | tertius immundae cura fidelis harae'. But if it is not to be obtrusive and spoil the epistolary illusion, foreshadowing must be partial and allusive. Foreshadowing was a recognised literary technique in the ancient world; cf. G. E. Duckworth, 'Προαναφώνησις in the Scholia to Homer', *AJPh* 52 (1931), 320–38, esp. 326 on foreshadowing by analogy and 328 on foreshadowing of action outside the narrative of the epic itself.



as a criticism: Calypso, after all, is a goddess. The reader with this much knowledge of the *Odyssey* will see considerable irony in the Ovidian Penelope's remarks. Without realising it, she has innocently stumbled on the truth, though her interpretation of it is incorrect. The reader with a deeper knowledge of the *Odyssey* will see things in a different light, for if he recognises the stage at which Penelope is writing this letter, he will realise that Penelope knows about Calypso, for Menelaus tells Telemachus in *Od.* 4. 555 f. that she is holding Odysseus back against his will, and Telemachus recounts this news to Penelope on his return from Sparta in *Od.* 17. 142 ff. So, although Ovid's Penelope cannot know what her husband says about her to Calypso, and thus her remark 'forsitan et narres quam sit tibi rustica coniunx' in 77 remains ironical, her character changes dramatically in our eyes. Far from being innocent, she is being somewhat disingenuous, and indeed is prevaricating in lines 64–5 when she says she has received no firm news of him from Pylos and Sparta. This is substantially the position Howard Jacobson takes in his book on the *Heroides*:<sup>21</sup> a Penelope who mentions weaving to her husband, as Ovid's does in lines 9–10, without telling him of the ruse with which she kept the suitors at bay, we might reasonably suspect to have a motive for withholding this information, which is such eloquent testimony to her chastity. Viewed in this way, deviations from Homer serve to differentiate Ovid's characterization of Penelope. When in lines 37 and 63–5 she claims responsibility for initiating the mission to Pylos and Sparta, this is a deliberate lie on her part to impress upon Ulysses that she has gone to all reasonable lengths to find him before succumbing to the overwhelming pressure to remarry to which she alludes in 81 ff. Desperate situations call for desperate arguments. Within the epistolary context, deviation from an established source allows the reader to recognise and penetrate the subjectivity of the 'writer's' viewpoint, which is a central feature of the form.<sup>22</sup> Inconsistency within a letter may perform the same function in the *Heroides*. Thus when Penelope falsely claims to have sent Telemachus to enquire after his father (37, 63–5), but then contradicts herself further on by saying that he went, as was nearer the truth, 'invitis omnibus' (100), we should see this contradiction not as an oversight on Ovid's part, nor as evidence of textual corruption or interpolation, but as a clue planted by Ovid which will prompt us, with our superior knowledge through the *Odyssey* of what 'objectively' happened, to question Penelope's state of mind and motives in writing this letter.<sup>23</sup>

Reference to the *Odyssey* in reading Penelope's letter is unavoidable, and the resonance of the poem and the complexity of Penelope's character seem largely to arise from recognition of Ovid's deviations from the canonical Homeric account. These deviations thus need not be seen as an insuperable obstacle to the interpretation I have

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit. n. 6 above, pp. 243–76. Jacobson traces in detail the freedom, not to say irreverence, with which the character of Penelope was treated by post-Homeric writers.

<sup>22</sup> That the epistle was the form which above all others revealed the character of its writer was recognised by Demetrius, *On Style* 227: πλείστον δὲ ἐχέτω τὸ ἠθικὸν ἢ ἐπιστολή, ὥσπερ καὶ ὁ διάλογος: σχεδὸν γὰρ εἰκόνα ἕκαστος τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολήν. καὶ ἐστὶ μὲν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλου λόγου παντὸς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἦθος τοῦ γράφοντος, ἐξ οὐδενὸς δὲ οὕτως, ὡς ἐπιστολῆς.

<sup>23</sup> Blatant inconsistency within a single poem occurs elsewhere in the *Heroides* and must, I think, be seen as a function of characterization. Jacobson (op. cit. n. 6 above, p. 148) draws attention to *Her.* 4, where Phaedra describes herself as a married woman (17 ff.), yet immediately afterwards presents herself to Hippolytus through images which suggest virginity (21 ff.), a manifestation of her desire to see herself in relation to Hippolytus as a *puella* (cf. 2), and not as the *noverca* (cf. 129) she really is. Cf. also C. S. Pearson, 'Simile and Imagery in Ovid *Heroides* 4 and 5', *JCS* 5 (1980), 110 ff., esp. 113.

offered of the epistle's occasion and recipient. The exact whereabouts of Ulysses are thrown into prominence by Penelope's question in 57–8. Lines 59–62 are then very specific, and they are clearly derived from Penelope's interview with her disguised husband in *Od.* 19. 163 ff. It is impossible to say whether ancient readers would have been attuned to the ironic possibilities afforded by the epistolary form at this point. Ovid's chief claim for the *Heroides* was that they were innovative ('ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus', *Ars* 3. 346), so a priori we might not expect a high level of 'competence' on the part of Ovid's readership in dealing with these epistolary narrations. An intriguing sidelight is cast on this problem, however, by the well-documented response of ancient readers to Ovid's source for Penelope's letter. For Aristotle, the plot of the *Odyssey* was 'complex' precisely because it contained recognitions throughout: ἡ δὲ Ὀδύσσεια πεπλεγμένον (ἀναγνώρισις γὰρ διόλου) καὶ ἡθικὴ (*Poetics* 1459b 14–15). Aristotle's preoccupation with this aspect of the epic is reflected in the scholia, which repeatedly remark upon the variety of means of recognition employed in the *Odyssey*.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, on a number of occasions, the scholiasts feel impelled to discuss at considerable length why Odysseus reveals his identity to several characters before the slaying of the suitors, but not to Penelope, as in Schol. N *Od.* 13 init. (Dindorf, p. 789):

Διὰ τὶ Ὀδυσσεὺς τῇ μὲν Πηνελόπῃ ἡλικίαν τε ἤδη ἐχούσῃ καὶ φιλοῦσῃ αὐτὸν οὐκ ἐδήλωσεν ὅς ἦν, τῷ δὲ Τηλεμάχῳ νέῳ ὄντι καὶ τοῖς οἰκέταις, τῷ μὲν συμβῶτι, τῷ δὲ βουκόλῳ ὄντι; οὐ γὰρ δῆπου μὴ πείραν ἐκείνης εἰληφώς...<sup>25</sup>

The lengthy answers the scholiast gives to his question need not detain us. Whilst it would be foolhardy to suggest that Ovid was directly influenced by any of these comments, they do respect the typical preoccupations of a tradition of criticism with which he had at least a passing familiarity,<sup>26</sup> and which will have determined to some extent the way in which he and his readers approached the *Odyssey*. If the theme of recognition and its means was in Ovid's mind, we could do worse than recall Aristotle's pronouncements on the theme. For him the best kind of recognition-scene was one which arose naturally out of the development of the action, and his two favourite examples occur in the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles and the *Iphigenia in Tauris* of Euripides: πασῶν δὲ βελτίστη ἀναγνώρισις ἡ ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων, τῆς ἐκπλήξεως γιγνομένης δι' εἰκότων, οἷον ἐν τῷ Σοφοκλέους Οἰδίποδι καὶ τῇ Ἰφιγενείᾳ (*Poetics* 1455a 16–18).<sup>27</sup> In the latter play, as we remarked in passing, recognition takes place when Iphigenia gives to Orestes a letter intended for himself. *Mutatis mutandis* Penelope's letter fulfils the highest expectations of Aristotelian criticism.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Schol. *Od.* 4. 69, 113, 8. 43, 489, Eust. 1487. 15 ff., 1489. 35 ff. I owe the references in this and the following note to the kindness of Dr N. J. Richardson. On Aristotle's influence on the scholia see his article 'Literary Criticism in the exegetical Scholia to the *Iliad*: a Sketch', *CQ* n.s. 30 (1980), 265–87.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Schol. Vd. *Od.* 21. 208 (H. Schrader, *Porphyrii quaestionum Homericarum ad Odysseam pertinentium reliquiae* [Leipzig, 1890], p. 123), Eust. 1873. 45 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Rem.* 364 f. 'ingenium magni livor detractat Homeri; | quisquis es, ex illo, Zoile, nomen habes.' In spite of a number of attractive practical demonstrations of the relevance of the Homeric scholia to the criticism of Virgil by R. Heinze, *Vergils epische Technik* (Leipzig, 1915) and R. R. Schlunk, *The Homeric scholia and the Aeneid* (Ann Arbor, 1974), the methodology of their application to Roman poetry remains to be explored.

<sup>27</sup> The recognition scene in the *IT* obviously made a deep impression on Aristotle, as he refers to it also in *Poetics* 1452b 5–8 and 1454a 7.