Ovid's Early Poetry
From his Single Heroides to his Remedia Amoris

THEA S. THORSSEN
Ovid is one of the greatest poets in the Classical tradition and Western literature. This book represents the most comprehensive study to date of his early output as a unified literary production. First, the book proposes new ways of organising this part of Ovid’s poetic career, the chronology of which is notoriously difficult to establish. Next, by combining textual criticism with issues relating to manuscript transmission, the book decisively counters arguments levelled against the authenticity of *Heroides* 15, which consequently allows for a revaluation of Ovid’s early output. Furthermore, by focusing on the literary device of allusion, the book stresses the importance of Ovid’s single *Heroides* 1–15 in relationship with his *Amores* 1–3, *Ars amatoria* 1–3 and *Remedia amoris*. Throughout, the book identifies principles of Ovidian poetics that are found in his early poetry and that point towards the works of myth and exile that followed in his later career.

**Thea S. Thorsen** is Associate Professor of Latin at the Department of Historical Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. She is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy* (2013) and *Greek and Roman Games in the Computer Age* (2012) and co-editor, with Stephen Harrison, of *Sappho at Rome: Receptions from Lucretius to Martial* (forthcoming). She has published numerous articles on Greek and Roman poetry and prose, in Norwegian and in English, and she became the first person to have published translations of all of Ovid’s love elegies into Norwegian verse (2001–9).
OVID’S EARLY POETRY

From his single Heroides to his Remedia amoris

THEA S. THORSEN
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim
Ovid’s early poetry from his single Heroides to his Remedia amoris / Thea S. Thorsen.

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Thorsen, Thea Sellias, author.
Ovid’s early poetry from his single Heroides to his Remedia amoris / Thea S. Thorsen.

isbn 978-1-107-04041-0 (hardback)
1. Ovid, 43 B.C.–17 A.D. or 18 A.D. – Criticism and interpretation.
2. Latin poetry – History and criticism. I. Title.
PA637.T47 2014
871’.01 – dc23 2014023813
isbn 978-1-107-04041-0 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of urls for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.
Inger Louise Forselv in memoriam
Contents

Acknowledgements  page viii
Abbreviations  x
Notes on texts and translations  xii

Introduction  1
1 Dating the young Ovid  9
2 Ovidian signatures and the single Heroides  39
3 Being last – with the latest news  69
4 The authenticity of Heroides 15  96
5 Sappho among heroines  123
6 Sapphic self-reflections in Ovid’s Amores  147
7 Art, being and nothingness: Ars amatoria and Remedia amoris  171
   Postscript: The creation of a poet  194

References  196
General index  209
Index locorum  215
The authenticity of Heroides 15

*Heroides* 15 represents a key text in order to achieve a profounder appreciation of Ovid’s early poetry. Crucial structural patterns relating to Ovid’s other amatory poetry appear when his single *Heroides* are seen through the lens of Sappho’s letter to Phaon. First, the heroines in this work are wont to ‘sign’ their letters in a manner that is similar to the way in which *Naso* signs his other amatory works. Significantly, none of the Ovidian heroines does this in a manner more similar to that of Ovid than the Heroidean Sappho, who even formulates her version of the highly Ovidian assertion of literary renown: *iam canitur toto nomen in orbe meum* (*Her. 15.28, ‘my name is already sung abroad in all the earth’*). Next, for each of his Heroidean letters Ovid activates the intertextual backdrop of at least one individual literary model, in addition to a more general mythical framework, through which the poet aligns himself with preceding and contemporary poets. The legacy of Sappho, which includes both her own poems and her legendary afterlife, highlights this specifically Heroidean poetic collegiality, inasmuch as the intertextual backdrop of *Heroides* 15 includes Sappho’s poems proper. Finally, even though all of Ovid’s fifteen heroines write, there is an intensification in the authorial qualities of several of the *scribentis imaginum* in the latter half of the work, which culminates in the closing figure of the writing Ovidian heroine and real-life, historical poet Sappho.

*Heroides* 15 represents a key text in order to achieve a deeper understanding of Ovid’s establishment as a poet within the context of the immediate Roman literary history. The inclusion of a ‘Roman’ Sappho in the single *Heroides* in combination with a uniquely bold claim to originality on behalf of the same work (*Ars* 3.345–6) evokes dynamics that are characteristically Horatian-Propertian, in which the crucial choice of genre, poetic rivalry and the importance for an Augustan poet of assuming the identity of a Greek colleague are at stake. Choice of genre, poetic rivalry and the assumption of Greek poetic identities are all vital features in Ovid’s early poetry. Furthermore, these are features that in the metapoetically most explicit passages
relate to the single *Heroides* and that are, again, most acutely articulated in this work’s final poem – Sappho’s letter to Phaon. Likewise, certain lexical cues in *Heroides* facilitate a thematically broader comparison between this poem – the closure of the work with which Ovid designed his career to start in terms of primordial allusions to Homer through Penelope in *Heroides* – and the *extremus labor* (Ecl. 10.1 ‘final undertaking’) of Vergil’s poetic debut. Thus *Heroides* provides yet another crucial example of how Vergil provides a model for Ovid’s poetic career.¹

No doubt, the structural patterns of the single *Heroides* that emerge through the lens of the poem (as outlined in the preceding chapters), as well as the obvious links between *Heroides* and Ovid’s establishment as a poet within the context of contemporary Roman literature, all testify to Ovid’s authorial assertion. Yet, the authenticity of *Heroides* has long since been – and still is – greatly disputed among scholars. In the following section we take a closer look at the reasons why.

---

¹ Cf. Farrell (2004); Barchiesi and Hardie (2010: 60).

² See, however, Boccaccio in his *De mulieribus claris* (1361–2), where he seems to conflate the knowledge of the story of Sappho throwing herself into the waters of Leucas for a young man, as referred to in the *Epistula Sapphus* and *Suda* Σ108, with Marius Victorinus’ observations on the metre of the Lesbian poets (cf. Gramm. Lat. VI.161 Keil): *ingemiscens in eius obstinatam duritiem, dicunt uersus flebiles cecinisse; quos ego elegos fuisse putassem, cum tali sint elegi attributi materie, ni legissem ab ea, quasi preteritorum carminum formis spretis, nouum adinuentum genus, diuersis a ceteris incedens pedibus, quod ad hue ex eius nomine saphycam appellatur,* ‘bemoaning his persistent harshness, they say that she sung tearful verses; I would have thought that these were elegies, since elegies are associated with such matter, if I had not read about her that after the metres of her predecessors had been almost scorned [by her], she were preceding in entirely different feet, [producing] a new, invented genre, which until today is called “Sapphic” after her name’ (my translation). Cf. also Fritsen (2005: 41–6) and Comparetti (1876: 6–7).

³ As seen in e.g. *Sappho phaoni. Saphos lesbia uates ad phaonem ex grecis in Latinas litteras uersa per Nasonem sulmonensem ut ferunt nonnulli epistula aurae* (Par. Lat. NB Lat. 7989 of 1423, ‘Sappho to Phaon. The Lesbian poet Sappho’s golden letter to Phaon, translated by Naso from Sulmo, as not few tell of, from Greek into Latin words’). For further references see Ramírez de Verger (2009: 188, n. 1). See also Fritsen (2005: passim, esp. 46).
well as many commentaries. Despite having a manuscript tradition that was largely separate from the other *Heroides* (both single and double, see above), Sappho’s letter to Phaon remained firmly associated with Ovid and his collection of epistolary love elegies in the subsequent editions that were produced, where it conventionally occupied the final and twenty-first place. This changed in 1629, when D. Heinsius, as discussed in Chapter 1, united the poem with Ovid’s other heroines as the single *Heroides*’ fifteenth and final letter, following Scaliger’s lead.

The authenticity of *Heroides* 15 was first challenged in 1816 by Francke in his treatise about the question of the origin of the elegiac genre. Francke’s scepticism was based first of all on what he, apparently unfamiliar with the *Francofurtanus* and medieval *florilegia*, thought was the entirely separate transmission of *Heroides* 15. Moreover, Francke somewhat pedantically perceived a mix-up between the genre of elegy defined in terms of metre (*elegia*) in contrast to elegy understood as plaintive song (*elegi*, pl.) in a line from *Heroides* 15, which he knew in the humanist version: *flendus amor meus est, elegia flebile carmen* (*Her. 15.7*, ‘my love is tearful: elegy is a tearful song’). Francke furthermore thought that this mix-up was produced by a forger who had read Ovid’s lines *flebilis indignos, Elegia, solue capillos: a, nimis ex uero nunc tibi nomen erit* (*Am. 3.9.3–4*, ‘tearful Elegia, loosen the hair that you should not have had to loosen: ah, too much of a truth will your name now become’), where the etymological explanation given in the pentameter, according to Francke, excited the same mix-up as at *Heroides* 15.7, between the term concerning the metre (*elegia*) and the term concerning the tearful song (*elegi*, pl.) in the hexameter.

No wonder that, in 1843, when Schneidewin wished to defend Francke’s stance, which had gained very little support among scholars, he excused his forerunner for having withheld ‘better reasons’. For Schneidewin knew the textual variant of the last half of *Her. 15.7*, *elegi quoque flebile carmen* (literally ‘elegies are also a tearful song’), which was attested in only a few humanist copies, and with which Francke’s argument fell. These humanist copies stemmed from the medieval witness *Francofurtanus*, with which Schneidewin was unfamiliar at the time.

Schneidewin then set forth to produce the ‘better reasons’ in order to condemn the authenticity of *Heroides* 15, which he explicitly called a ‘Machwerk’ (‘shabby piece of work’). First, he found the Latin of *Her. 15.4*

---

4 See Dörrie (1975: 55–68). ‘Ovid’s Sappho’ was furthermore a hot scholarly issue, as can be seen in the philological polemics of Calderini (d. 1478) and Merula (d. 1494), cf. Campanelli (2001: passim, esp. 39).

5 Francke (1816: 8).

6 Francke (1816: 43).

7 Schneidewin (1843: 139) (‘bessere Gründe’).

8 Schneidewin (1843: 139).
(hoc breue nescires unde mouetur opus) clumsy, not so much because of its use of indicative in a dependent clause, as because of its sense, which he found revealing of the forger behind the poem. Schneidewin furthermore claimed that the forger had misunderstood the passage at Am. 2.18.34, where Sabinus apparently had made Phaon love Sappho again, while the Heroidean Sappho, according to Schneidewin, promises to do so only when her heartache has been cured to the degree that she does not even want Phaon back. Schneidewin’s third argument against the poem’s authenticity concerned the possible attestation of Heroides 15.18 (non oculis grata est Atthis ut ante meis) in the second book of the Ars of the grammarian Marius Plotius Sacerdos (late third century AD), which was circulating in a slightly different version under the title Catholica, erroneously attributed to the grammarian Valerius Probus (first century AD).

Both treatises are transmitted in the Codex Bobiensis, where the first of these texts, [Probus’] Catholica, has the following passage: ‘[a word ending in] *this*, that is of the third declension [and has the ending] *this* or *dis* in the genitive. *Atthis*, *Atthidis*. Thus Ovid.’ By contrast, the version attributed to Sacerdos has: ‘[a word ending in] *this* that is of the third declension [and has the ending] *this* or *dis* in the genitive, the male *Atthis*, the male *Atthis*’ or *Atthidis*. Thus Ovid.’ Whereas [Probus’] Catholica thus seems to refer quite simply to ‘Atthis’, which is the name of a girl loved by the historical Sappho and uniquely attested in the Ovidian corpus at Her. 15.18, the passage ascribed to Sacerdos is more difficult: either it contains a misspelling with aspiration of the name ‘Attis’, the male priest of Cybele (cf. Met. 10.104, Fast. 4.223, 5.227, Ib. 455), or, if the spelling of Atthis with aspiration is correct, then the transmitted *hic*, indicative of a male, must be a misspelling or mistaken correction of the feminine *haec*. Keil assumed the latter and emended *hic* to *haec* in his edition of the Grammatici Latini (1855–1923).

9 Schneidewin disregards numerous parallels for the usage of *mouere* with *opus* in the sense applied in Heroides 15; cf. Elisei (2010: 60).
11 This *et hoc tertiae declinationis, this uel dis facit genetiuo. Atthis, Atthidis. sic Ovidius* (Probus in Gramm. Lat. IV.30 Keil).
12 This *et hoc tertiae declinationis, this uel dis facit genetiuo hic Atthis, huius Atthis uel Atthidis. sic Ovidius* (Sacerdos in Gramm. Lat. IV.482 Keil).
13 In this Fasti passage the name of the Cybele priest is in fact spelled with ‘h’ (*Athim*) in one medieval manuscript (*G2*), cf. Frazer (1929: 154).
14 While there actually exists at least one misspelling of the name of the Cybele priest in Ovidian manuscripts (see note 14) the *Codex Bobiensis* generally seems weak on vowels, a fact in support of Keil’s emendation. I am grateful to Michael Reeve for pointing this out to me, as well as for providing a parallel example of another emendation by Keil: *hic luxus | haec luxus* (Sacerdos in Gramm. Lat. IV.482.21 Keil).
The authenticity of Heroides 15

Seemingly ignorant of the Sacerdos version of the passage, which does provide reasons to doubt that the Probus reference is to Heroides 15, Schneidewin simply denied that the Catholica could refer to this poem, because, as he pointed out, the poem displays the name in the nominative, whereas the grammarian discussed the genitive. In his conclusion Schneidewin suggested that the poem was a Renaissance forgery, and as such a parallel to the three extant Sabinus replies that were believed to be the letters of Ovid’s friend Sabinus until Jahn in 1837 attributed them to the humanist Angelus Sabinus.¹⁶

Two years after Schneidewin’s first article on the topic, he was forced to withdraw his proposition that the poem was a Renaissance forgery.¹⁷ The reason for this was the discovery of a medieval testimony to Heroides 15. The discovery also made Schneidewin conclude that the poem was necessarily composed before the Middle Ages, since the figure of Sappho was largely unknown during the medieval era. Nevertheless, Schneidewin sustained his view that the poem was a ‘Machwerk’ written by a forger, although he now assumed that this forger was active before the Middle Ages.¹⁸

¹⁶ Cf. Jahn (1837: 631). The Sabinian letters include one from Ulysses to Penelope, one from Demophoon to Phyllis and one from Paris to Oenone. The date of these letters continues to be the object of scholarly dispute, cf. Hauptli (1996); Geise (2001); Lyne (2004) and Spieß (2012). See Heinze (2013) for a summary of the debate. On the assumption that the author of these letters is Angelus Sabinus (alias Angelo Sani or Angelus de Curibus Sabinis), who flourished during the late 1460s–70s and who indeed claims to be the author of these poems in his Paradoxa in Iuuenali (1477), then the anonymous Epistula Phaonis ad Sappho, found in a manuscript written c.1467 (see p. 93, n. 80), might very well precede the Sabinian letters in time.


¹⁸ Schneidewin (1845: 145). Already the following year, Loers, who in 1829–30 had published an edition of the Heroides including Sappho’s letter to Phaon (as well as the letters that seven years later were claimed to be the Renaissance forgeries by Angelus Sabinus), compellingly countered at least two of Schneidewin’s arguments. First, he read opus at Her. 15.4 in the sense of carmen (‘poem/poetry’) for which there are several parallels in the Ovidian corpus; see Loers (1846: 41). The following parallel passage in Ovid is arguably the most striking, though here there is a subjunctive in a dependent clause: hic ego dum spatior tectus nemoralibus umbris | quod mea quaeram Musa moueret opus (Am. 3.1.5, ‘Whilst I was strolling here enveloped in woodland shadows, asking myself what work my Muse should venture on’). Second, Loers pointed out that no matter how interested the grammarian referring to Ovid’s Atthis must have been in the genitive form, he could not have quoted Ovid for it, neither in the case of Sappho’s beloved female friend (whose name the grammarian in that case had spelled correctly) nor for the priest of Cybele (whose name he in that case had misspelled), as neither name appears in the genitive in the Ovidian corpus. The grammarian thus used Ovid for
Furialis Erichto: the ‘evidence’ of Lachmann

In his inaugural lecture for the summer semester of 1848 at the Humboldt University, Lachmann argued that all of the twenty-one transmitted *Heroides* that were not explicitly mentioned at *Am. 2.18* were spurious, including one that in fact *was* mentioned in the *Amores* poem, namely the letter of Sappho. Lachmann thus rejected the authenticity of *Her. 3, 8 and 12–21*, mostly for metrical reasons. *Heroides 15* does in fact contain certain metrical difficulties (see p. 104). Yet, although Lachmann explicitly condemned the poem’s authenticity, he chose to focus on two non-metrical arguments, which in his view sufficed in order to prove its non-Ovidian origin. Although the realisation that *Heroides 15* must have been of a pre-medieval date had already rendered the Atthis argument irrelevant – since the existence of the extant poem attributed to Ovid in the third century AD did not preclude that it was a post-Ovidian forgery – Lachmann nevertheless dismissed the ‘Atthis evidence’, arguing that the unamended Sacerdos version of the text (with which he apparently was familiar) applied not to a girl but a boy (*hic Atthis, see above*). Second, and most importantly, Lachmann referred to the humanist version of *Her. 15.139* (*furialis Erichtho*), claiming that ‘no one will ascribe [Heroides 15] to *Naso* who has first read Lucan, from whose sixth book the phrase *furialis Erichtho* is extracted (139).’ According to Lachmann, Lucan (AD 39–65) is the *terminus post quem* of *Heroides 15*, which consequently must have been composed by someone other than Ovid.

Lachmann’s arguments considering the authenticity of many of the *Heroides*, and especially that of *Heroides 15*, proved to be highly influential. In 1852, in the preface of his Teubner edition of Ovid’s early poetry, Merkel endorsed Lachmann’s position in general and most avidly his Erichtho ‘evidence’ concerning *Heroides 15*. Nevertheless, Merkel did not omit any of the twenty-one transmitted *Heroides* from his own edition. Instead, he signposted his doubts, but only in the case of *Heroides 15*, by putting its title ‘15’ in brackets, printing the text in italics and reintroducing the pre-Heinsian convention among editors of assigning the last and twenty-first place, after that of Cydippe’s letter to Acontius, to the letter of Sappho.

the genitive even though this form did not exist in his work, just as he wrote that *ions tis faciet: insons, insontis; sic Horatius* (Gramm. Lat. IV.27.28; VI.479.18 Keil, ‘[the word ending in] ions [in the nominative] will become tis [in the genitive]: insons, insontis. Thus Horace’), even though only the nominative is found in the Horatian corpus, cf. Loers (1846: 43–4).

Lachmann simply dismissed the aspiration as a misspelling.

... neque eam [epistulam] *Nuoni adscribet qui Lucanum legerit, ex cuius libro sexto ista furialis Erichtho in illam deducta est* (139), Lachmann (1848 = 1974: 57).

Merkel (1852: 8).
While Merkel’s editorial response to Lachmann’s verdict thus remained relatively moderate in practice, Riese was more audacious in the first volume of his 1871 edition of Ovid’s works. Riese, also referring to Lachmann and his Erichtho ‘evidence’ in the case of Heroides 15, did in fact omit this poem altogether. And in 1874 Palmer topped Riese’s editorial decision by excluding not only Heroides 15, but also all the double Heroides.

**Furialis Enyo: Palmer’s change of mind**

In order to explain the omission of Heroides 15–21 from his edition, Palmer claimed in his preface that when ‘Lachmann and Madvig, perhaps the two greatest Latinists of the century, join in condemning them as spurious, I have sufficient authority for excluding them from this edition’. Considering Palmer’s high esteem of Madvig’s view, it should be mentioned that the Danish Latinist never treated the question scholarly, but simply stated: ‘I do not touch the remaining epistles, because I simply agree with those who do not consider them to be by Ovid.’ Concerning Heroides 15 in particular, Palmer asserted that the ‘epistle that since the time of Heinsius has been classed as the fifteenth is condemned by Lachmann, and by every scholar possessed of common sense’.

Palmer’s confidence in his 1874 preface is particularly striking for two reasons. First, his decision to include only fourteen of the twenty-one transmitted Heroides in his first edition is unprecedented. Not one scholar before Palmer had made a more radical editorial decision regarding Ovid’s single Heroides, which was now reduced to fourteen elegiac letters. Second, Palmer was later to change his mind about the authenticity of Heroides 15, which he would eventually include – together with the double Heroides – in a second edition of the same work, which was posthumously completed by Purser and published in 1898. Palmer’s change of mind does not come as such a surprise considering the exceptionally intense debate about the authenticity of a number of Heroides, especially that of Heroides 15, which flourished during the twenty-four years that passed between his two editions.
Among the remarkably many attempts either to assert or refute the authenticity of one or more of the twenty-one transmitted *Heroides*, the most important contribution in favour of the authenticity of *Heroides* 15 during this whole period was presented in the apparatus of De Vries’ edition of the poem in 1885. In his edited text, De Vries printed Lachmann’s main and widely acknowledged argument against the authenticity of the poem, the alleged post-Lucanian occurrence of *Erichtho* at *Her.* 15.139. However, De Vries argued, as Comparetti had done before him, that Lucan could have drawn *Erichtho* either directly from Ovid or from a common source which was now lost. Furthermore, in his textual apparatus at *Her.* 15.139, De Vries most significantly included the variant *Enyo*, which he had found in the medieval *Francofurtanus*. In the discussion of the authenticity of *Heroides* 15 which closed his edition and commentary, De Vries did in fact consider this variant, but explained that he chose not to print it in the text proper, since he was not convinced that *Enyo*, a goddess of war, would be appropriate in the context of *Heroides* 15.

But in 1897 Housman clarified:

> It means Bellona: not of course the Italian goddess of war, but the Cappadocian goddess of hysterics, whom the Romans brought home from the Mithridatic campaigns and the frenzy whose votaries is described at length in Tibull. [1.6.45] and more briefly in dozens other places. Ovid requires a Greek name for Sappho to call her by, and takes Ἐνυώ which was the recognised equivalent of the other Bellona.

Thus, Lachmann’s post-Lucanian ‘evidence’ was eventually undermined by the industrious manuscript collations of De Vries. It was De Vries who inspired Palmer to make a serious attempt at defending the authenticity of at least parts of the extant *Heroides* 15 in his second edition of the *Heroides*.

The circumstances under which the edition of Palmer and Purser materialised were quite dramatic – at least according to philological
The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

More or less on his deathbed, Palmer had to assign the completion of the work to Purser, who (if we are to believe his own words) reluctantly accepted and did his best to follow the original editor’s instructions.

Palmer sustained his view that the double *Heroides* were spurious even in his second edition, but in the case of *Heroides* 15 he instructed Purser to ‘defend as far as possible the Ovidian authorship’. Purser approached the question of the authenticity of *Heroides* 15 with great care and considered numerous points of relevance, of which only two might be said to represent genuine problems: first, the troubled transmission, and second, the metrical difficulties at *Heroides* 15.96 and 113, which are as follows:

non ut ames oro,
uerum ut amere sinas (Her. 15.96, ‘I do not plead for thee to love, but to let thyself be loved’), and postquam se dolor inuenit nec pectora plangi (Her. 15.113, ‘After my grief had found itself, I felt no shame to beat my breast’).

In the case of *Heroides* 15.96, there is one problem, namely the elision of -m in the second half of the pentameter, which is unparalleled in the Ovidian corpus. There are five instances of elisions in this position in Ovid, at *Ars* 1.548, *Rem. am.* 668, *Her.* 20.178 and *Tr.* 3.6.6, but none of -m. Stephen Harrison proposes _uero_ instead of _uerum_, which would be perfectly fine in this sense. In the case of *Her._ 15.113, there is a whole sequence of problems: first an opening spondaic foot, followed by a caesura after the first syllable of the second foot and another caesura in the last syllable of the fourth foot, but no caesura in the conventional place of the third foot. There is, furthermore, the strikingly colloquial phrase _se inuenire_, which is not attested before the time of Seneca the Elder (e.g. _Controu._ 3, _praef._ 13). Ramírez de Verger has elegantly solved the problems in line 113 by suggesting that the original line started with the words _sed postquam_ (cf. _Am._ 3.7.75, 3.8.33, _Met._ 2.445, 797, 4.137, 7.394), whose order was later inverted, creating the misunderstanding that one of the two _ds_ in _sed_ and _dolor_ was due to a scribal error, which again produced the reading _se dolor_, which in turn prompted the combination of _se inuenit_ inspired by the colloquial expression, suppressing the original _increuit_ (cf. _Met._ 9.704 and _Celsus_ 1.9.25). Ramírez de Verger’s suggestion would thus give _sed postquam dolor increuit, nec pectora plangi_ (‘but after the pain had gained ground’).

Already at the time of Purser, not only were the remaining problems few, they were even strongly related, since the two metrically odd lines might

---

36 Palmer and Purser (1898: vii).
37 In written communication, cf. _OLD_ 2012: 2046, 7a. See also Elisei (2010: 130).
39 Ramírez de Verger (2006b).
40 Adopted in this book.
very well be due to the undisputedly troubled transmission of the poem. Thus, the early debate was settled with arguments that all in all supported the Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 15.

**The recent debate (1965–2003): a critical enquiry**

Almost seventy years after the Palmer and Purser edition, Courtney brought the question of potentially spurious *Heroides* up again; notably, Courtney did not question the authenticity of *Heroides* 15. None of the contributors to the *Heroides* debate that followed over the subsequent decade doubted the authenticity of *Heroides* 15 either: In 1971, Baca, believing that the extant *Heroides* 15 was genuine, tried to explain the poem’s separation from the rest of the *Heroides* by suggesting that Ovid himself detached it from his collection of epistolary love elegies. The same year also saw the publication of Dörrie’s first edition of the *Heroides*, which did not contain *Heroides* 15, not because Dörrie thought that it is spurious, but because he was planning to dedicate an entire edition only to that poem. In his review of Dörrie’s 1971 edition, Goold confessed that he believed that only the *Heroides* mentioned at Am. 2.18 were genuine, including *Heroides* 15.

The same year that Goold’s review appeared, Jacobson published his extensive study of the single *Heroides*, including a lengthy chapter on *Heroides* 15, which he regarded as authentic. Already, the following year saw the materialisation of Dörrie’s second *Heroides* edition, which was the most ambitious attempt at explaining, illuminating and integrating the poem into a greater literary context since De Vries’s edition of 1885. Dörrie’s edition of *Heroides* 15 represented in many ways a consolidation of the now virtual *consensus omnium* that the poem was a genuinely Ovidian composition.

**The challenger: Tarrant’s quantum of doubts**

However, in 1981 Tarrant launched the single most influential attack on the authenticity of the poem in recent times, an attack which completely

---

41 Courtney revisited Lachmann’s metrical arguments and found that *Her.* 9 and the double *Heroides* were inauthentic: *Her.* 9 because of certain metrical difficulties and the double *Heroides* because of three instances of polysyllabic pentameter endings, which are otherwise attested only in Ovid’s later compositions and now increasingly regarded rather as an argument in favour of a late but nevertheless Ovidian date, see the Introduction. Courtney (1965: 65) defended the authenticity of *Heroides* 15, claiming that there ‘is only one substantial difficulty, XV.96, in a poem in which we cannot rely on our manuscript’.


The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

shattered the above mentioned *consensus omnium*. Because of the success and number of Tarrant’s doubts regarding the authenticity of *Heroides* 15, his line of argument and the evidence on which it is based is closely scrutinised in the following.

In the long tradition of scholarly debate over *Heroides* 15, Tarrant’s aversion to the poem – which he calls ES, shorthand for *Epistula Sapphus* (‘the letter of Sappho’) – can only be compared to Schneidewin’s condemnation of it as a ‘Machwerk’:

> It is my private opinion that the ES is a tedious production containing hardly a moment of wit, elegance or truth to nature, and that its ascription to Ovid ought never to have been taken seriously . . . vague, flat, lifeless – qualities not often applicable to the work of Ovid but all too appropriate for the ES.44 [Regarding *Her.* 15.95] the tasteless play on the two senses of *sinus* [harbour/ bosom] is . . . distressing. It is necessary to imagine that Ovid’s own letter of Sappho unluckily perished and that this ersatz composition even more unluckily survived.45

The success of Tarrant’s contribution to the debate on the authenticity of *Heroides* 15 does not rely so much on his distaste for the poem, as on his promise, which he convincingly keeps for the most part of his paper, to leave his personal opinion aside and embark on ‘a close, but unbiased inspection on grounds of style and form’.46

The greatest power of Tarrant’s arguments relates first and foremost to the fact that they are numerous. Tarrant begins his investigation into the question of the authenticity of *Heroides* 15 by looking more closely at the poem’s metrical peculiarities. In addition to the two metrical difficulties mentioned above, Tarrant adds the universally transmitted *repen do* (line 32), which, in order to fit the metre, would have to be bacchiac (u – – ) with a shortened final o, which is unparalleled in Ovid and otherwise found only in future indicative.47 However, most editors print Bentley’s emendation, based on a parallel in Ausonius (*Prof. Burd.* 2.31–2) of the metrically acceptable *repe nde*.

Although Tarrant thus adduces a third metrical problem in addition to the two discussed above, he does not find that these three difficulties are sufficient to prove that the poem is spurious. Instead, he finds better reasons to sustain his doubt about the authenticity of *Heroides* 15 when he considers the usage of words and phrases that strike him as odd within the context of the Ovidian corpus and Augustan literature. Tarrant concentrates this part of his investigation on two passages of the poem, the first of which

---

44 Tarrant (1981: 144).
47 Cf. Hartenberger (1911: 56).
has already partly been discussed above regarding the new ‘Brothers Poem’ by Sappho and is as follows:

sex mihi natales ierant, cum lecta parentis
ante diem lacrmas ossa bibere meas.
arsit iners\(^{48}\) frater meretricis captus amore
mixtaque cum turpi damna pudore tuit;
factus inops agili peragat freta caerula remo,
quasque male amisit, nunc male quaerit opes.
me quoque, quod monui bene multa fideliter, odit:
hoc mihi libertas, hoc pia lingua dedit.
et tamquam desint, quae me sine fine fatigent,
accumulat curas filia parua meas.

\((\text{Her. 15.61–70})\)

[Six natal days had passed for me, when I gathered the bones of my parent, dead before his time, and let them drink my tears. My untaught brother was caught in the flame of harlot love, and suffered loss together with foul shame; reduced to need, he roams the dark blue seas with agile oar, and the wealth he cast away by evil means once more by evil means he seeks. As for me, because I often warned him well and faithfully, he hates me; this has my candour brought me, this my duteous tongue. And as if there were lack of things to weary me endlessly, a little daughter fills the measure of my cares.]

The next passage that Tarrant finds dubious because of individual words and phrases is the following, which has already partly been discussed above regarding the Roman reception of Sappho’s symptoms in her fragment 31:

et lacrimae deerant oculis et uerba palato,
adstrictum gelido frigore pectus erat.
sed postquam dolor increuit,\(^{49}\) nec pectora plangi
 nec puduit scisis exululare comis,
non aliter quam si nati pia mater adempti
portet ad exstructos corpus inane rogos.
gaudet et e nostro crescit maerore Charaxus
frater, et ante oculos itque reditque meos,
utque pudenda mei uideatur causa doloris,
‘quid dolet haec? certe filia uiuit’ ait.
non ueniunt in idem pudor atque amor. omne uidebat
uulgu: eram lacer0 pectus aperta sinu.
tu mihi cura Phaon; te somnia nostra reducunt,
somnia formoso candidiora die.

\((\text{Her. 15.111–24})\)

The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

[Tears failed my eyes, and words my tongue; my breast was fast frozen with icy chill. But after my grief had gained ground I felt no shame to beat my breast, and rend my hair, and shriek, not otherwise than when the loving mother of a son whom death had taken bears to the high-built funeral pile his empty frame. Joys swells my brother Charaxus’ heart as he sees my woe; he passes before my eyes, and passes again; and, purposing to make the cause of my grief appear immodest, he says: ‘Why does she grieve? Surely her daughter lives!’ Modesty and love are not at one. There was no one who did not see me; yet I rent my robe and laid bare my breast. You, Phaon, are my care; you, my dreams bring back to me – dreams brighter than the beauteous day.

Tarrant is first puzzled by natales ierant (*Her*. 15.61, ‘birthdays had passed’), pointing out that Ovid elsewhere does not use eo, but ago (*Met*. 2.497 and 13.753) and adsum (*Met*. 9.285 and *Tr*. 3.13.2) with natalis (‘birthday’). However, the two first passages from the *Metamorphoses* are so similar in topic (a youth on the threshold of adulthood) and wording (natalibus actis), notably, even in the same place of the hexameter, that they should reasonably count as not two but one example of how Ovid combines natalis and ago. Furthermore, at *Met*. 9.285–6 the combination of natalis and adsum refers to Hercules’ actual birth (iam natalis adeset | Herculis, *Met*. 9.285–6, ‘when the natal hour of... Hercules was near’), while at *Tr*. 3.13.1–2 it is Natalis personified, the birthday god, who is present. Clearly, none of these lines treats the passage of time, which is at the heart of the Heroidean phrasing. Instead, it would be more appropriate to consider *Fast*. 3.575–6, where Ovid uses eo with annus (‘year’) for the passage of time in comparison with *Her*. 15.61. Worthy of consideration here is also the importance for Sappho to stress how young she was when her father died. *Mihi* is ethic dative and draws attention not only to Sappho’s age, but also to herself, as if to say, ‘poor me, I was only six years old’. In this context the choice of eo might have interpretative advantages, since, as Elisei points out, the verb occurs in connection with death and consequently, in *Heroides* 15, ‘the usage of this word anticipates perhaps the sad context’.51

Next, at *Heroides* 15.64, Tarrant objects to two features. First, there is the usage of mixtus in combination with complementary elements (turpi

---

50 Nor is this sense conveyed in the passage ostendens cumulum, quot haberet corpora puluis, | tot mihi natales contingere uana rogavi (*Met*. 14.137–8, ‘Pointing to a heap of sand, I made the foolish prayer that I might have as many years of life as there were sand-grains in the pile’), which Tarrant (1981: 141) suggests that the ‘writer may have recalled’. Here the dative mihi is linked to the request by the Sibyl to have something (birthdays) happening to her.

pudore, ‘disgraceful shame’; damna, ‘losses of wealth’), while Ovid, Tarrant claims, ‘generally’ uses the participle of contrasts. But Charaxus not only wasted the wealth of Sappho’s family, he even ruined their reputation by having an affair with a whore. The material losses are thus mixed with his moral disgrace, blending two different kinds of the same category (material/moral degradation), for which there is in fact a parallel in the Ovidian corpus: sic tibi nec docti desunt nec principis artes, mixta sed est animo cum Ioue Musa tuo (Pont. 4.8.77–8, ‘so thou lackest the arts neither of the scholar nor the prince, but in thy mind the Muse and Jupiter are wedded’). Taken together with the passage in Heroides 15, there are thus two such instances of mixtus used in combination with complementary elements in the Ovidian corpus. Tarrant also points out that the combination turpi . . . pudore is unparalleled in Ovid’s output, since he believes that the exact same combination at Met. 11.180 is corrupt. There are indeed problems with this passage. However, the sequence of the two words does not appear entirely non-Ovidian, as the words are found, though not grammatically as tightly linked as in the case of Heroides 15, in the line nec spolium nostri turpe pudoris aue (Her. 17.114, ‘and do not covet to my shame the spoil of my honour’).

Similarly, in line 65 of Heroides 15, peragat freta and freta caerula arouse Tarrant’s suspicion plainly because these exact combinations are unparalleled in Ovidian poetry and Augustan literature. Furthermore, the phrase in which the two combinations occur, agili peragat freta caerula remo (‘he roams the dark blue seas with agile oar’), appears inelegant and hence incriminating to Tarrant (it ‘makes Sappho’s brother sound like the first recorded surfer’), compared with the way in which he considers the genuine Ovid to phrase the same idea: seu rate caeruleas picta sulcauimus undas (Pont. 2.10.33–4, ‘Whether we furrowed the blue waves in a gaily painted boat’). However, the synecdoche employed in the Heroidean line, focusing on the most active – or agile – part of the whole vessel, the oar, successfully helps in creating an image of Charaxus as extremely active with his business at sea. By contrast, the disturbing atmosphere of the Heroidean line is naturally absent from the exile poem, where Ovid recalls the wonderful

53 See Bömer (1980: 283–4). Tarrant furthermore suggests, however, that the line tristia cum magno damna pudore tuli (Am. 3.7.72, ‘I endured the saddening loss with shame’) was ‘the inspiration for the phrase’. The parallel is intriguing, since Am. 3.7.72 and Her. 15.64 not only match each other verbatim but to a great extent stage the same drama: while the playboy Charaxus falls socially and loses wealth and respect, the playboy Naso droops physically as he loses his ability to perform in bed.
55 Presumably as a wine merchant, cf. Strabo 17.33.
The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

journeys he shared with his epic-composing friend Macer, in a poem whose allusions to *Heroides* 15 are numerous and highly pointed (see Chapter 3).

Tarrant proceeds to object to *libertas* in the line of *Heroides* 15.68, claiming that the word in the sense of ‘frankness’ is not found elsewhere in the Ovidian corpus, or in Augustan literature. However, Horace claims that: *poetae atque alii | si quis erat dignus describi, quod malus ac fur . . . multa cum libertate notabant. | hinc omnis pendet Lucilius* (Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.1–6, ‘poets . . . and other good men, if there was anyone deserving to be drawn as a rogue and thief . . . they would set their marks upon him with great freedom. It is on these that Lucilius wholly hangs’). Furthermore, in Propertius, we read *sit modo libertas quae uelit ira loqui* (Prop. 1.1.28, ‘if only I were free to utter the promptings of anger’). *Libertas* is thus attested in the sense of ‘frankness’ once in the Augustan poet Horace, once in the Augustan poet Propertius, and once in the Augustan poet Ovid.

The final feature that Tarrant draws attention to in the first passage quoted above from *Heroides* 15 is the expression *accumulat curas*, which he claims to be unparalleled in Ovid’s corpus. Tarrant admits, however, that he finds that the thought of the line is ‘similar’ to that in *namque deorum | cetera cum magno Caesare turba facit | meque tot adversis cumulant, quot litus harenas* (Tr. 4.1.53–5, ‘For the rest of the gods take sides with mighty Caesar, heaping upon me as many ills as the sands of the shore’). There is thus a parallel in thought for this line in the case of *Heroides* 15.70. Furthermore, this is a line that belongs to Sappho’s list of reasons to worry, and translated as above into ‘my little daughter adds to my worries’, and as such, the construction arguably retains a sense of ‘heaping something upon something else’, in accordance with what Tarrant points out as Ovid’s ‘regular usage’ of *ac/accumulare*. As for the second passage quoted above, that of *Heroides* 15.111–24, Tarrant observes that there is indeed a parallel between *Heroides* 15.111 (*deerant . . . uerba palato*) and *Amores* 2.6.47 (*ignaro stupuerunt uerba palato*). Tarrant claims that the former is an infelicitous reworking of the latter, since there is a significant ‘difference between . . . “the words got stuck in my throat” but not “my throat lacked words.”’ Ovid

---

57 There are also several instances of the word in this sense in Republican and Augustan prose, cf. Elsei (2010: 113).
58 It is furthermore worth noting that also *Tr.* 4.1.55 belongs to a catalogue of calamities, and that this exile poem, which invokes the shrieking of bacchants as a simile for the poet (see next page), also explores the question of how life – and particularly adversity in life – relates to poetry, a question that creates the very tension of *Heroides* 15.
The challenger: Tarrant’s quantum of doubts

furnishes no example of this use of palatum where lingua would be natural."59 But as has been argued in Chapter 1, the choice of palatum at Heroides 15.111 seems both ingenious and pointed against the background of the preceding Catullan-Horatian reception of Sappho’s fr. 31, to which the Heroidean line in question belongs. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that the usage of palatum at Amores 2.6.47 is just as odd (and just as post-Catullan)60 as the usage of the word at Heroides 15.111, which therefore does not emerge as particularly anomalous in the context of Ovidian poetry.61

Next, Tarrant objects to exululare, claiming that Ovid never uses the term to ‘describe normal crying; rather he applies it to the maddened victims of poison (Met. 4.521), the baying of Lycaon (Met. 1.233) and the shrieking of bacchants (Met. 6.597; Tr. 4.1.42) or worshippers of the Magna Mater (Fast. 4.186, 341; Ars 1.508).’62 First, ‘normal crying’ is hardly an adequate description of Sappho’s desperate outburst at the discovery of Phaon’s elopement. Furthermore, of all the Ovidian passages found by Tarrant, those concerning the bacchants do not appear alien, but extremely relevant regarding usage of the verb exululare in Heroides 15. At Metamorphoses 6.597 the bacchantic shrieking is in fact not genuinely ecstatic, but a calculated trick by Procne (cf. simulat, Met. 6.596) to attain a rational goal, the liberation of her imprisoned sister Philomela. The occurrence in this passage of a word used not only ritualistically of bacchants, but also by Sappho in Heroides 15, arguably intensifies the ominous tension in Procne’s act of liberating her sister, in which she will famously end up as the most desperately grieving mother of ancient myth, with whom the Heroidean Sappho compares herself in her letter to Phaon (cf. Her. 15.153–6). It should be added that also at Tr. 4.1.42 the word occurs in a context that has many features in common with the passage in which it occurs in Heroides 15. First, both poems tell of the sorrows of a poet, Sappho’s heartache and Ovid’s exile; strikingly, Ovid actually compares the grieving lover and the grieving poet at Tr. 4.1.33–6,

60 While Catullus 51 is an important source text for Her. 15.109–12, Catullus 3 is perhaps the most important model for Ovid’s Am. 2.6. It should also be noted that there are more allusions to Am. 2.6 in Her. 15 and that both poems represent, in very different ways, images of the writer, cf. Chapter 6.
61 Cf. McKeown’s commentary to the poem: ‘I can adduce no closer parallel than torpes palatum, used with reference to loss of the sense of taste at Pont. 1.10.13, Colum. 10.110 and Juv. 10.203.’ But ‘[f]or the palate as an organ of speech, cf. Epist. Sapph. 111, Hor. Sat. 2.3.274 and Persius 1.35 (all with verva palato in the same line-position as here).’ McKeown (1998: 135–6).
The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

thus asserting the connection between the two poems. Furthermore, in both poems the shrieking (*exululare/exululata*) appears in a simile, first as Sappho compares herself to a madly mourning mother (*Her.* 15.115 *non aliter*) and second as Ovid compares himself to a bacchant (*Tr.* 4.1.41–3, *ut . . . sic*), just as several of the protagonists in the *Heroides* have done before him (*Her.* 4.47, 10.48, 13.33–4). The use of *exululare* in *Heroides* 15 thus contributes to an arresting pattern of real and fictitious frenzy embodied either by women who metaphorically prefigure the poet, or the figure of the poet proper, and must therefore be considered highly pointed.

At *Heroides* 15.117 Tarrant first draws attention to the term *crescit* ‘in the sense “swell with satisfaction” . . . for which Ovid offers no parallel, though Seneca (*Ep.* 34.1) does’, 63 which is indeed the case. More problematic is Tarrant’s next claim, namely that the word *maeror* ‘is found nowhere in Augustan poetry, with the exception of one occurrence in Horace *Ars Poetica* (110)’. 64 As pointed out by Rosati, 65 there exists also a pre-Augustan attestation of the word *maeror*, furthermore, found in a poem of great significance to Roman elegy in general and to *Heroides* 15 in particular, namely Catullus 65.15. 66 The generically important word’s reappearance in a poem that metapoetically engages in the tradition of Latin love elegy, as *Heroides* 15 does, is therefore highly appropriate.

Finally, Tarrant points out that the combination *formosus* and *dies* (*Her.* 15.124) is unparalleled in Augustan poetry and thus, in his opinion, ‘ill-fated’. Tarrant refers to the combination of *formosus* (in the superlative) and *annus* at Vergil’s *Eclogue* 3.57 and *Ars* 2.315 for a more regular usage and suggests that the Heroidean combination would only be possible in a post-Ovidian era, in which phrases like *o formosa dies*, attributed to Petronius, and Martial’s *lux formosior omnibus Kalendis* (*10.24.2*) were also known. 67 However, *Eclogue* 3.57 and *Ars* 3.315 relate so clearly to each other that they hardly can count as two different examples of regular usage. 68 Furthermore, Knox observes that the combination at *Her.* 15.124 is ‘not so odd as has been thought; cf. *Rem. am.* 187, *formosa . . . aetas, Fast.* 4.129 *formoso tempore*’. 69 Considering the number of words denoting temporal spaces (*annus, dies, aetas, tempus, lux*) in combinations with the adjective *formosus* that are found in Latin literature from Vergil until Martial, it seems questionable whether any of them can be called ‘unparalleled’. Instead, these combinations seem to be better understood as contributions to a diverse pattern of the expression ‘a wonderful time’, albeit of various duration.

---

63 Tarrant (1981: 140).
64 Tarrant (1981: 140).
Tarrant, having thus completed his search for unusual words and phrases, concludes that in these two passages of a total number of twenty-four lines—a little more than 10 per cent of *Heroides 15*—there are at least eleven oddities ‘which cannot be paralleled in the work of Ovid’. The number would indeed be disconcerting for anyone who is inclined to assume that *Heroides 15* is a genuine work. But as we have seen, five of the eleven oddities Tarrant has found are unparalleled *combinations* of words (64, 65 (two), 70, 124). Not only can the majority of these combinations be reasonably defended as Ovidian, as shown above. There is also a serious methodological problem attached to the use of unparalleled word combinations as an argument against authenticity: such combinations abound in works of questionable and unquestionable authenticity alike. Furthermore, of Tarrant’s remaining six objections, four can be quite compellingly countered (*mixta*, 64; *libertas*, 68; *palato*, 111; *maerore*, 117). More importantly, even if the eleven cases Tarrant has pointed out were as decisive as he argues, they would not even in his opinion, he asserts, suffice to prove *decisively* that the poem is spurious.

The decisive evidence against the authenticity of *Heroides 15* is, in Tarrant’s view, the ‘incriminating Ovidian borrowings’ from Ovid’s exile poetry, to which Tarrant believes the writer of *Heroides 15* resorted in order to compose his poem. Sappho’s letter to Phaon is undoubtedly designed to belong to Ovid’s single *Heroides*, which surely is, as we have seen, a part of Ovid’s early poetry. However, according to Tarrant, similarities between *Heroides 15* and later Ovidian compositions demonstrate the contrary, namely that Sappho’s letter to Phaon was in fact composed later than the latest exilic poems, most probably after Ovid’s death, and thus not by him. In the case of the ‘incriminating Ovidian borrowings’, as in the case of non-Ovidian phrases and diction, Tarrant limits his attention to two passages in comparison with other Ovidian passages. The first is the opening of Sappho’s letter compared to the opening passage of *Pont. 2.10*, quoted in Chapter 3, pp. 94–5.

The basis of Tarrant’s approach to the ‘incriminating Ovidian borrowings’ is Axelson’s famous principle of *Prioritätsbestimmung*, according to which passages that share similarities beyond accidental likeness can be relatively dated by establishing which of them is more coherent as regards the immediate context, and therefore must have preceded the other. As already discussed in Chapter 3, there are indeed many striking *loci similes*.

---

70 Tarrant (1981: 142).
71 See pp. 118–22.
72 Tarrant (1981: 142).
The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

in the opening lines of *Heroides* 15 and *Epistulae ex Ponto* 2.10, addressed to Macer. Tarrant claims that the Heroidean passage must be modelled on the opening of the exile poem (and not the other way around) for two reasons. First, the opening lines of *Pont.* 2.10 allegedly draw a consistent image of the poem’s circumstances: Ovid, in exile, writes to an old friend and is afraid that he has forgotten him. *Her.* 15.1–4 and 5–6, on the other hand, deal with supposedly ‘unrelated topics’: Sappho’s anxiety that Phaon is able to recognise her handwritten letter, and the fact that it is written in elegiac couplets. But is that really so? While there is a *mora temporis* (‘length of time’) since Macer has seen the handwriting and seal of Ovid and therefore plausibly could have forgotten the look of both, Phaon has just left Sappho and should therefore be perfectly capable of remembering what her handwriting looks like. In fact, the only reason why he, potentially, should not be able to recognise the letter’s author by the physical look of its writing is that he is only familiar with Sappho’s lyric compositions and has never read her elegiac couplets before. Thus, Sappho’s anxiety that Phaon is not able to recognise her handwriting and the fact that her letter consists of elegiac couplets are perfectly related. Furthermore, the possible confusion on Phaon’s part (‘can this be Sappho’s handwriting when these are elegiac couplets?’), which Sappho thus anticipates, provides a brilliant pretext for Sappho to pursue her main objective, namely to tell him how much she loves him and what a miserable state he has left her in (*Her.* 15.7–8), since the genre of elegy with its couplets is a direct consequence of her unrequited love for him. In a discussion of what is genuinely Ovidian and not, it should also be mentioned that the focus on metrical metamorphosis in *Heroides* 15 is singularly Ovidian: none of the other Roman elegists so prominently signposts the technical hallmark of the genre, the metre, as Ovid (cf. *Am.* 1.1).

Tarrant’s second reason to assume that the exile poem is the model for *Heroides* 15 is that the addressee of *Pont.* 2.10, Macer, is mentioned in the first couplet, thus contributing to the poem’s ‘coherent situation’, while Phaon’s name features only in line 11 of the Heroidean poem. This variation reflects, however, not a distinction between *Heroides* 15 and *Pont.* 2.10, but a distinction between the single *Heroides* and the collection of *Epistulae ex Ponto*. In several of the single *Heroides* the addressee is mentioned rather late (e.g. *Her.* 5.11, 6.25, 7.9, 8.9, 9.27), while Ovid in *Epistulae ex Ponto* regularly includes both his own and his addressee’s name in the first couplet(s) when

---

74 Hardie (2002b: 323–4) and Chapter 3. 75 Tarrant (1981: 144).
he writes to friends.78 This difference might even be reflected in the part of the manuscript tradition of the Heroides where there are spurious additional opening couplets to some of the letters, which include the identity of both sender and addressee.79 In sum, then, the opening passage of Heroides 15 and Epistulae ex Ponto 2.10 deal with related topics, and the different points at which the addressee is mentioned are perfectly in line with each of the collections of elegiac letters to which the two respective poems belong.

Tarrant’s next examples of ‘incriminating Ovidian borrowing’ are found in the following passage:

ueste tegor uili, nullum est in crinibus aurum,  
non Arabum noster dona capillus habet.  
cui colar infelix aut cui placuisse laborem?  
ille mei cultus unicus auctor abest.  
molle meum leuibusque est cor violabile telis,  
et semper causa est, cur ego semper amem.  

(Her. 15.75–80)

[I am clad in garment mean, no gold is in the strands of my hair, my locks are scented with no gifts of Araby. For whom should I adorn myself, or whom should I strive to please? You, the one cause of my adornment, are gone. Tender is my heart, and easily pierced by the light shaft, and there is ever cause why I should ever love.]

Tarrant duly points out two parallel passages in the Ovidian corpus for the last couplet in the passage quoted above: centum sunt causae, cur ego semper amem (Am. 2.4.10, ‘there are a hundred causes to keep me always in love’) and molle Cupidineis nec inexpugnabile telis | cor mihi, quodque levis causa moveret, erat (Tr. 4.10.65–6, ‘My heart was ever soft, no stronghold against Cupid’s darts – a heart moved by the slightest impulse’). Tarrant claims that Her. 15.65–6 must be modelled on the two Ovidian lines, because, he alleges, the Heroidean couplet does not really fit into its context. Instead, the couplet produces an incoherent tension between fidelity and fickleness inasmuch as Sappho initially says that she neglects her looks because her ‘one and only’ is gone, only to declare that there is always a reason for her to always be in love. However, if indeed there is a tension between fidelity and fickleness in Heroides 15, it would be of a distinctly Ovidian kind. Certainly, Amores 2.4, with its catalogue of arousing women and the poet’s omnivorous wish to have them all, is truly a testimony to erotic capriciousness, but at

78 This is somewhat less frequently the case when he writes to superior persons and his wife.
79 Palmer and Purser (1898: xlii).
The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

*Amores* 1.3, in which the poet promises everlasting fidelity to his girl, we find exactly the same second half of the pentameter *cur ego semper amem* (*Am. 1.3.2*, cf. *Am. 2.4.10*), and together these *Amores* poems establish a very Ovidian tension between fidelity and fickleness, as demonstrated in *Chapter 6*. Furthermore, the passage of *Heroides* 15 proceeds with Sappho reflecting on the relationship between her ability to fall in love and her poetic vocation, just as Ovid does in the above-mentioned passage of *Tr. 4.10*. And when Sappho subsequently describes Phaon’s irresistible beauty and the way she *had* to yearn for him, just as if she were a *uir* (*Her. 15.85*, ‘man’), the things which according to Tarrant contribute to the fidelity–fickleness tension become instead explanations as to why Sappho had to yield to Phaon’s irresistibility. Tarrant’s ‘strongest internal evidence’, the two examples of ‘incriminating Ovidian borrowings’, are thus even more problematic than the problematic examples of allegedly non-Ovidian diction as proof against the poem’s authenticity.

On the basis of such highly problematic ‘internal evidence’, Tarrant proceeds to reject even the ‘external evidence’ in support of the authenticity of *Heroides* 15, namely *Am. 2.18.26, 34*, as well as the medieval *florilegia* in which excerpts from *Heroides* 15 are placed between *Heroides* 14 and 16, discussed in *Chapter 1*. At this point, Tarrant’s particular disregard of the poem’s literary qualities re-enters his line of reasoning: unable to accept that Ovid could have written such a ‘tedious’ poem ‘containing hardly a moment of wit, elegance or truth to nature’ in his ‘vigorous youth’ – which is when the poet must have done so, if the references to the extant *Heroides* 15 at *Am. 2.18.26, 34* are genuine – Tarrant feels forced to assume not only that *Heroides* 15 was composed by a forger who knew Ovid’s entire output, and who therefore must have lived (at least partly) after his death. Therefore, Tarrant suggests that the same forger changed two lines of *Am. 2.18* that were originally about Briseis (*Her. 3*) into the extant *Amores* lines about Sappho, in order to authenticate his forgery. According to Tarrant, the *Amores* interpolations by a forger thus...

---

80 Cf. Bessone (2003: 233). See also *Her. 15.107–8* and *Am. 1.3.11–12* for further loci similes.

81 Tarrant (1981: 143) furthermore thinks that Sappho’s *leuibusque...telis* (*Her. 15.79*) ‘requires the more explicit phrase *Cupidineis telis* in *Tristia* 4.10.65 to be correctly understood’. However, weapons wounding someone who falls in love, especially in the heart, hardly need the mentioning of Cupid’s ownership to be properly comprehended, cf. *saecius ingemuit telumque ufoliae sensit* (*Ars 1.169*, ‘he feels the winged barb and groans with the wound’) and *femina nec flammae nec saecus discavit arcus; parcit haec uideo tela nocere uiris* (*Ars 3.39–40*, ‘A woman wields neither flames nor savage bows: seldom do I see these weapons hurting men’).

82 Tarrant (1981: 148). Thévenaz argues however that *Heroides* 15, originally written in Ovid’s youth, was revised by the poet in exile Thévenaz (2009b: 121–42).
facilitated the misconception – conceived of first by exceptionally learned scribae in medieval France producing the florilegia and then by D. Heinsius in his 1629 edition – that Heroides 15 was the closing poem of the single Heroides, just like Penelope was obviously the first, both according to the manuscript tradition and the Amores catalogues. As already pointed out, there are traces of several manuscript traditions of the Florilegium Gallicum, in which different excerpts from the various Heroides also occur. Against this background, the idea that different scribes were all following the subtle cues given in Amores 2.18 of placing lines from Sappho’s letter to Phaon between Heroides 14 and 16 does not seem convincing. Furthermore, as already pointed out, there is no evidence in D. Heinsius’ 1629 edition of Ovid’s Opera Omnia that suggests that the editor looked to any of the Heroides catalogues in Amores 2.18 when he reunited Heroides 15 with Ovid’s other single Heroides, nor in the case of Scaliger, whose notes D. Heinsius explicitly followed.

Persuasive arguments on faulty foundations

Tarrant’s condemnation of the authenticity of Heroides 15 has provoked a variety of responses. Among the most direct are Rosati’s mildly insistent, yet strongly successful objections against Tarrant’s case by means of highlighting the poem’s literary qualities. To point out the poem’s artistic sophistication is in fact most devastating to Tarrant’s argument, which ultimately depends on the assumption that the poem is of such poor quality that it is inconceivable that Ovid could have composed it ‘in his vigorous youth’. 83

Furthermore, Tarrant’s methodological approach has been strongly criticised by Courtney, upon revisiting the question of the authenticity of Ovid’s Heroides:

Suppose we want to declare the Letter of Sappho spurious; we run up against the difficulty that Ovid himself twice refers to it in Am. 2.18. No problem, we have an easy solution available; off with his head, just replace the lines concerned . . . with references to the Letter of Briseis . . . . We then have to presume that the author of the Letter of Sappho validated his forgery by rewriting two lines of Am. 2.18 to introduce mention of it; how did he then impose his will on the whole textual tradition? 84

As Courtney’s criticism makes clear, Tarrant’s claim that the extant Heroides 15 is spurious also relies on the hypothesised Amores interpolation. Notably,

the authenticity of Heroides 15

this hypothesis has convinced no editor of the Amores. Yet, paradoxically, at least three of these Amores editors nevertheless accept Tarrant’s ‘internal evidence’ against the authenticity of the extant Heroides 15. The power of Tarrant’s quantum of doubts, which thus surpasses the very grounds on which it is built, is manifest in standard works of reference like the Oxford Latin Dictionary, the Oxford Classical Dictionary, Knox’s 1995 edition of select Heroides and numerous Ovidian studies. Tellingly, in two of the most important scholarly works on Ovid’s collection of epistolary love elegies produced in recent times, Spentzou omits Heroides 15 entirely from her analysis of Ovid’s single and double Heroides, while Fulkerson regards the poem as inappropriate in the context of the single Heroides on hermeneutical grounds. Furthermore, many of the excellent scholars who do assume that Heroides 15 is genuine, and who present intriguing observations regarding the poem, refrain from entering the debate about its authenticity.

Methodological dead ends

Numerous scholars have explicitly embraced Tarrant’s case against the authenticity of Heroides 15 and aim to take his methodology further. For instance, Murgia wishes to refine the principle of Axelson, which Tarrant used when he sought to establish the relative chronology of Her. 15 and Pont. 2.10. On the basis of his own theory of how the human brain naturally produces repetitions, Murgia recommends not merely two, but three passages of comparison in order to facilitate their Prioritätsbestimmung. The probability against any result coming out correctly by chance, assuming

---

86 Cf. Booth (1991: 86). In order to defend the authenticity of the transmitted lines concerning Sappho at Am. 2.18, McKeown (1998: 398) assumes that Ovid’s single Heroides did in fact include a Sappho letter, but that the original at some point in time must have been substituted by the extant forgery of Heroides 15. Cf. Kenney (1996: 1, n. 4).
87 E.g. OLD (2000: 1691).
89 Cf. Knox (1995: 12–14, 278–315). In his commentary Knox largely reproduces Tarrant’s arguments, to which he adds that ‘the setting is not drawn from any work of literature . . . It was an ingenious idea, but it was not O.’s’ (1995: 14, my italics). Knox modifies this somewhat curious argument in the same edition: ‘If the author of this epistle based it upon a work of literature, then the most likely candidate is one of the many lost comedies that dealt with Sappho’ (Knox 1995: 278).
91 Spentzou (2003: 4, n. 5).
92 Fulkerson (2005: 152–8).
93 Cf. e.g. Rimell (1999); Hardie (2002b: 134, 324); Hunter (2006: 30).
that the three passages involved have at least three items in common, will, according to Murgia, necessarily be ‘astronomical’. Consequently, Murgia adds a third passage to the comparison between the opening of Her. 15 and Pont. 2.10, on which Tarrant focuses, namely the following from Propertius:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ecquid} & \text{ te mediis cessantem Cynthia Bais} \\
\ldots & \\
\text{nostri cura subit memores a ducere noctes?} \\
\text{an te nescoquis simulatis ignibus hostis} & \\
\text{sustulit e nostris Cynthia carminibus?}
\end{align*}
\]

[While you dally in the heart of Baiae, Cynthia, . . . does any concern arise to bring on nights when you remember me? Is any room left for me in a far corner of your heart? Or has some rival by his pretended rapture stolen you, Cynthia, from your place in my songs?]

Murgia points out that Propertius’ poem shares the following three items with Pont. 2.10: \textit{ecquid} (Prop. 1.11.1/Pont. 2.10.1) + \textit{an} (Prop. 1.11.7/Pont. 2.10.5); \textit{nostri cura} (Prop. 1.11.5/Pont. 2.10.8); and \textit{sustulit} (Prop. 1.11.8), which Murgia equates with \textit{eripit} (Pont. 2.10.8). Furthermore, he claims that none of the elements of the opening of Her. 15, except the interrogative structure of \textit{ecquid} plus \textit{an}, are shared with Propertius’ poem, while Sappho’s letter to Phaon has three further features in common with the exile poem in question: \textit{littera dextra} . . . \textit{cognita nostra} (Her. 15.1–2), which Murgia equates with \textit{cognita} . . . \textit{nostra littera} . . . \textit{manu} (Pont. 2.10.4); \textit{oculis} . . . \textit{tuis} (Her. 15.2), which Murgia equates with \textit{oculi} . . . \textit{tui} (Pont. 2.10.6); and \textit{auctoris} (Her. 15.3/Pont. 2.10.3). According to this analysis, Pont. 2.10 repeats items from Prop. 1.11 and thus confirms the exile poem’s later date, while Her. 15 repeats only one element from Prop. 1.11, plus far more items from

95 The ‘astronomical’ conclusion stems from the following card-game analogy: ‘If, in a deck of 52 cards, one out of four is a spade, and one out of thirteen is a jack, the chance of drawing a spade on random selection from a full deck is one out of four, of drawing a jack one out of thirteen, but of drawing the jack of spades (if the deck is fair) one out of 52 (\(1/4 \times 1/13\)). If three choices have to be made, each of which has one chance in eight of being made correctly, the chance of making all choices correctly is one in 512 (\(1/8 \times 1/8 \times 1/8\)). When a large number of choices have to be made correctly for a given result to occur, the odds quickly become astronomical against all coming out correctly by chance, even when the individual results are not very probable’ (Murgia 1984: 462).

96 Murgia’s text differs from that of Heyworth, Propertius’ latest editor (cf. 2007: 17), but not regarding the underlined words in question. The textual differences therefore do not affect the argument.
The authenticity of *Heroides* 15

*Pont.* 2.10, which allegedly reveals the post-exilic date of Sappho’s letter to Phaon. In conclusion, Murgia asserts that the probability that the result of his analysis is correct is in fact ‘astronomical’.

Against this case, one should start by asking why Murgia quotes and analyses only four lines of *Her.* 15, while he considers the first eight lines of Propertius’ 1.11 and Ovid’s *Pont.* 2.10, respectively. Taking the whole passage of *Her.* 15.1–8 into account, there is *mea carmina* (*Her.* 15.5–6), which is just as relevant to Propertius’ *nostris carminibus* (*Prop.* 1.11.8) as any of the other features Murgia points out. Furthermore, when quoting the Propertian passage, Murgia omits three lines, which are not pertinent to his argument. If one can compress or enlarge passages in order to fit them into greater schemes, then why not extend the pertinent passage of *Her.* 15 to verse 9, where *ignem* in the sense of ‘fire of love’ varies the metaphorical *ignibus* of Propertius 1.11.7? The verse order of this poem is disputed, so why not also take *alterna* at line 12 into consideration, since this word also appears at *Heroides* 15.5? If these features are brought into the discussion, there are many more shared elements between all the passages involved and consequently there is no longer a case for using Axelson’s principle of *Prioritätbestimmung* as a basis for their relative dating.

Murgia’s attempt to take this principle of ‘incriminating borrowings’ further leads him into a methodological impasse. Similarly, several scholars demonstrate that the search for unusual and ‘unparalleled’ words and phrases in presumptively spurious works ultimately has the same destination. First, Beck, inspired by Tarrant’s hypothesised *Amores* interpolation, suggests that the lines concerning the letter of Phyllis (*Am.* 2.18.22, 32) are also interpolations. And in 1999, Beck’s doctoral supervisor, Zwierlein, published his monumental study of what he calls *Die Vergil- und Ovid-Revision in tiberischer Zeit*. Solely using arguments concerning ‘unparalleled’ textual elements, Zwierlein proposes that the fairly unknown Iulius Montanus (frr. 221–4 Hollis) forged not only major parts of Vergil’s works but also substantial quantities of Ovid’s output, such as all of the *Heroides*, the whole poem of *Amores* 2.18 along with *Ars* 3.345, all of the *Medicamina* and of course its Ovidian attestation at *Ars* 3.205–8. Tarrant’s influence on Zwierlein is palpable. Considering *Heroides* 15 in particular, Zwierlein explains for example that the poem is

von Tarrant mit zwingenden Gründen als unecht erwiesen geworden ist . . . Tarrant hält die Pentameter 26 und 34 . . . , in denen die Sappho-epistel

Paradoxically, even though Zwierlein endorses Tarrant’s condemnation of the poem’s authenticity, a consequence of his idiosyncratic line of reasoning is that the poem can again join the other Heroides on his sideline. This consequence is affirmed by Lingenberg’s subsequent study, where he demonstrates that Heroides 1–5 – including Briseis’ epistle, whose authenticity Tarrant notably defends – are crammed with combinations of words and phrases that are non-Ovidian, that is combinations of words and phrases that are not attested elsewhere in the Ovidian corpus. Lingenberg, just like Tarrant, sees these ‘unparalleled’ features as indications of spuriousness. At the same time, however, he establishes that such features are the rule rather than the exception in poems that are traditionally considered to be a part of the Ovidian corpus, and, by consequence, that the Heroides 15 is not exceptional in that respect.

In sum, then, four points of importance emerge from the debate on the authenticity of Heroides 15. First, there is no need to doubt that the mention of Sappho at the end of both Heroides catalogues in Amores 2.18 reflects that Heroides 15 held the final place in the collection of Ovid’s single Heroides. Second, the proposition that Am. 2.18.26 and 34 are interpolated replacements of original references to Briseis appears unpersuasive. Third, Heroides 15 does not include an outstanding number of cases of non-Ovidian diction. Finally, Heroides 15 does not contain ‘incriminating borrowings’ indicative of a post-Ovidian date, but meaningful allusions to crucial poems throughout Ovid’s output.

Despite the many weaknesses of the recent arguments against the authenticity of Heroides 15, the mere quantity of these arguments continues to nurture a scholarly uncertainty, which manifests itself in reluctance against interpreting the poem within the larger context of Ovid’s poetry. In order to balance this trend, the remaining chapters follow the lead of the select

---

100The place of excerpt from Sappho’s letter to Phaon in various medieval testimonies strongly indicates that along with the separate transmission, the poem was also copied together with Ovid’s other Heroides as number fifteen, see Chapter 1.
101Even if the lines mentioning Sappho in Amores 2.18 were interpolations composed by a forger, there is no evidence that this alleged forgery influenced D. Heinsius in his decision to unite Heroides 15 with the rest of Ovid’s single Heroides: he explicitly bases this decision on Scaliger’s assumption that Heroides 15 is genuinely Ovidian, with no mention of Amores 2.18. See Chapter 1.
102See also Ramirez de Verger (2009).
The authenticity of *Heroides 15*

scholars\(^{103}\) who have contemplated the significance of *Heroides 15* within an Ovidian context, and focus on the poet’s early output.

\(^{103}\) After Tarrant, see Verducci (1985); Farrell (1998) and Lindheim (2003) for *Heroides 15* as a part of the single *Heroides*; see Galand-Hallyn (1991) and Dangel (2008) for *Heroides 15* and the *Amores*; see Rimell (1999) and Elisei (2010) and forthcoming for *Heroides 15* and the *Ars amatoria*; and see Holzberg (2002); Hardie (2002b) and Volk (2010) for overall interpretations of Ovid’s oeuvre including *Heroides 15*. Relevant is also Ingleheart (forthcoming), for her investigation into the image of Sappho – outside of *Heroides 15* – from the *Amores* to Ovid’s exile poetry.
References

References

(1991) ‘Psittacus redux: Boyd’s bird and mine (or, some thoughts on aims and methods in literary studies)’, CJ 86: 368–76.
References

Campanelli, M. (2001) Polemiche e filologia ai primordi della stampa: Le Obserua-
Campbell, D. A. (1978) ‘Aeolium carmen: Horace’s allusions to Sappho and
Florence.
(2006) ‘The art of making oneself hated: Rethinking (anti-)Augustanism in
Ovid’s Ars Amatoria’, in R. K. Gibson, S. Green and A. Sharrock (eds) The
Art of Love: 216–34.
Comparetti, D. (1876) Sull’Autenticità dell’Epistola Ovidiana di Saffo a Faone.
Florence.
and Other Latin Poets. Ithaca.
157–66.
revisitée par Ovide élegique (Héroïde XV)’, Latomus 67: 114–29.
Davis, G. (2009) ‘From lyric to elegy: The inscription of the elegiac subject in
Heroides 15 (Sappho to Phaon)’, in W. Batstone and G. Tissol (eds) Defining
Instructa Commentario Illustrata et Ouido Vindicata. Leiden.
Hildesheim.
Desmond, M. (1993) ‘When Did o reads Vergil: Gender and intertextuality in
Ovid’s Heroides 7’, Helios 20: 56–68.
References


(2005) The Ovidian Heroine as Author: Reading, Writing and Community in Ovid’s Heroides. Cambridge.
References


‘Two disputed passages in the Heroides’, CQ n.s. 29.2: 394–431.


Madison, Wisc.


References


References


References

(1881) *Kritische Commentar zu Ovids Heroiden*. Vienna.
(1886) *P. Ouidi Nasonis Heroides*. Vienna.
Tarrant, R. J. (1981) ‘The authenticity of the letter of Sappho to Phaon (Heroides XV)’, *HSPh* 85: 133–53.
References

Tolkien, J. (1888) Quaestionum ad Heroides Ouidianas Spectantium Capita VII. Leipzig.
Ullman, B. L. (1932) ‘Classical authors in certain mediaeval Florilegia’, CPh 27: 1–42.