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Omnia vincit amor: Or,

Why Oenone Should Have Known It Would Never Work Out

(Eclogue 10 & Heroides 5)

In the *Heroides*, Ovid does not create the heroines he portrays; they emerge from prior texts. Ovid's text, therefore, works on multiple levels, drawing together traditional version and re-fashioned one. Because no prior extant version of their love story survives, the letter from Oenone to Paris, *Heroides 5*, stands out in the Ovidian collection.

Moreover, as far as we can glean from the few fragmentary accounts we do have, the story focuses not on their erotic relationship, but rather on the moment of Paris' death and Oenone's refusal to save his life. And yet, I argue that *Heroides 5* nevertheless closely resembles the other letters in the Ovidian collection by participating in a dialogue with an earlier literary work. Bucolic references, more precisely echoes of *Eclogue 10*, haunt Oenone's words. I propose that the Ovidian poem enters into discussion with *Eclogue 10*, and that an examination of the relationship that Ovid sets up to the Virgilian text offers a fruitful way in which to read *Heroides 5*.

Interpretations of *Eclogue 10* note the work's generic tension between pastoral and elegiac poetry (Putnam 1970, Conte 1986). Gallus, the poet of erotic elegy, makes an appearance in Arcadia's pastoral landscape. Gallus wishes to escape his role as suffering, tormented elegiac lover, and his desire expresses itself as a yearning to change genres. He wants to become a shepherd, playing a reed pipe and ranging through the woods. But pastoral and elegy, Virgil's poem announces, are two genres that can never accommodate each other. Despite his best intentions, Gallus cannot transform himself into a bucolic character. Quickly he turns to the very elegiac pursuits of hunting and carving the name of his beloved on tree trunks. *Omnia vincit amor: et nos cedamus amori (Eclogue 10.69)*: elegy wins out over pastoral.

Ovid's Oenone should have read her Virgil more carefully. She would have known very early on in her relationship to Paris that their union could not last. Their genres are incompatible. Ovid's Oenone is a bucolic character, a nymph (3) born from a stream (10) who, like Virgilian shepherds, lies with her flock on grass, leaves, or the straw of a humble hut (13ff). In contrast, Paris shows signs that he, like Gallus, is only passing through the shepherds' world. Paris too revels in hunting and in carving on trees. More tellingly, his decision to grant the golden apple to Venus in return for Helen betrays a devotion to erotic desire that places him squarely in the realm of elegy.

Ovid's intertextual allusion has implications for his assumption of the female voice in the *Heroides*. While the heroines seem to tell their own stories from a subjective perspective, a close examination reveals the women undercutting their narrative centrality. For Oenone, genre holds the key to her self-marginalization. Inverting the model of Gallus, she inserts herself, a pastoral character, into the elegiac tale she tells. Further, we recall Virgil's warning -- *omnia vincit amor*. In Oenone's own narrative, Paris' elegiac values will clash with, and ultimately overpower, her pastoral ones.