

Megan O. DRINKWATER

Irreconcilable Differences: Generic Incompatibility in Ovid, *Heroides* 5 and 16

This paper illustrates the importance of Ovid's *Heroides* 16, the elegiac letter from Paris to Helen, in providing a full generic reading of letter 5, from Oenone to Paris. The fifth of Ovid's *Heroides*, composed from the perspective of Paris' first wife to her wayward spouse, is not a simple elegy, defined loosely by the tropes, vocabulary, and meter of that genre. Rather, *Heroides* 5 provides a generic triptych, presenting both imagined author and addressee as characters appropriate to pastoral and epic as well as elegy. In her letter, Oenone is a nymph of pastoral origin (Jacobson 1974, 176-7 n. 2; Knox 1995, 140-1) exercising an elegiac *modus scribendi*, but she is also at pains to establish herself as an apt character for the epic to which she sees Paris attracted.

Although Ovid's elegiac epistles have been returning to scholarly focus in recent years, *Heroides* 5 has received relatively little attention. In a recent article, however, Sara Lindheim (MD 2000) has convincingly argued, using Virgil's representation of Gallus in *Eclogue* 10, that Paris' associations with elegy should have warned Oenone that their union would not last. This paper argues that the generic agenda in Oenone's letter is still more complex. Among her reminders of their shared bucolic past, Oenone argues that she too is appropriate to the epic future that awaits him now that he has been recognized as a member of Priam's royal household (*Her.* 5.11). Jacqueline Fabre-Serris (*Élégie et Épopée dans la Poésie Ovidienne* 1999) has noted the influence of epic in *Heroides* 5, but does not examine the full significance of the high style in the nymph's epistle. This paper responds to the question left open by these scholars: how does epic fit in to the scheme of Oenone's letter? It discusses *Heroides* 5 in terms of Ovid's own work, showing that Oenone's letter is itself an intertext between Paris' bucolic past as a shepherd on Mt. Ida and his epic future with Helen, to which *Heroides* 16 looks pointedly ahead. Its conclusion is that Ovid's presentation of Paris in *Her.* 16 shows that what separates him from Oenone is not his ties to erotic elegy, as Lindheim has argued, but rather the pull of the more elevated genre of epic.

Paris' letter to Helen, the first of the double letter collection, was written by Ovid considerably after *Her.* 5 and its companions in the single letter collection (C. Hintermeier 1993; E. J. Kenney 1996; P. Rosenmeyer *Ramus* 1997). Nevertheless, it represents an episode prior to the imagined composition of Oenone's letter; she composes her epistle as Paris and Helen return to Troy from Sparta. Thus *Her.* 16 provides background information for Oenone's letter, and even as she recalls their shared past on Mt. Ida, sleeping on a bed of leaves (5.14-5) and hunting (5.17-20), she shows herself to be a careful reader of her spouse's ethos and actions. Accordingly, when Oenone sees Helen in the prow of Paris' ship (5.65-70), she emphasizes her own potential as an epic spouse in her attempt to win him back. Oenone insists upon her own worthiness to be the daughter-in-law of Priam and Hecuba (5.83-4), to be herself the *matrona potentis* (5.85), and to hold regal *sceptra* (5.86) associated with epic royalty. She reminds Paris that she is well versed in epic protocol as proven by her respect for the Trojan elders (5.39-40) and his royal brothers (5.93-6).

Paris' letter 16 provides abundant support for Oenone's concern. Yet even while he attempts to establish himself both as a desirable *amator* of elegy and as a suitable epic spouse for a woman of Helen's beauty and regal status, traces of his pastoral origin remain. His retelling of the Judgment, his very *entrée* into epic, begins with the youthful shepherd transfixed by the distant city of Troy as he perches above a typical pastoral *locus amoenus* (*Her.* 16.53-8). Such a description makes it clear that even during his time as a humble *servus* (5. 12), Paris was dreaming of more elevated locales. He is careful, moreover, to elide his bucolic childhood driving *armenta* (5.79) with four brief lines on his recognition by Priam (16.89-92), without explaining why his *nobilitas* had previously been *tecta* (16.52). His final appeal to Helen ironically underlines his epic future in the *Iliad*, as he insists that he is a fighter as well as a lover (16.357-66), a claim which Helen will tactfully deflect in her response in *Her.* 17.

This paper adds to the current scholarly debate on the generic affiliation of Ovid's *Heroides* by illustrating that there is much to be gained both from looking further beyond the boundaries of elegy, and by reading the single and double letters together— intratextually— rather than as separate, unrelated works.