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Erotic paraffin-alia: Ovid waxes poetic about *Heroides* 13

This paper will explore the literary use of erotic magic imagery in *Heroides* 13, the letter from Laodamia to Protesilaos, in order to shed much-needed light on the poem and, more important, to illustrate an unnoticed use of irony. Contrary to all other versions, in which Laodamia creates an image of Protesilaos to console herself after his death, Ovid's Laodamia fashions the *imago* while her husband is still alive. Ovid's innovation, combined with Laodamia's superstitious nature and her unconscious (but repeated) use of magic, provide a key to unlocking the poem's meaning. By his significant changes in the myth, Ovid creates the semi-comic irony of a Laodamia who, attempting merely to assuage her loneliness, unwittingly curses her husband and causes his death, as well as her own. The poet capitalizes upon the ancient idea of a double which stands in sympathetic relation to its original, and creates a multiplicity of Protesilaos for his own – and our – entertainment.

The extant sources disagree about the events after Protesilaos' death at Troy, but in all of them, Laodamia creates an *imago* of Protesilaos to fondle after she hears of his death. In Ovid, by contrast, Laodamia makes the image while Protesilaos is still alive. Ovid capitalizes on this innovation by incorporating from the tradition precisely those elements that add a magical tone to the poem. (1) Ovid's treatment of the wax *imago* in the poem repeatedly recalls the widespread use of anthropomorphic waxen images in magic, particularly erotic, spells. (2) Ovid consistently characterizes Laodamia as comically superstitious and shows her religious zeal as excessive. He also portrays her as having prophetic powers. (3) Finally, as I will suggest, the statue of Protesilaos will be burned and Protesilaos will die soon after Laodamia's letter has been dispatched. Her private erotic magic ritual backfires, causing two deaths instead of the desired reconciliation.