

The Bucolic Heroine: Conforming the Complexity of Oenone in *Heroides V*

Oenone's letter to Paris in *Heroides V* is unique among Ovid's *Heroides*. Oenone's distinctive status as a nymph challenges the model which Ovid uses in the other letters. The epistles of the *Heroides* follow a loose pattern where an abandoned woman writes to her lost lover. The heroines share some common characteristics: they are usually urban women of elite status who can offer their lover wealth and power besides their affection; some of these women include Phyllis, Hypsipyle, and Dido. Oenone's story deviates from this pattern because she is a nymph living in the countryside who possesses neither wealth nor power. Her immortality also comes in sharp contrast to the pattern and sets her apart from the other mortal heroines. As a nymph, Oenone is bound to nature and therefore offers Paris an alternative to urban culture and tangible gifts. Because she cannot offer power and wealth, Oenone offers Paris the peace and tranquility of the bucolic lifestyle.

Although the appeal of Oenone is irregular, Ovid is still able to produce the common themes of the *Heroides* in Oenone's letter. In order to emphasize Oenone's unique appeal, Ovid elevates the charm of the bucolic lifestyle and uses nature-based metaphors which draw parallels to the lives of the "average" Ovidian heroines. Pearson (1980) delves deeply into Ovid's nature-based metaphors and supports the claim that these may have been used to maintain a consistent model in all the letters. Several other aspects of Oenone's letter are attempts to correlate with the standards of the other letters. The Poplar carving in *Heroides V* resembles the stone epigrams of Dido or Phyllis, based on the research on Ovid's funerary inscriptions in Ramsby (2005). Oenone's reference to her competition as a "heifer" (found in nature) parallels Dido's competition who is *altera dido*. Oenone must also fight off woodland deities such as Faunus, a situation similar to that of Penelope fighting off mortal suitors. A reexamination of *Heroides V* shows Ovid's ingenuity and creativity in approaching the unique story of Oenone while maintaining the common elements of his style in the *Heroides*. Ovid is able to adapt Oenone's extraordinary persona so that he can both highlight her individuality and preserve the consistency of the collection.

Works Cited

- Pearson, Catherine S. 1980. "Simile and Imagery in Ovid *Heroides* 4 and 5." *Illinois Classical Studies* V: 110-129.
- Ramsby, Teresa R. 2005. "Striving for Permanence: Ovid's Funerary Inscriptions." *The Classical Journal* 100.4: 365-391.