

“*Ars Sine Arte*: Paris as *amator* in Ovid, *Heroides* 16”

Scholarship on Ovid’s *Heroides* agrees upon the influence of the *Ars Amatoria*, or at least its precepts, on the double-letters in general and on *Heroides* 16 and 17—the letters between Paris and Helen—in particular. The consensus is that Paris’s attempted seduction of Helen shows him to be a skilled lover who closely and accurately follows the advice of the *praeceptor* (W. S. Anderson, 1973; E. J. Kenney, 1996; A. Michalopoulos, 2006). Although Ovid asserts that his lover’s handbook is not intended for seducers of married women and that its audience is specifically the *Romana iuventus* (1.459), frequent references to Paris and Helen in the text, along with the injunction to men (1.437-486) and women (3. 467-498) alike to use letters as a mode of seduction, have understandably encouraged scholars to read the letters against the *Ars*. While references to the *Ars* in Paris’ imagined letter to Helen are often quite clear, this paper argues that Paris’ skill in following its advice is far less masterful than current scholarship asserts.

Through a close examination of how Paris applies the *praeceptor*’s advice in *Heroides* 16, the paper shows that Ovid complicates the issue by referring overtly to the *Ars*, while covertly having his hero violate its commands with alarming frequency. After detailing some of Paris’ elegiac missteps, such as his inappropriate method of selecting Helen as the object of his affection and his incorrect use of letters as seduction tools, the discussion focuses on two episodes as related by Paris in *Heroides* 16 along side their counterparts in the *Ars*: Paris’ versions first of the impact Helen’s desertion of Menelaus will have, and second of the Banquet scene he witnesses while a guest of Helen and Menelaus. Paris’ misinterpretation of the *Ars* and misapplication of its precepts in *Heroides* 16, the paper argues, shows Paris not as a lover skilled in the Art of Love, but rather presents the first male *amator* of the *Heroides*’ double-letter collection to be an elegiac speaker who imperfectly understands the rules of his own genre. In presenting such a dubiously effective first hero, Ovid calls into question the nature and propriety of the double-letter seductions, encouraging readers to look beyond the surface parallels between his letters and the *Ars* and into the larger question of the letters’ persuasive efficacy—or lack thereof.