

legitimus amor: Illegitimate Protesilai in *Heroides* 13

The Laodamia of Ovid's *Heroides* 13 is desperate, loving, and full of heartfelt devotion in her letter to the absent Protesilaus. At the precise moment that the brokenhearted heroine recalls the scene of her husband's departure, however, she suddenly and surprisingly declares: *pectora legitimus casta momordit amor* ("a lawful love bit my chaste heart," *Her.* 13.30). As James Reeson points out, Laodamia is emphasizing that her *amor* "is not a whim, but the love of a wife for her husband" (Reeson 2001: 129n30). But why does she feel the need to assert the legitimacy of their relationship in the first place? Is their love perhaps not as lawful as she claims it to be? In answer to these questions, I suggest that Laodamia perceives Protesilaus as dead, and so the *amor* she tries to justify refers to the one she experiences not only with her true husband, but also with multiple husband-substitutes that appear throughout the poem.

As Laurel Fulkerson (2002) has observed, four different Protesilai emerge in *Heroides* 13: 1) the past Protesilaus that Laodamia variously recalls and appeals to throughout the letter (*Her.* 13.7-14 *et passim*); 2) the phantom Protesilaus that haunts her dreams at night (*pallens imago*, *Her.* 13.105-08); 3) the wax Protesilaus that she keeps by her side at all times (*cera*, *Her.* 13.149-56); and 4) the elegaic Protesilaus that she deliberately fashions throughout the letter (*Her.* 13.79-82 *et passim*). The multiplicity is improper and dangerous. By reviewing Laodamia's interactions with each form of her husband, both real and fake alike, I show that Laodamia consistently conducts inappropriate relations. For all her various exchanges with the different Protesilai that inhabit her life and letter, Laodamia consistently mismanages herself, corrupts the marriage bond, and ultimately impugns the legitimacy and integrity of the love she advances.

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