Internal Consistency in Ancient Poetry: The Singular World of Ovid's Single *Heroides*

Psychologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides have found that all cultures use fictional worlds to simulate situations and participate in them both mentally and emotionally. Additionally, humans are able to separate real-life experiences from those in fictional worlds (Holland 327–28). The myths which Greeks and Romans used as a basis for many variations of such fictional worlds were themselves a complicated mix of fact, legend, and an individual author's modifications and personalizations. As such, when Ovid entered the literary scene, and began to use myths and mythologized figures as his poetic subjects, he encountered what Mark Wolf recognizes as an imaginary world in which users could explore content and add detail over a variety of media (7–15). Today, this is possible through the rapid communication and instant connection engendered by the internet; in the ancient world, first ἀοιδοί and pottery, then written and performed poetry, theater, politics, and history all interacted with and modified the stories and individuals from the mythological past.

Any storyteller must, throughout a tale, clearly present the characters, setting, and conflict. When the story's elements are familiar to an audience through other works, the author must work to show which important details are different from previous versions that the audience has encountered. For example, the Hermione and Neoptolemus of Ovid's *Heroides* are clearly separated from their characters as depicted by Euripides or Sophocles when Ovid had Hermione describe her treatment at Pyrrhus' hands (*Her*. 8.3–14). Ovid pinpointed the timing of Briseis' letter to Achilles by having her tell Achilles that she has heard a rumor that he plans to leave Troy the next day (*Her*. 3.57–58). Ovid's Deianira was vocally bitter and unhappy about her

mismatch of a marriage to Hercules—especially after he sent Iole to Trachis—and used her letter to explain and justify her actions in a way Sophocles' Deianira could not (*Her.* 9).

Ovid thus informs his readers either bluntly or subtly of his subjects' relationships to other versions of their tales. However, I argue that he does more than simply differentiate his characters from their predecessors in the epistles dedicated to their stories; Ovid follows a shared set of rules and boundaries for all of the letters within the single *Heroides*. Wolf would consider Ovid a storyteller, rather than a world-builder, since his "world-building generally does not occur beyond that which is necessary to advance the story" (29–30). But as a storyteller, Ovid shows great attention to his presentation of characters' attitudes, their knowledge of other women's situations and methods (Fulkerson), his rules for magical abilities, and his use of the literary traditions of his characters (Jolivet). While Björk explores how Ovid used *ethopoeia*, she shows the cohesiveness of the *Heroides*, and, as Bolton notes, Ovid's use of gender and place contribute to a consistent larger concept of how space and gender are delineated. By looking at the *Heroides* in conjunction with modern explorations of imaginary worlds and world-building, I will show that Ovid created not just a simple series of epistles, but a single world, with internally consistent boundaries. This paper will thus provide a foundation for those who want to evaluate the *Heroides* in relation to each other, rather than on an individual basis.

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