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**Thea S. Thorsen, *Ovid's Early Poetry: From his Single 'Heroides' to his 'Remedia amoris'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xii, 223. ISBN 9781107040410. \$95.00.**

**Reviewed by Chiara Battistella, Università di Udine  
([chiara.battistella@uniud.it](mailto:chiara.battistella@uniud.it))**

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In this learned volume Thorsen examines Ovid's early corpus of roughly 10000 lines, which is made up of the single *Heroides*, the *Amores*, the *Medicamina faciei femineae*, the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris* and constitutes, in the author's words, 'the formative phase of his poetic career' (p. 3). The main point of interest of this volume—and certainly its major contribution—is the extensive use Thorsen makes of *Heroides* 15 (the *Epistula Sapphus*), constantly presented as the key-text against which she sets out to interpret the Ovidian early corpus. The author, who wrote a doctoral dissertation on *Her.* 15, is an expert on the topic. Given that her arguments strongly focus on this epistle, which crops up on almost every page, she might have included it in the title. However, it must be acknowledged that she explains with clarity from the outset the extent to which she will maintain a privileged focus on *Her.* 15 throughout the volume.

I agree that the time is now ripe not just to draw scholarly attention to the overall unity of the single *Heroides* as a collection, which began as early as the 1908s/1990s, but also to give *Her.* 15 the literary place Thorsen successfully shows it deserves in the Ovidian early poetry. In fact, Thorsen's book has made me re-evaluate this piece, which I believe has plenty to say about genre, gender and poetic invention in general, despite the famous problem of authenticity.

The book is divided into seven chapters, subdivided into sections, plus a postscript. A helpful summary of the contents of the book is provided by the author (pp. 4-8).

Chapter 1, which mostly serves as an introduction, discusses the problem of chronology in the Ovidian erotic corpus. Although chronology matters a great deal in literary studies, it cannot be taken as a safe criterion for establishing the actual composition of the single *Heroides* owing to their well-known troubled transmission. Consequently, the notion of fictional (or literary) chronology appears to make more sense within this context, in that it encourages the reader to look for an internal artistic design rather than for datable evidence. To this

effect, the figure of the heroine Penelope in *Her.* 1 is emblematic and highly suggestive of the poet's intention to gesture towards the origin of the history of ancient literature, as she clearly hints at Homer in being presented as the writer of the first epistle of the collection. In this chapter the author also makes finer points about the notions of gender equality and aesthetic symmetry, which she describes as organising categories, together with fictional chronology, to better understand Ovid's love poetry. With reference to the issue of gender, she observes that male and female roles are finely counterbalanced in Ovid's early poetry, in which both genders are given voice and share a strikingly similar amatory code, as I will discuss below.

In chapter 2, Thorsen's research methodology begins to take clearer shape. Poetic identity is analysed in light of the authorial signatures that can be spotted in Ovid's amatory corpus, like *Naso poeta* and *Naso magister* (p. 39). Interestingly, upon closer observation, a similar device also pervades the corpus of the *Heroides*, in which heroines make use of epithets corresponding to authorial signatures. The case of Sappho is noteworthy, in that she refers to herself as *auctor Sappho* (15.3) and *Sappho poetria* (15.183), thus bearing a close resemblance to Ovid the poet. Thorsen, drawing on Sappho's fragments (including the newly discovered 'Brothers Poem') shows how in Ovid's epistle the historical Sappho merges with the fictional one by playing with the issue of authorship, which is further complicated by the notion of co-authorship, in that Ovid, the 'real' poet, lurks constantly behind his literary creation (pp. 66-7).

Chapter 3 focuses on the 'Romanness' of the single *Heroides*. It reviews the major Roman models (both pre-elegiac and elegiac) that influence the epistolary collection. In this chapter the author makes good points about Ovid's boasted originality in the invention of epistolary elegy and his interplay with Greek models. Genre is also investigated in light of the dichotomy between lyric and elegy. As is well known, generic tension is a common feature in most of Ovid's works. Thorsen's arguments in chapter 3 are lucid and convincing: she looks at *Her.* 15 and a few other epistles of the collection against the backdrop of their alleged Roman models in order to explain the meaning of Ovid's rewriting. Although it is not entirely novel (see p. 86, n. 58), I especially enjoyed the discussion of *Her.* 15 and Verg. *Ecl.* 10. The two poems appear to share some noticeable traits, such as the final place in their respective collections and the issue of generic tension (elegy vs bucolic poetry in *Ecl.* 10 and lyric vs elegy in *Her.* 15).

In chapter 4, the problem of the letter's authenticity is raised and discussed in detail. The author's statements about *Her.* 15 being a key text in the collection (pp. 96-7) introduces the reader to the long-debated *quaestio* of the epistle's authenticity, which is still being disputed because of the *damnatio* of previous influential scholars. The author reconsiders the whole tradition of inauthenticity from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward until Tarrant's famous attack in 1981 ('The authenticity of the letter of Sappho to Phaon [*Heroides* XV],' HSCPh 85, 1981, 133-53). This is a much-needed chapter to understand how the issue of authenticity was generated, but it also effectively sheds light on the limits of philology and its methodologies. Thorsen is very persuasive in showing how vital *Her.* 15 is to the collection for both grasping and appreciating the dynamics of the construction of the figure of the poet and of a genre. The

chapter also poses the problem of how philology may at times end up complicating or hindering what appears rather straightforward if observed from a more literary standpoint.

From chapter 5 onward *Her. 15* is brought into the picture even more systematically to grant readers access to Ovid's elegiac landscape. Chapter 5 demonstrates that this epistle and the single *Heroides* are deeply intertwined and that the former exploits a few *topoi* present in the collection by varying them, as is the case with the departure scene (15.99-116). Since the Ovidian Sappho has not seen Phaon depart, she makes up for this visual lacuna by drawing on several topic features from the single *Heroides* in order to envisage the missing scene. In addition, Thorsen considers the overlapping notions of erotic and poetic pleasure and the acts of poetry-making and lovemaking, arguing that amongst all heroines it is in particular the fictional Sappho who comes closer to Ovid's erotopoetics. To this extent the author, in commenting on *Her. 15.41-50* (pp. 143-6), could have brought into the discussion, together with *Her. 13, Am. 1.5.23-26* as well, which tellingly exemplifies how love or, rather, its more physical counterpart, lovemaking, represents the perfect source of poetic inspiration.

Striking connections between *Her. 15* and the *Amores* are drawn in chapter 6, in which they constitute the central theme. The author compares Ovid's *Epigramma ipsius*, the opening piece of the collection, with the *incipit* of *Her. 15*, bringing to the forefront the concept of change, especially generic change, which is at the heart of both poems. The several cross-references and the points of contact between Sappho's epistle and the *Amores*, which Thorsen persuasively elucidates, underline a common factor that links the ideological thinking and the behaviour of the figure of the elegiac lover and poet. Toying with the idea of role-reversal, Sappho, to a larger extent than any other heroine in the collection, comes to embody the feminine counterpart of Ovid as the elegiac poet in the same way that Phaon replaces the *puella* of elegy.

The final chapter of the volume (7) is rounded off by investigating cross-references between *Her. 15* and the remainder of Ovid's amatory poetry, that is the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*. The Ovidian Sappho, again, encompasses qualities and roles that clearly appear to belong to Ovid, the poet and the lover; therefore, her utterances and reflections throughout the epistle wind up being indistinguishable from those of the 'real' author (cf. *Her. 15.79-84*), with one exception. Is there a cure for the lovesick Sappho who has been abandoned by her Phaon? As is well known, Ovid has given one to his affectionate readers who suffer because of love, the *Remedia amoris*, a self-help manual on how to escape from love. In *Her. 15* a Naiad tells Sappho (161-72) that she might try a leap from the Leucadian cliff so that she may be rid of her passion. However, just ten lines later, Sappho continues to see Phaon as 'healthier than the Leucadian wave' (15.187 *tu mihi Leucadia potes esse salubrior unda*), thus showing that giving up love is not a viable remedy for her. If she does not get Phaon back, she would prefer to meet death in those Leucadian waters (220). The end of love represents indeed for the inhabitants of the elegiac universe the end of life, unless the elegiac poet seeks to find another possible world (i.e. literary world) where he could reinvent himself, as Ovid

successfully did. In my view, Thorsen might perhaps have expanded further on this point and added a few more pages to her conclusions: the cross-references to the *Remedia* are convincing, yet she is somewhat perfunctory in her closing thoughts at p. 193.

Overall, Thorsen's volume provides an intelligent and highly recommendable reading of *Her. 15*, which is presented and utilised as a veritable interpretive guide to Ovid's early poetry. From this investigation, Sappho emerges as an exceptional heroine who has much more to say than her fictional companions in the collection in terms of poetic reflections, especially concerning genre, gender and the theme of love. Her character is so exceptional that she becomes inseparable from the figure of the poet, thus making the wonderful miracle of the identification between the author and his literary creation come true. Ovid might have truly exclaimed: 'Sappho, c'est moi!'.