

**Feeling lonely within a community:
The representation of loneliness in Ovid's *Heroides***

ABSTRACT: In Ovid's *Heroides* the coupling of elegiac poetry with the epistolary form favors the deeper exploration of female emotions through the first-person narrative of the heroines' emotional experiences. The present paper views Fulkerson's literary community of Ovid's *Heroides* also as an emotional community, in the model of Barbara Rosenwein. According to Rosenwein's theory, members of an emotional community formulate their own emotional code, with emotional attachments and expressions of feeling recognizable to all members. Taking into account that Ovid's *Heroides* function as a textual community that uses a literary genre to describe and shape the emotional behavior of its members within the collection, the present paper attempts to capture the discourse of loneliness through the vocabulary of the letter-writers in the ovidian epistolary collection. Based on the assumption that loneliness is a complex emotion with erotic rejection and sadness as key components, the present paper explores loneliness in the context of the hero's absence and the passing of time.

KEYWORDS: Ovid; emotions; Roman love elegy; loneliness.

About the collection

Ovid's *Heroides* consist of fifteen single epistles (and six double epistles) addressed by heroines of Roman and Greek myth to men who either did not give in to their sexual desires or took advantage of them emotionally and physically and then abandoned them¹. The epistles are dramatic monologues whose literary background is already familiar to Ovid's reading audience through the treatment of the myths, especially in epic poetry, tragedy, and bucolic poetry². The heroes bear the characteristics of the literary genre to which they originally

¹ The double epistles (Ov. *Her.* 16-21) are a conversational correspondence between three couples, Paris and Helen, Leander and Hero, Acontius and Cydippe. The double epistles are not the subject of the present paper.

² Cfr. Jacobson 1974, p. 340; Knox 1995, pp. 16-25. Epistles 1, 3, 6, and 7 are taken in content from epic poetry; Epistles 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 14 from tragedy; Epistles 2, 5, 10, and 13 from Hellenistic poetry or Neoteric poetics. On the content of the letters and the transmission of the myth, see Spentzou 2003, pp. xi-xviii; Fulkerson 2005; Murgatroyd, Reeves & Parker 2017.

belong, but conform to the conventions of Roman love elegy by assuming the role of the unfaithful and indifferent lover³. Although the letters are written in elegiac couplets, they borrow elements of epistolary discourse as well as rhetorical speech⁴. They are thus a hybrid literary genre that makes use of the features of both epistle and elegy without breaking away from the original works, with which the letters maintain a brilliant intertextuality⁵.

In Ovid's poetry, perhaps more than in the works of other elegiac poets, there is room for the expression of the female voice⁶. Not without reason, Leonard Barkan, when speaking of the influence of Ovid's poetry on medieval Western European texts, uses the term «ovidianism» to refer to a world in which women's feelings are especially emphasized⁷. It is no coincidence that Ovid's *Heroides* was a *locus classicus* for the poets of the 15th and 16th centuries when it came to capturing the feelings of oppressed women. The creators of early modern poetry admired the way the heroines of the collection lament their mistreatment at the hands of the heroes of classical myth and resist the emotional control interwoven with and projected by heroic values of honor and piety⁸. Moreover, the epistolary form of the *Heroides*, along with Cicero's letters, has been a literary model of emotional expression and rhetorical technique since Petrarch's time⁹.

In Ovid's *Heroides*, in particular the coupling of elegiac poetry with the epistolary form favors the deeper exploration of female emotions through the first-person narrative of the heroines' emotional experiences. The subjective and confessional tone of epistolary writing, combined with the emphatic portrayal of emotion, common to Roman love elegy, redefines the conventionally passive role of the heroines while promoting a new perspective on the poetic of emotion. Hence, we can easily understand why many scholars saw the *Heroides* as a case study in female psychology. Jacobson considers each letter as a charac-

³ On the comparative representation of characters of the epic poetry with their elegiac presence in the *Heroides*, see Anderson 2014, pp. 49-83.

⁴ Cfr. Knox 1995, pp. 15-17; Farrell 1998, pp. 309-323; Lindheim 2003, pp. 15-18; Kennedy 2010, pp. 217-232. The possibility that Ovid published his work under the title *Epistulae Heroidum* reinforces the epistolary character of the *Heroides*.

⁵ Cfr. Spentzou 2003, pp. 19-24; Kennedy 2010.

⁶ We must not overlook, however, that in the entirely male-dominated literary genre of Roman love elegy, the female voice is represented by Sulpicia, whose work, though almost epigrammatic and small-scale, manages to transcend the gendered conventions of the genre and portray emotion and sexuality through the female perspective. For Sulpicia's poetry and the questions that arise around it, see Skoje 2013; Fulkerson 2017, with bibliography.

⁷ Cfr. Barkan 1986, p. 14.

⁸ Cfr. Barnes 2017a, pp. 89-91.

⁹ Cfr. Barnes 2017b, pp. 95-98.

ter's "psychosynthesis", while De Jean, Harvey, and Rimell view the epistolary collection as a feminine ventriloquizing discourse¹⁰. Others read the *Heroides* through Lacan's psychoanalytic prism or as an example of feminist discourse¹¹. Finally, on the basis of intratextuality, Laurel Fulkerson approaches the female authors of the collection as members of a virtual literary community that takes shape within the text and resembles the poetic community of the Roman elegists¹².

The present paper views Fulkerson's literary community of Ovid's *Heroides* also as an emotional community, in the model of Barbara Rosenwein¹³. According to Rosenwein's theory, members of an emotional community formulate their own emotional code, with emotional attachments and expressions of feeling recognizable to all members. With a focus on cognitive theories, but also on the culturally and interpersonally constructed nature of emotions, Rosenwein traced the emotional discourse of various social groups, such as neighborhoods, unions, academic and monastic communities, and used written sources to capture the standard vocabulary that different emotional communities use to express their emotions. Taking into account that Ovid's *Heroides* function as a textual community that uses a literary genre to describe and shape the emotional behavior of its members who articulate their feelings towards their loved ones, I will attempt to capture the discourse of loneliness through the vocabulary of the female writers in the ovidian epistolary collection. Based on the assumption that loneliness is a complex emotion with erotic rejection and sadness as key components, the present paper explores loneliness in the context of the hero's absence and the passing of time.

Approaches to the perception of loneliness in Greek and Roman thought

Although it could be called the emotion of our century, loneliness has received little scholarly attention, at least in terms of its definition and what it has meant in past times and cultures, as Alberti points out in her biography of loneliness¹⁴. By tracing the history of loneliness through a variety of published texts from the 16th to the 20th centuries, Alberti was able to show both the increasing frequency of the term «loneliness» since 1800 and the change in meaning,

¹⁰ Cfr. Jacobson 1974, p. 374; De Jean 1989; Harvey 1989; Rimell 2000.

¹¹ Cfr. Lindheim 2003; Spentzou 2003.

¹² Cfr. Fulkerson 2005, p. 2.

¹³ Cfr. Rosenwein 2006.

¹⁴ Cfr. Bound Alberti 2019, pp. 4-9.

suggesting that «loneliness» expressed the feeling of being alone, especially in texts of the 16th and 17th centuries¹⁵. Although, literary production provides the researcher with a vast and largely unexplored corpus of texts that capture and evoke loneliness, allowing him to search for, record, and study the ways in which emotional communities of the past perceive and express the spectrum of loneliness, things can be rather obscure in the search for traces of loneliness in ancient Greek and Latin literature.

In ancient Greek literature, for example, characters, like Odysseus, far from home and family, and like Oedipus in his search for truth, walk a lonely path. We can look for shreds of loneliness in Plato's *Symposium* (189c ff.), where Aristophanes, praising love, recounts the myth of Hermaphroditus. The violent bisection of the androgynous and the anxious effort to reunite with his other half denotes the constant search for the Other and the human need to overcome loneliness (Pl. *Smp.* 191d). Aristotle in the *Politics* (1253a) holds a similar view when he asserts that, without the desire for companionship and communication, man gradually becomes less human, a beast, or a god.

The Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius, in *De Rerum Natura* (5.958-961), describes the solitary and selfish human nature when, before the building of society by the intervention of Venus, pure instincts determined survival. What feeling other than loneliness appears in the texts of the great Roman writers who experience exile? Ovid's *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, in which the exiled poet expresses his sadness and longing for his family, friends, and the city of Rome, can stand as a prominent example. The philosophical aspect of loneliness fills out the literary representation of the sentiment through the Roman period. In general, all philosophical schools present solitude as a virtue of the sage who, mastering indifference, withdraws from the human world because of his nihilistic self-sufficiency¹⁶.

These indicative references to loneliness in the Greco-Roman thought and literature reveal two significant aspects of the emotion. First, both Plato and Lucretius regard loneliness as the counterpart of love. Second, grief is the consequence of loneliness, as Ovid points out by naming his letters from exile *Tristia*, «Sorrowful Poems», to convey the prevailing sense of exile¹⁷. The preceding considerations approximate the contemporary conception of loneliness as Anderson describes it: «An enduring condition of emotional distress

¹⁵ Ivi, pp. 18-20.

¹⁶ For a brief overview on the departure and imposed loneliness of the sage, see Annas 2008, pp. 11-27.

¹⁷ *OLD*, s.v. *tristis*. For the relation between loneliness, love and grief see. TenHouten 2007, pp. 56-57.

that arises when a person feels estranged from, misunderstood, or rejected by others and/or lacks appropriate social partners for desired activities, particularly activities that provide a sense of social integration and opportunities for emotional intimacy»¹⁸. According to Anderson's definition, we might say, in other words, that loneliness is the inevitable result of the loss or absence of a familiar person. Furthermore, as Alberti puts it, «loneliness is an emotion cluster» consisting of rejection and grief¹⁹. Moreover, Ben Ze'ev sees loneliness as a variant of grief, a type of grief that arises from the loss of a desirable social relationship while rejection and the loss of a once flourishing relationship, according to Sullivan, leads to the experience of pain identical to that of death²⁰.

Returning to the Greco-Roman world, we find that neither the Greek nor the Roman philosophers and writers list loneliness in their texts as an emotion but rather as a condition²¹. David Konstan emphasizes the absence of words in the ancient Greek language denoting the emotion of loneliness²². The adjectives μόνος (*mónos*), «alone», and ἐρήμος (*erêmos*), «desolate», indicate the physical absence of people and isolation, but not the inner experience of loneliness with its corresponding emotions²³. Accordingly, in Latin the terms *solitudo*, «solitude», and *solus*, «alone», have similar meanings²⁴. In his *Tusculanae Disputationes*, where he discusses emotions, Cicero does not speak of loneliness as an emotion. He does, however, associate grief, *animi doloribus*, with the desire for isolation, *alii solitudines*, projecting one of the parameters of loneliness in its contemporary perception²⁵. Cicero counts loneliness among the misfortunes that occur by chance, and therefore believes that loneliness is not one's own choice, but is due to external factors that a person cannot control²⁶. This assumption, combined with the fact that loneliness is seen as

¹⁸ Anderson 1998, p. 265.

¹⁹ Cfr. Bound Alberti 2019, pp. 6-7.

²⁰ Cfr. Sullivan 1999, pp. 270-271; Ben Ze'ev 2000, p. 470.

²¹ Cfr. Konstan 2006, p. 16. The lack of a facial expression to show loneliness, the identification of loneliness with solitude, and the fact that loneliness is an emotion cluster made it difficult to capture loneliness as an emotion earlier than in 1980. See Wood 1986, p. 194; TenHouten 2007, p. 14; Bound Alberti 2019, pp. 17-20.

²² Ivi, p. 220.

²³ *LSJ*, *s.v.* μόνος and *s.v.* ἐρήμος, with cross references. See also *LSJ*, *s.v.* μοναξία (*monaxía*), «solitariness».

²⁴ *OLD*, *s.v.* *solitudo*, «the state of being alone or unaccompanied, the state of having no friends, protectors or similar, loneliness, forlornness, the state of being forsaken by or deprived of», και *s.v.* *solus*. «having no companion, alone, forsaken, lonely, deserted».

²⁵ Cic. *Tusc.* 3.63 *ex hoc evenit, ut in animi doloribus alii solitudines captent*. «And it is owing to this that some men, when in sorrow, betake themselves to deserts».

²⁶ Cic. *Tusc.* 5.29 *aderit enim malorum, si mala illa ducimus, turba quaedam: paupertas, ignobilitas, humilitas, solitudo, amissio suorum, graves dolores corporis, perdita valetudo, debilitas, caecitas,*

a reaction to a physical loss and is not caused by moral judgments and social interactions, may justify the non-existence in ancient Greek and Latin vocabulary of words to denote loneliness as we understand it today²⁷. But in his more personal letters to Atticus, Cicero shares the feeling of loneliness with his friend when he confesses to him that he feels deeply lonely despite the presence of many people around him²⁸. Furthermore, and in a more erotic context, that of Roman love elegy, Propertius is unable to enjoy either the songs or the beautiful women that surround him. Instead, he lies on a couch, feeling desperately lonely because his beloved Cynthia is not there²⁹. Both Cicero's and Propertius' sincere statements are very close to the 21st-century view of loneliness as a more complex sentiment that does not strictly correlate with the physical presence but is obviously related to the absence of the Other, that one person who is important in creating Anderson's emotional intimacy.

The absence of the hero – The loneliness of the heroine

Within the elegiac setting of the ovidian collection, the narrative revolves around the love affairs of the letter-writers and especially around the absence of the beloved, which is a central point not only for the narrative itself but also for the writing of the letters, for absence is the fact that drives the heroines to write. As Roland Barthes very aptly notes, «Historically, the discourse of absence is carried out by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises)»³⁰.

Abandoned by their favorite heroes either because of events beyond their control, such as a war and the politics that accompany it (Penelope, Briseis, Hermione, Laodamia), the struggle to overcome the social conventions (Phae-

interitus patriae, exilium, servitus denique. in his tot et tantis – atque etiam plura possunt accidere – potest esse sapiens; nam haec casus importat, qui in sapientem potest incurrere. «For a crowd of evils would present themselves, if we were to allow poverty, obscurity, humility, solitude, the loss of friends, acute pains of the body, the loss of health, weakness, blindness, the ruin of one's country, banishment, slavery, to be evils. For a wise man may be afflicted by all these evils, numerous and important as they are, and many others also may be added, for they are brought on by chance, which may attack a wise man».

²⁷ Cfr. Konstan 2006, p. 40.

²⁸ Cic. *Att.* 12.51.1 *Tironem habeo citius quam verebar. venit etiam Nicias, et / Valerium hodie audiebam esse venturum. quamvis multi sint, / magis tamen ero solus quam si unus esses.* «Tiro is come back sooner than I hoped. Nicias has also arrived, and I hear that Valerius is coming today. However many they may be, I shall still be more alone than if you were here by yourself».

²⁹ Prop. 4.8.47-48 *cantabant surdo, nudabant pectora caeco: / Lanuvii ad portas, ei mihi, solus eram.* «They sang, I was deaf: bared their breasts, I was blind. Alas, I was off alone by Lanuvium's gates».

³⁰ Barthes 1978, pp. 13-14.

dra, Canace, Hypermestra), a travel feat that must be fulfilled (Fyllis, Dido, Ariadne) or even the embrace of another woman (Oenone, Hypsipyle, Medea, Deianira), the heroines try to bridge the distance between themselves and their heroes with their letters and to restore the hero's presence, which is so necessary for them, through a virtual dialogue³¹.

The heroines' static and everlasting availability contrasts with the heroes' gendered tension to flee, an attitude that inevitably turns to emotional discourse. In the words of Barthes, «The other is in a condition of perpetual departure, of journeying; [...] I - I who love, by converse vocation, am sedentary, motionless [...]. It is to say, 'I am loved less than I love'»³². The amorous rejection of the heroine and subsequent absence of the hero set the stage for the sense of loneliness to emerge through the heroine's abandonment. Hypermestra's words comment on Barthes' fragmentary discourse: «you get away; I stay» (14.78 *tu fugis, ipsa moror*). When the imprisoned heroine urges Lynceus to leave and thus save his life, she briefly emphasizes the hero's departure and her staying as an inevitable opposing choice of the two characters, as well as an active stance of the man against the passive attitude of the woman³³. The use of *moror*, «to dismiss, disregard, pay no attention», conceals the hero's indifference, the rejection of Hypermestra by Lynceus, and reveals the cause of her loneliness and grief³⁴.

Briseis' choice of verbs (3.61-62 *ibis*, [...] *relinquis*, [...] *desertae*) and alteration of tenses (future, present, present perfect) when she learns of Achilles' decision to leave Troy for his hometown outlines the hero's departure and its consequence, the heroine's abandonment³⁵. She describes herself as *deserta* (3.62) and *relicta* (3.66), «abandoned, forsaken», while the confessional exclamation *o miseram* (3.61), typical of the disappointed elegiac lover, underscores the heroine's sad plight. Dido uses the same characterization for herself in com-

³¹ On the epistle as a substitute of the lover in *Heroides* and other ovidian texts see Hardie 2002, pp. 106-142.

³² Barthes 1978, p. 13.

³³ Direct speech and the present indicative instead of the present imperative or future indicative emphasize the critical necessity of Lynceus' fleet and the certainty of Hypermestra's abandonment. The verb *moror*, «to keep from going away, detain, hold back», reminds Lynceus of the sacrifice Hypermestra makes for his sake. See *OLD*, *s.v.* *moror*; also Reeson 2001, pp. 278-279.

³⁴ *OLD*, *s.v.* *moror*. See also Pucci 1978, pp. 52-54 and notes 1 & 3 for the wordplay between the words *mora* and *amor* and the erotic connotations they convey; Pichon 1991, *s.v.* *mora* with cross-references.

³⁵ *Ov. Her.* 3.61-62 *ibis et - o miseram! - cui me, violente, relinquis? / quis mihi desertae mite levamen erit?*. «Ah, you'll go, heartless Achilles, but who are you leaving me to, / who will gently comfort me when I'm abandoned?». Cfr. *Ov. Her.* 3.66 *et videam puppes ire relicta tuas!* «And I see your fleet sail off and leave me!», where Briseis sees in her mind the departure of Achilles' ships and she is sure of her abandonment.

bination with the verb *relinquo* (7.7 *miseramque relinquere*) when she realizes that Aeneas will surely leave her³⁶. In both cases, the use of the accusative (3.61 *miseram ... me*, 7.7 *miseram ... Dido*) reinforces the transformation of the heroines into lonely, sad objects who are, as Barthes comments, «in expectation, nailed to the spot, in suspense – like a package in some forgotten corner of a railway station»³⁷.

Penelope, the archetypal example of faith, complains because Odysseus, her beloved husband, is absent (1.50 *abest*, 1.55 *abes*), even though Troy has been conquered and he is both alive and victorious³⁸. Odysseus' absence becomes even more apparent in contrast to the return of the other Greek heroes who fought at Troy and have now returned home, forcing Penelope to assume that her husband's absence is intentional (1.80 *abesse velis*). From the beginning of her letter, Penelope expresses her loneliness, along with the emotional patterns of fear and discomfort that characterize the heroines' entire emotional world. She refers to herself as *relicta* (1.8), «abandoned», while her loneliness is underscored by the adjective *frigida* (1.7), «frozen», a quality that is also transferred to her bed, empty of the pleasures of love (1.8 *deserto ... lecto*)³⁹.

Following Penelope's example, Deianira emphatically admits her loneliness when she confesses that Hercules is always absent (9.33 *semper abest*) and that she has more the role of a hostess (9.33 *hospes*) and less that of a wife (9.33 *coniuge*) to a hero who is himself more guest than a husband⁴⁰. Hypsipyle emphasizes her abandonment by Jason for the sake of Medea (6.155 *destituor*) by highlighting her role as a wife (6.155 *coniunx*) and mother (6.155 *mater*),

³⁶ Ov. *Her.* 7.7 *certus es ire tamen miseramque relinquere Dido*. «Are you determined to go nonetheless and abandon miserable Dido?»

³⁷ Barthes 1978, p. 13.

³⁸ Ov. *Her.* 1.50 *virque mihi dempto fine carendus abest?* «Just do without my absent husband forever?»; 1.57 *victor abes*. «You won, but aren't here». Cfr. Ov. *Trist.* 2.375-376 *aut quid Odyssea est nisi femina propter amorem, / dum vir abest, multis una petita procis?* «What's the Odyssey but Penelope wooed by many suitors / while her husband's away, for the sake of love?», where Ovid refers to the absence of Odysseus and emphasizes the presence of suitors who claim Penelope in the name of love.

³⁹ Ov. *Her.* 1.7-8 *non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto, / nec quererer tardos ire relicta dies*. «Then I wouldn't have slept alone in a cold bed or be / complaining, all on my own, that the days pass slowly».

⁴⁰ Ov. *Her.* 9.33 *vir mihi semper abest, et coniuge notior hospes*. «My man is always away (more of a guest than a husband)». On the juxtaposition of the role of the *coniunx* and that of the *hospes* Cfr. Virg. *Aen.* 4.323-324 *cui me moribundam deseris, hospes? / hoc solum nomen quoniam de coniuge restat?* «My guest, since that's all that is left me from the name of husband, / to whom do you relinquish me, a dying woman?», where Dido refers to Aeneas as her guest, a title that replaces that of husband; Ov. *Her.* 7.167 *si pudet uxoris, non nupta, sed hospita dicar*; «Call me hostess, not wife, if you're ashamed of marriage to me», where Dido voluntarily exchanges the role of wife with that of hostess, as long as she remains with Aeneas.

which did not prevent Jason from leaving her⁴¹. The Queen of Lemnos mentions these qualities when she curses Medea to suffer the same, namely to be left alone by her husband as she is, orphaned (6.156 *orba*) after having two children. The curse of Hypsipyle prescribes Medea's bleak future, but also outlines the heroine's loneliness, which is experienced as orphanhood⁴². The female perspective of abandonment is reversed by Jason himself, who clarifies his reluctant departure from Hypsipyle's side with the verb *abstrahor* (6.59), implying a violent physical and emotional separation⁴³. However, the verb *abstrahor* also means «to free, to withdraw from control or possession», and in this meaning implies that Jason leaves Hypsipyle voluntarily. This aspect confirms the second, more interpretive reading of his words by the heroine, who then accuses him of hypocrisy. In contrast, Laodamia points to the involuntary departure of Protesilaus (13.9 *raptus es*), who seems to be seized by the wind like the sails of his ship (13.15 *abreptaque vela*), this sudden seizure being associated associatively with death⁴⁴.

The proximity of loneliness to death is evoked by the frequent use of the adjective *viduus*, which appears in the letters of many heroines to project the feeling of loneliness and abandonment onto objects and especially onto the marriage bed. The adjective, which means widowhood, is used by Penelope to describe her bed (1.81 *viduo lecto*), an idea that recurs variedly from the beginning of the letter, where the heroine complains about Odysseus's abandoned marriage bed (1.7 *deserto lecto*)⁴⁵. The use of *viduus* also expresses the absence

⁴¹ Ov. Her. 6.155-156 *utque ego destituor coniunx materque duorum / a totidem natis orba sit illa viro!* «I'm deserted, a wife and mother of two, so let her lose / her husband after she's had two children». Cfr. Ov. Her. 7.133 *forsitan et gravidam Dido, scelerate, relinquis*. «You're abandoning me when I may be pregnant too, you criminal», where Dido reproaches Aeneas for her abandonment, while she is possibly pregnant. For the intertextuality of letters 6 and 12 and the dualism of the heroines see Bloch 2000; Hinds 1993, pp. 27-34.

⁴² Cfr. Ov. Her. 8.90 *et duo cum vivant, orba duobus eram*. «Both were alive, but I was an orphan twice over», where Hermione uses the epithet *orba* to emphasize her loneliness due to the absence of both her parents; 11.120 *nec mater fuero dicta nec orba diu*. «I won't be called a mother or bereaved for long», where Canace loses the identity of a mother after the death of her child, while she feels orphaned by the absence of Macareus.

⁴³ Ov. Her. 6.59-60 *abstrahor, Hypsipyle; sed dent modo fata recursus, / vir tuus hinc abeo, vir tibi semper ero*. «I'm being forced to go, Hypsipyle. Provided fate lets me return, / I leave as your husband, and I'll always be your husband». On the multiple meanings of *abstrahor* see Knox 1995, p. 184; OLD, s.v. *abstraho*. Also Cfr. Ov. Her. 14.83 *abstrahor a patrii pedibus, raptamque capillis*. «I'm seized by the hair, dragged from my father's feet», where Hypermestra is violently dragged away from her father's feet and thrown into dungeon.

⁴⁴ Ov. Her. 13.9 *raptus es hinc praeceps*. «You were rushed away from here». Cfr. Ov. Her. 10.43 *iamque oculis ereptus eras*. «And now you were snatched from my sight», where Theseus suddenly disappears from Ariadne's sight. On the connotations between the verb *rapio* and death see Michalopoulos C. 2006, p. 228, with cross references.

⁴⁵ Ov. Her. 1.7 *non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto*. «Then I wouldn't have slept alone in a

of the beloved and the resulting loneliness in the letter of Oenone (5.106 *viduo toro*) and Ariadne (10.14 *viduo toro*), as well as in the slightly modified versions in the letters of Hermione (8.10 *maesto ... toro*) and Laodamia (13.107 *lecto... caelibe*), all with clear sexual allusions.

The hidden complaint about the heroines' lonely lives is reflected in the use of the adjective *viduus* as a designation in various nouns. Penelope uses it to characterize her hands (1.10 *viduas manus*), Dianeira applies it to her house (9.35 *domo vidua*), Hermione in two instances to both Menelaus and the palace courtyard (8.21 *vidua aula*, 8.86 *viduum virum*)⁴⁶. The hypallage in Penelope's letter, where *viduas* identifies *manus* while semantically referring to *mibi* (1.9), and the grammatical pan in Dianeira's letter, where the ablative *vidua* signifies *aula* but the same type as a nominative defines the preceding *ipsa* (9.35), reinforce the diffusion of the sense of loneliness from objects to persons. Similarly, in Hermione's letter, the shift of the adjective from the inanimate *aula* to the animate *virum* indicates the escalation of the heroine's loneliness and emotional emptiness, culminating in the tragic realization that she is an orphan (8.90 *orba*), even though both of Hermione's parents are still alive⁴⁷.

The loneliness of the heroines is absolute, since most of them have no family left or cannot return to it. The pain of being an orphan must be eased by the hero himself, who replaces the family the letter-writers have lost. Briseis insists that Achilles was a kind of compensation for her (3.51 *conpesavimus*) and of a great value, as emphasized by the contrast between *tot* (3.51) and *unum* (3.51), between her whole family and only Achilles himself⁴⁸. From the point of view of an emotional exaggeration, it is not unfair that Briseis refers to Achilles

cold bed»; 1.81-82 *me pater Icarium viduo discedere lecto / cogit*. «As I'm on my own, my father Icarium tries to force me / to remarry». On the meaning of *viduus* literary and in an erotic context see OLD, s.v. *viduus*; Pichon 1991, s.v. *viduus*. Cfr. Prop. 2.9.16 *Scyria nec viduo Deidamia toro*. «Nor Scyrian Deidamia, bereaved in her bed»; Ov. *Am.* 3.5.42 *frigidus in viduo destituere toro*. «You'll be left cold in your bed»; Her. 16.318 *in viduo iaces solus et ipse toro*. «I myself also lie in bed all alone»; Trist. 5.5.48 *iustaque de viduo paene querella toro*. «And all too justified a complaint over your empty bed», where the epithet *viduus* qualifies the noun *torus* to emphasize the loneliness and lamentation of the lover.

⁴⁶ Ov. *Her.* 1.10 *lassaret viduas pendula tela manus*. «And I wouldn't be wearing out my widowed hands weaving»; 8.21 *si socer ignavus vidua stertisset in aula*. «If he'd done nothing, snoring away in the palace»; 8.86 *abducta viduum coniuge flere virum*. «A man weeping for the wife taken from him»; 9.35 *ipsa domo vidua votis operata pudicis*. «At home, on my own, I busy myself with chaste prayers».

⁴⁷ Ov. *Her.* 8.90 *et duo cum vivant, orba duobus eram*. «Both were alive, but I was an orphan twice over». See Michalopoulos C. 2006, pp. 259 & 262.

⁴⁸ Ov. *Her.* 3.51-52 *tot tamen amissis te conpesavimus unum; tu dominus, tu vir, tu mihi frater eras*. «You were my compensation for the loss of so many: You were my master and husband, you were my brother». Cfr. Prop. 1.11.23 *tu mihi sola domus, tu, Cynthia, sola parentes*. «You're my only home, my only parents, Cynthia».

as her lord, her husband, and her brother, ignoring the fact that the hero is responsible for the death of her family members (3.45-51). Briseis adopts this emotional motif from the Homeric Andromache, reflecting female loneliness in the warring world of the heroes⁴⁹. Hermione also attributes to Orestes the qualities of a husband and brother, whose absence exacerbates the emotional loss of family for the heroine⁵⁰. Hermione has experienced loneliness since childhood, as her mother left with Paris and her father is constantly at war. In an attempt to restore mental and physical ties to her family, especially her mother, the young heroine emphasizes her kinship with Orestes and creates virtual family relationships that reveal her emotional upset⁵¹.

Dianeira faces the wrath of Eurystheus alone, without the presence of Hercules' parents, her son, and of course the hero himself⁵². Medea confesses that she has lost everything, her throne, her home, her family, and she is set apart and alone, having lost Jason, who had replaced all of that⁵³. Medea, like Briseis, uses the *omnia – solus* contrast (12.162) to highlight the emotional value of Jason, but also the blow that the princess of Colchis receives from the loss of her hero. Ariadne feels exiled, unable to return to Crete having betrayed her father and her homeland by helping Theseus⁵⁴. For Medea and Ariadne, the

⁴⁹ The motif is a parallel from Hom. *Il.* 6.429-430 Ἕκτορ, ἀπὸρ σὺ μοι ἔσσι πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ / ἠδὲ κασίγνητος, σὺ δὲ μοι θαλερός παρακοίτης. «Hektor - you who to me are father, mother, brother, and dear husband», where Andromache addresses Hector in the same words.

⁵⁰ Ov. *Her.* 8.28 *et, si non esses vir mihi, frater eras.* «If you weren't my husband, you'd be my cousin», 8.89-90 *parva mea sine matre fui, pater arma ferebat, / et duo cum vivit, orba duobus eram.* «When I was little I didn't have my mother, and father was at war; / both were alive, but I was an orphan twice over», 8.101 *pars haec una mihi, coniunx bene cessit Orestes.* «Marriage to Orestes is the only bit of good luck that I've had». On Hermione's traumatic experience of absence see Michalopoulos C. 2006, pp. 50-54 & 99.

⁵¹ See Brescia 2017, pp. 273-276.

⁵² Ov. *Her.* 9.43-44 *mater abest queriturque deo placuisse potenti, / nec pater Amphitryon nec puer Hyllus adest.* «Your mother's away, sorry she ever attracted mighty Jupiter; / your father Amphitryon and your son Hyllus aren't here either». Cfr. Soph. *Trach.* 49-60, 61-93, 584-587, where the loneliness of the ovidian Deianira is juxtaposed with her sophoclean counterpart, who can speak to her nurse, the chorus, and her son. Cfr. also Ov. *Her.* 9.151-157, where Deianira refers to her own family only to prove that her act, the murder of Hercules, is the result of a cursed heredity. On the loss of the heroine's family and the absence of Hercules' family see Bolton 1989, pp. 244-246; Casali 1995b, pp. 507-508.

⁵³ Ov. *Her.* 12.161-162 *deseror amissis regno patriaque domoque / coniuge, qui nobis omnia solus erat!*. «Me deserted and deprived of my throne, country, home / and husband, who was on his own everything to me». The choice of the passive *deseror* underscores Medea's abandonment by Jason. See Bessone 1997, pp. 218-219.

⁵⁴ Ov. *Her.* 10.66 *exul ero.* «I'll be an exile», 10.69-70 *at pater et tellus iusto regnata parenti / prodita sunt facto, nomina cara, meo.* «Since by my actions I betrayed my just father Minos / and his kingdom of Crete (names so dear to me)». Cfr. on the contrary, Cat. 64.180 *an patris auxilium sperem?* «Or shall I hope for my father's help?», where Ariadne hopes for some kind of help from her father. On the motif of exile in Ovid's *Heroides* Cfr. Ov. *Her.* 7.115 *exul agor cineresque viri*

loss of their family and the resulting loneliness seem to be the consequence of their decision to follow the heroes, trading stable family ties for the uncertainty of love. Their choice makes the heroines completely dependent on their lovers, and therefore the absence of the hero makes their loneliness even more intense. Dianeira, however, does not refer to her own family, but to the family of Hercules. She is not remembering her own past family happiness and stability, but she is portraying her loneliness because of the absence of Hercules' family. Thus, Dianeira indirectly blames the hero for her loneliness, which results from her position as Hercules' wife. Because of this position, she also receives the wrath of Eurystheus and the vengeance of Hera, which she emotionally translates into loneliness.

The mastery of time: The unbearable endurance of loneliness

The absence of the beloved condemns the heroines in the epistolary collection to years of loneliness and waiting and sends their sex lives into inactivity, jeopardizing the preservation of erotic desire. The absence of Odysseus affects the passing of time for the ovidian Penelope, as the days pass slowly and the nights seem endless. Penelope's very careful choice of words (1.7 *deserto ... frigida lecto*, 1.8 *quererer tardos ... relicta dies*, 1.9 *spatiosam noctem*) reinforces the relationship between time and her loneliness and justifies the complaint of her abandonment, physically and emotionally⁵⁵. In the collection's elegiac setting, Penelope's loom, which she uses to strain her hands on cold, lonely nights instead of enjoying love in Odysseus's arms, becomes a means of deceiving not the suitors who besiege her but herself, substituting the erotic act for the work of weaving and soothing her erotic anxieties⁵⁶.

patriamque relinquo. «Driven into exile, I left my homeland and my husband's ashes», 14.129 *exul Hypermetra, pretium pietatis iniquum*. «Exiled Hypermetra, whose devotion was unfairly punished», where both Dido and Hypermetra revisit the motif of the exiled heroine. Batistella 2010, p. 73 argues that the literary exiles of the collection's epistolary writers anticipate Ovid's poetic of exile.

⁵⁵ Ov. *Her.* 1.7-10 *non ego deserto iacuissem frigida lecto / non quererer tardos ire relicta dies / nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem / lassaret viduas pendula tela manus*. «Then I wouldn't have slept alone in a cold bed or be / complaining, all on my own, that the days pass slowly / and I wouldn't be wearing out my widowed hands weaving / in an attempt to beguile the long nights». In addition to the direct reference to the bed (1.7 *lecto*), the words *frigidus* and *desertus* in an elegiac context relate to the absence of sexual life. Cfr. Cat. 68a.6 *desertum in lecto caelibe perpetitur*. «Forsaken, enduring an empty bed»; Ov. *Am.* 3.5.42 *frigidus in viduo destituere toro*. «You'll be left cold in your bed»; Ars 3.70 *frigida deserta nocte iacebis anus*. «Will lie alone, and aged, in the cold of night». See also Pichon 1991 *s.v.* *frigidus* and *s.v.* *tardus*.

⁵⁶ Weaving is a stereotypical activity with which the elegiac *puella* passes the long nights while thinking of her lover. Cfr. Tib. 1.3.84-88 *Adsideat custos sedula semper anus. / Haec tibi fabellas*

Doomed to lonely nights are also many other female correspondents of the *Heroides*' emotional community⁵⁷. Medea, after meeting Jason, is forced to stay away from the hero for two nights in erotic torment and fear. The all-powerful witch who, according to the confession of her rival, Hypsipyle, can lower the moon from the sky and hide the sun in the shadows, in short, to control time (6.85-86), loses her power under the influence of love (12.167) and turns into an elegiac *puella*. Medea's state of mind sums up the situation of the elegiac lover: she cries alone in her room at night, her days are not pleasant, bitter nights and long hours of sleeplessness torment her. The elegiac motif of the lover's insomnia is reinforced by the verb *fuit* (12.58), which indicates the heroine's impression of the slow passing of the night until dawn, while the chiasmus *non grata – amarae / noctes – dies* (12.169) underlines the heroine's emotional state⁵⁸. Ironically, she comments on her inability to put an end to her insomnia: she who was able to put the dragon to sleep is unable to bring sleep to herself (12.171). And Hermione is also tormented by insomnia and suffers even more at night, despite the physical presence of Neoptolemus, be-

referat positaque lucerna / deducat plena stamina longa colu, / at circa gravibus pensis adfixa puella / paulatim somno fessa remittat opus. «Let the old woman who protects / sacred honour, always sit with you diligently. / She will tell you tales and when the lamp is lit / draw long threads from the full distaff / while the girls all round work at their heavy task, / till little by little, wearied, the work sends them to sleep»; Prop. 1.3.41-44 *nam modo purpureo fallebam stamine somnum, / rursus et Orphea carmine, fessa, lyrae; / interdum leviter mecum deserta querebar / externo longas saepe in amore moras.* «Till a moment ago, I staved off sleep, weaving the purple threads, and again, wearied, with the sound of Orpheus's lyre. Until Sleep impelled me to sink down under his delightful wing I was moaning gently to myself, alone, all the while, for you, delayed so long, so often, by a stranger's love». The sexual connotations imposed by the conventions of Roman love elegy and the emphasis on Penelope's hidden eroticism do not outweigh the heroine's Homeric traits. Penelope is still devoted to Odysseus as she sleeps alone in an empty bed and spends her nights weaving. Nevertheless, the epistle is tinged with eroticism. See Michalopoulos C. 2014, pp. 193-218.

⁵⁷ About unfulfilled nights of love as an elegiac *topos* see Michalopoulos C. 2006, p. 205, with cross references.

⁵⁸ Ov. *Her.* 12.58 *acta est per lacrimas nox mihi, quanta fuit.* «And spent the whole night long crying», 12.169-170 *non mihi grata dies; noctes vigilantur amarae, et tener a misero pectore somnus abit.* «I loathe the daytime, my nights are wakeful and hateful, / soft sleep abandons me in my misery». About insomnia as a symptom of the elegiac lover Cfr. Tib. 2.4.11 *nunc et amara dies et noctis amarior umbra est.* «Now the day is bitter, the shadows of night more bitter»; Prop. 1.1.33 *nam me nostra Venus noctes exercet amaras.* «Venus, our mistress, turns nights of bitterness against me», 4.3.29 *at mihi cum noctes induxit vesper amaras.* «While I, when evening leads on the bitter night»; Ov. *Am.* 1.2.3 *et vacuus somno noctem, quam longa, peregi.* «And the sleepless nights, so long to endure», all with the same wording and content. Cfr. also Ov. *Her.* 11.29 *nec somni faciles et nox erat annua nobis.* «Sleep wasn't easy, each night was as long as a year», where Canace comments on the slow passing of the night as a symptom of love. See Pichon 1991, *s.v.* nox, with cross references; Vaiopoulos 2020, 114-117, with cross references. See also Pichon 1991, *s.v.* vigilare, to describe spurned and abandoned lovers. For the emotions of Medea in the whole letter see Michalopoulos A. 2021.

cause she is forced to recline with a man she does not love⁵⁹. The present tense participles *ululantem* and *gementem* (8.107) reveal the despair of the young woman who is forced to be separated from Orestes, the man she actually desires. The heroine's emotional state is the result of the loneliness brought on by the personified night when she locks (8.107 *condidit*) Hermione in her room. The verb *condo* reverses gender roles by making Hermione an *amatrix inclusa* who, locked in a room rather than outside a door, laments her separation from her beloved⁶⁰.

Despite their loneliness, the heroines refuse to forget their lovers, who occupy their thoughts day and night. Their loneliness is thus deepened by the omnipresent absence of the beloved, which, as Barthes argues, becomes an «active practice, a business» which keeps the heroines of doing anything else⁶¹. Dido spends her days and nights with the image of Aeneas in her eyes and her heart. The repetition of the hero's name at the beginning of each verse (7.25 *Aeneas*, 7.26 *Aenean*) and the adverb *semper* emphasize the heroine's passion for Aeneas, who becomes a kind of invocation that fills the gap of his absence with the illusion that Dido can address him through her letter as if he were present⁶². Laodamia admits that the thought of Protesilaus is a source of pain for her day and night, but her grief increases at night when she lies down on her lonely bed⁶³. The heroine emphatically underlines the loneliness of the night by repeatedly saying *nocte... nocte... nox* (13.103-104) to reach the reasonable

⁵⁹ Ov. *Her.* 8.107-109 *nox ubi me thalamis ululantem et acerba gementem / condidit in maesto procubuique toro, / pro somno lacrimis oculi funguntur obortis.* «At night, shut in the bedroom, wailing and groaning / bitterly, I lie down on my bed of sorrow / and, weeping instead of sleeping». Cfr. Ov. *Am.* 1.4.61-62 *nocte vir includet; lacrimis ego maestus obortis, / qua licet, ad saevas prosequar usque fores.* «The man shuts you in at night, I sad, with welling tears, / as is right, always haunt that cruel entrance».

⁶⁰ Cfr. Michalopoulos C. 2006, pp. 269-270.

⁶¹ Barthes 1978, pp. 15-16.

⁶² Ov. *Her.* 7.25-26 *Aeneas oculis semper vigilantis inhaeret / Aenean animo noxque diesque refert.* «Aeneas is before my eyes all the time I'm awake; / at night in sleep my thoughts return to Aeneas». Cfr. Virg. *Aen.* 4.83-84 *sola domo maeret vacua stratisque relictis / incubat. illum absens absentem auditque videtque.* «She grieves, alone in the empty hall, and lies on the couch / he left. Absent she hears him absent, sees him», 4.466-467 *in somnis ferus Aeneas, semperque relinqui / sola sibi, semper longam incommitata videtur.* «Harsh Aeneas himself persecuted / her, in her crazed sleep: always she was forsaken, alone with / herself, always she seemed to be travelling companionless on some long journey», where the content agrees with the ovidian text, but the sense of loneliness is more intense through the use of the epithet *sola*, the verbal types *relictis*, *absens*, *absentem*, *relinqui* and the repetition of the adverb *semper*.

⁶³ Ov. *Her.* 13.103-107 *sive latet Phoebus seu terris altior exstat, / tu mihi luce dolor, tu mihi nocte venis, / nocte tamen quam luce magis – nox grata puellis / quarum suppositus colla lacertus habet. / aucupor in lecto mendaces caelibes somnos.* «Whether the sun has set or is high in the sky, / come to me quickly by day and by night, / but more so at night – nights are lovely for girls / who are lying with someone's arms around their neck».

conclusion that the night favors the girls who sleep with their lover, not herself, who is accompanied by false dreams in the night. The juxtaposition of the erotic pleasures of the night (13.105 *nox grata*) with the false pleasure of the dream, which leaves an aftertaste of sadness (13.104 *dolor*), underscores the loneliness of Laodamia, who, to comfort herself, will replace her lover with an effigy (13.151-155)⁶⁴.

The lover's insistence on accurately measuring the duration of the beloved's absence feeds Phyllis's loneliness and frustration⁶⁵. The juxtaposition of the hypothetical conjunction *si* with the adverb *bene* (2.7) and the second person singular (2.7 *numeres*) with the first person plural (2.7 *numeramus*) excludes Demophon from the circle of lovers and expresses an indirect rebuke to the hero, whose absence beyond the promised time (2.2 *ultra promissum tempus abesse*) is a mystery for Phyllis that occupies her intensely. Demophon's absence for three months, so well calculated by the heroine in love, clearly shows the dimension of the feelings between him and her and gradually reinforces Phyllis's impression that Demophon has finally betrayed her. By charting time in detail with the cycles of the moon (2.3-6), we follow the passage of time along with Phyllis and understand the heroine's sequence of feelings from anticipation and hope to disappointment and loneliness, feelings that lead her to write the letter just before her suicide⁶⁶. In the same way, Canace counts the time of Macareus' absence, but also the time of her pregnancy (11.45-46)⁶⁷. Hypsipyle, on the other hand, counts the time Jason has spent with her as evidence of the extent of his betrayal (6.56-57)⁶⁸. Of the women in the heroines' emotional community, only Phaedra sees Theseus' long absence positively, and uses her loneliness productively by attempting to seduce Hippolytus (4.109)⁶⁹.

In an attempt to justify the absence of the hero, to console their loneliness,

⁶⁴ About Laodamia's dreams and Protesilaus' effigy see Reeson 2001, pp. 171-175; Fulkerson 2002. Cfr. *Ov. Her.* 7.99-102 *est mihi marmorea sacratus in aede Sychaeus – oppositae frondes velle-raque alba tegunt. / hinc ego me sensi noto quater ore eitari / ipse sono tenui dixit «Elissa, veni!»*. «In a marble shrine covered in front with foliage and white wool / I have a statue of Sychaeus, which I regard as sacred. / I heard myself summoned from there by his well-known voice / four times; he said himself faintly, 'Dido, come!'», where Dido thinks she hears Sychaeus' effigy speaking to her.

⁶⁵ *Ov. Her.* 2.7-8 *tempora si numeres – bene quae numeramus amantes – / non venit ante suam nostra querela diem*. «If you count the days (and we lovers count them carefully), / this complaint of mine isn't premature». On the contrary, Cfr. *Ov. Rem.* 223 *tempora nec numera nec crebro respice Romam*. «Don't count the hours, or keep looking back at Rome», where not counting time is the antidote to love.

⁶⁶ On the way Phyllis counts time and the discussion of the tradition and interpretation of the excerpt see Jacobson 1974, pp. 71-72; Fear 1993, pp. 97-101.

⁶⁷ Cfr. Reeson 2001, pp. 62-63.

⁶⁸ Cfr. Knox 1995, pp. 183-184.

⁶⁹ Cfr. Michalopoulos C. 2006, pp. 186-187.

and to renew the hope of anticipation, the heroines apply to their lovers the characterization of the belated. Typical is the use of the noun *mora* and the verb *moror* to indicate tardiness as the cause of the hero's absence⁷⁰. Penelope seeks the causes of Odysseus' tardiness (1.57 *causa morandi*, 1.74 *longae causas ... morae*), while Briseis finds Achilles' tardiness (3.138 *lenta... mora*) agonizing, an impression reinforced by the qualifier *lenta* to emphasize the inexplicable tardiness of the Homeric hero famous for his swiftness. Sappho gives *mora* (15.212 *nostra mora*) the same sadistic tone on the part of the beloved, believing that Phaon wants to torment her with his tardiness before he finally returns to her. Only in Laodamia's letter is *mora* used to explain that being late favors erotic pleasure (13.122 *dulci... mora*), while Phaedra also colors the noun *mora* (4.147 *moras*) with erotic impatience and anticipation by urging Hippolytus not to delay their intercourse any further. The relationship between love and procrastination is cleverly captured in the witty anagram *Mora – Amor* (4.147-148 *moras / Cupid*), where love personified does not reward the lover's slowness. The same wordplay is found in Sappho's letter (15.169 *mora / amor*), where love leaves Deucalion without delay as soon as he jumps off a cliff.

Following Penelope's example, several heroines use the adjective *lentus* as an excuse for the hero's absence and at the same time to emphasize the vain hope that their loneliness is only temporary. It is no coincidence that the adjective *lentus* appears at the beginning of the collection's programmatic letter that Penelope sends to Odysseus⁷¹. It underscores Penelope's ironic tone at this point, as Odysseus' twenty-year absence is hardly described as a respite. At the same time, in the elegiac context of Ovid's *Heroides*, procrastination is associated with sexual rejection and the absence of intercourse, while it implies the existence of another person⁷². By the time Penelope rebukes Odysseus again for his tardiness (1.66), the idea of another woman has already formed in

⁷⁰ Ov. *Her.* 1.57 *victor abes, nec scire mihi, quae causa morandi*. «You won, but aren't here, and I'm not allowed to know why or where you're callously lingering and lurking», 1.74 *tam longae causas suspicor esse morae*. «I suspect every one of them of being behind your lengthy delay», 3.138 *nec miseram lenta ferreus ure mora!*. «Don't keep on cruelly tormenting me by doing nothing», 4.147 *tolle moras tantum properataque foedera iunge*. «Just hurry, start our affair soon!», 15.212 *quid laceras pectora nostra mora?*. «Why tear my heart apart by delaying?», 13.122 *semper in his apte narrantia verba resistunt; / promptior est dulci lingua referre mora*. «Well-told stories are always interrupted like this; / such pleasant pauses make the tongue more fluent », 15.169 *nec mora, versus amor fugit*. «In it his fire went out at once, love turned tail and fled». Cfr. also Ov. *Ars* 3.473-474 *mora semper amantes incitat, exiguum si modo tempus habet*. «Waiting always arouses love, if it's only for a short time», where delay excites love.

⁷¹ Ov. *Her.* 1.1 *banc tua Penelope lento tibi mittit, Ulixee*. «From Penelope to Ulysses, her dilatory husband». See Ugartemendía 2017, pp. 76-79. On Penelope's programmatic epistle see Kroner 2013.

⁷² Cfr. Barchiesi 1992, p. 66; Fear 1993, pp. 9-11. See also Pichon 1991, *s.v.* *lentus*, on the use

the heroine's mind as an existing fear. Phyllis desires Demophon's return and is willing to attribute his absence to a simple lateness⁷³. The characterization of Demophon as *serus* (2.101) and the use of time (2.102 *solo tempore*) as a guarantor of the hero's promises and faith show Phyllis' desire to vindicate her lover. The heroine's vacillation between hope and despair and her hesitation to condemn Demophon are reflected in her admission that hope is slowly lost for the beloved (2.9 *spes lenta*) and that the beloved is slow (2.9 *tarde*) to believe what hurts him. The vagueness of *quoque* (2.9) likely links the slowly fading hope to Demophon's tardiness and reflects the characterization *lentus* (2.23), which Phyllis then attributes to the hero in her attempt to justify her lover's absence as tardiness⁷⁴.

The erotic connotation of the adjective *lentus* becomes clearer in Hypsipyle's letter when the Queen of Lemnos rebukes Jason for his tardy performance of his marital duties (6.17 *officium lenti... mariti*) because he has neglected to send her a letter of his own that would alleviate her loneliness. It is possible, however, that the heroine is referring to Jason's erotic inertia and coldness towards her, since Hypsipyle, when she writes her letter, is aware of Medea's existence. Hermione uses the adjective *lentus* (8.18) to refer to Orestes' inaction towards his erotic rival Neoptolemus, who has kidnapped her⁷⁵. Despite Hermione's admitted erotic dislike of her new husband, the use of the adjective is a warning to Orestes that if he is a little late, someone else will reap the erotic rewards of the young bride⁷⁶. Similarly, Briseis characterizes Achilles' anger (3.22 *iraque lenta tua*) as delayed rather than the hero himself, for he too does not react as quickly as the heroine would like to Agamemnon's theft of his beloved⁷⁷. Achilles' delayed reaction becomes even more apparent in contrast to the phrase *parvo tempore* (3.24), the brief interval in which Patroclus reassures her that she will return to Achilles. All this is summed up in the meaning with which Sappho uses the adjective *lentus* (15.210) in her letter to connect the delay of Phaon's return with the absence of feelings for her (15.209-210). Indeed, the heroines gradually realize that they have lost the heroes' erotic interest and

of the epithet to describe a cold and indifferent lover, and one who does not get angry when faced with a rival.

⁷³ Ov. Her. 2.101-102 *et tamen expecto – redeas modo serus amanti, / ut tua sit solo tempore lapsa fides!* «Yet I do expect you back – just return to your lover, even though / late, untrue to your word only in terms of time».

⁷⁴ Ov. Her. 2.23 *at tu lentus abes.* «But you're lingering somewhere else».

⁷⁵ Cfr. Michalopoulos C. 2006, pp. 229 & 257.

⁷⁶ Cfr. Ov. Her. 17.107 *ad possessa venis praeceptaque gaudia, serus.* «You're slow, too late. The pleasures you hope for have already been / taken over and appropriated», where Helen says to Paris that he is too late to claim her.

⁷⁷ Cfr. Barchiesi 1992, pp. 208-209.

that they will never return. What the heroines are left with is their attempt to manage time in order to endure their now-given loneliness, accompanied by question marks, conjectures, and prayers that make the absence of a lover a full-time job that does not allow them to occupy themselves with anything else.

Conclusion

It is indeed difficult to study the emotion of loneliness in a textual corpus where there is little or, in some cases, no stereotypical emotional vocabulary to guide the research⁷⁸. Based on the assumption that loneliness is a complex emotion with erotic rejection and sadness as key components, the present paper explored loneliness in the context of the hero's absence and the passing of time. It should be borne in mind that the vocabulary recorded reflects loneliness according to the context of the letters and the semantic strain attributed to it by the letter-writers of the collection as members of an emotional community commonly expressing loneliness, but also as members of a literary community having to conform to the conventions of Roman love elegy.

Rather, the female authors in the collection attempt to sketch loneliness, to describe it empathetically, framed by feelings of sadness and despair. Loneliness in the heroines' emotional world is defined by the loss of a loved one and is based on the contrast between the absence (*absum*, *abeo*) of the man and the constant presence (*sum*) of the woman. Penelope's programmatic statement «I will be Odysseus' wife forever» (1.84 *Penelope coniunx semper Ulixis ero*) expresses the heroine's intention to wait, even if this condemns her to long-term loneliness.

The emotional lexicon of loneliness contains verb forms such as the verbs *desero* and *relinquo*, and even more frequently the participles *deserta* and *relicta*, to denote loss and abandonment, and to emphasize the absence of the hero and the consequent loneliness of the heroine. They are used in both the active and passive voice to emphasize the involuntary loss of a loved one and the victimization of the heroines by the men who have abandoned them. Abandonment, as well as erotic rejection in the elegiac setting of the letters, is reflected in the adjectives *lentus*, *serus*, and *tardus*, which denote the delayed return and the erotic indifference and coldness of the heroes toward the women in the collection. Metonymically, loneliness is represented as widowhood or orphanhood through the use of the adjectives *viduus* and *orbus*, while the

⁷⁸ The adjective *solus*, for example, is used only in Ariadne's letter to describe the heroine's loneliness as well as the isolation of the island. Cfr. *Ov. Her.* 10.47, 10.59, 10.129.

physical symptoms of loneliness resemble the feeling of coldness rendered by the adjective *frigidus*.

The heroines' emotional dependence on their lovers intensifies their loneliness, for the absence of the hero cancels out the erotic feeling and renders their sacrifices futile. The heroines' reference to their lost families reduces to a rhetorical trick of excessive melodrama, reminding the heroes of all they have sacrificed for their love in the hope that they will be moved to return. At the same time, it emphasizes the heroines' real and inner loneliness, for they cannot return to their past; the letter-writers of the collection have no refuge other than the heroes, who have replaced any physical or emotional attachment for the heroines. The heroines seem to be trapped in a past of loss of loved ones destined to repeat itself through the unfortunate development of their love relationships. The trauma of losing their family and home, the entire lives they left behind to follow their love, is revived through their rejection and abandonment by the heroes, perpetuating their loneliness as an unbearable, almost tragic, emotional experience similar to the loneliness of death.

In the heroines' emotional community, female speech has a therapeutic, palliative effect against loneliness, as the letter-writers seek to restore their emotional equilibrium, or even to gain a little more time through writing, so to learn to bear their grief and loneliness with courage, as Dido characteristically confesses⁷⁹. Writing thus becomes an exercise in loneliness, captured by the unprepared heroines with common emotional motifs, that are repeated and developed in the hybrid setting of their elegiac letters until they crystallize in the final letter of the collection, where Sappho, the only non-mythological woman in the community, undertakes to represent all the heroines and to sing of their lost loves (15.155), emphasizing the comforting and healing aspect of poetry⁸⁰.

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⁷⁹ Ov. Her. 7.178-180 *tempora parva peto: / dum freta mitescunt et amor, dum temperat usum, / fortiter edisco tristia posse pati*. «So I ask for a little time / while the sea and my love calm down, and with time and practice / I learn how to manage to bear my misery bravely».

⁸⁰ Ov. Her. 15.155 *ales Ityn, Sappho desertos cantat amores*. «The bird sings of Itys, Sappho of love deserted». For Sappho's as an elegiac poetess in Ovid see Bessone 2003, pp. 215-225.

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