Ovid *Heroides* 1: notes

Select Bibliography

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General points:
First poem of collection: important for establishing themes and approach; programmatic. See e.g. Baca 1969
Epistolarity: possibility of sending and receiving letters for Penelope. Explores epistolarity and engages with conventions (important to establish epistolary context for first one)
Epic character to elegiac context
See Knox on reading the *Odyssey* as a love story (86)
Homer’s *Od.* includes emotional interest (Penelope longs for her husband: cf. e.g. Hom. *Od.* 19.513-7 “For by day my one relief is to weep and sigh as I go about my tasks and supervise the household work; but when night falls and brings all other asleep, I lie down on my bed, and care comes with a thousand stings to prick my heavy heart and turn dejection into torture.”)
BUT hints; plot concentrated on masculine action
Elegiac perspective: “It is only in elegy that the poet and the lover coincide: elegy’s horizon becomes drastically restricted and the text ends up seeing only what its protagonist sees. I would suggest that, fundamentally, elegy is born from just this loss of full vision: the greater the closure of the world represented, the greater the effort the language must make to reduce to its model all that would remain excluded from it, recuperating and converting it in any way it can.” (G. B. Conte, ‘Love without Elegy’, *Genres and Readers* (1991), tr. Glenn W. Most (1994)p.39)
Mythical tradition: other versions: cf. Jacobson: e.g. tradition in which Pan was born to Penelope and Hermes; tradition where Penelope is not chaste exemplum of wifely devotion (with many suitors)
Main background text: Homer's *Odyssey* (significance of this as first intertext? Canonical; well-known...)
Here female voice; not in epic context (but see Fulkerson: e,g, Penelope manages to preserve herself as an epic heroine, despite being placed into an epic poem; utilizes only those elegiac conventions she deems suitable)
How typical is Penelope? (note forthcoming reunion; her position as wife)
Penelope: tradition e.g. paragon of fidelity in the ancient world (her husband falls prey to temptations but she remains unmoved by the suitors). Simplistic view disturbed? Penelope faithful but perhaps not immune? (complaint of loneliness in bed hints at suppressed sexuality? NB possible resentment at Odysseus’ dallying with Calypso, *Her*. 1.75-6)
Challenging/ altering perspective? more active than appears in Homer (e.g. *Her*. 1.37-8). Females now Ovid is now giving her the chance to tell her side of the story. Perhaps Homer unfairly belittles the female sex, dismissing their contribution in order to magnify his male characters.
Timing: “The poetics of the *Heroides* suggest ... that new windows can be opened on stories already completed. Ovid’s narrative prowess is evident in the respect he shows for the traditional script. Each epistle is written in the ‘blank space’ of a narration already fully and densely composed, sometimes also dramatically fast-paced and action-packed. The spectacular ability of the poet has something surgical about it. It selects the most favourable point, cuts into it, then closes it back up

without leaving a trace."(Barchiesi, 'Narrativity and Convention in the *Heroides*' p.31)
For the timing of *Heroides* 1, see Kennedy.
cf. 1.2 Penelope wants Odysseus back immediately but she doesn't expect him to poke his head round the door that minute. She's sending him a letter in the belief that he's miles away. Moreover, she's presumably sceptical about him receiving it. She's in the habit of giving out letters to passing strangers (59-62). She's been desperately trying to get information without result (*Her*. 1.63-4). In line 99 we hear that this trip, Telemachus' visit to Menelaus at Pylos, was recent
> clues to pin down the timing. In the *Odyssey*, Telemachus tells Penelope about his trip to Pylos in Book 17, by which point in the plot Odysseus is on his way to the palace, although disguised as a beggar. So the seer Theoclymenus informs her, contrasting Menelaus' lack of information with his prophetic knowledge: "I swear by Zeus before all the other gods, and by the board of hospitality, and by the good Odysseus' hearth, which I have reached, that Odysseus is actually in Ithaca at this moment, at rest or afoot, tracing these crimes to their source and scheming revenge on the Suitors" (Hom. *Od*. 17.155-9). Penelope is rather doubtful that her husband will come: it is perfectly plausible that she should write to a letter to give to the next stranger she sees, and a brilliant twist on Ovid's part that, according to Homeric chronology, this must be Odysseus. Reader has contextual knowledge heroine lacks.
NB Emphasis on stories Penelope has been told and idea of distance. Distance/absence theme in play in very idea of letter.

1 *haec*: sc. *uerba*
lentus: "tarrying" (cf. 66); 20 years! His fault. Reproach from beginning; Fear (1993) argues for elegiac connotation of uninterested lover
2 "it is no good your writing me a reply" (Knox ad loc); urgency of imperative; contrast between letter and presence. Programmatic: single *Heroides* do not receive replies and do not require replies to be understood (cf. Barchiesi)
3 *puellis*: elegiac perspective
4 *tanti*: genitive of price
6 *adulter*: Paris' lust has led to enforced chastity for Greek women
7-10 Penelope's speech in *Odyssey* 19 retold in elegiac terms (e.g. focus on a cold, lonely bed and complaint)
7 *deserto*: reproachful
Knox 7-8 recasting Hom. *Od*.
Knox 7-10: reversal of motif whereby male lover laments faithfulness of his mistress
frigida: also reference to chilling of affections? (Knox)
8 *quererer … relicta*: complaint/elegy link; imperfect tense; see Fear p14 (sees herself as abandoned woman). Penelope asserts her own fidelity.
9-10 weaving trick fleetingly evoked (cf. Barchiesi 1992: 24). Here deceiving time not suitors (writing in the context of a woman missing her husband, not as the crafty wife of epic). Lindheim (p47) suggests only cunning she can muster is an attempt to fool herself.
9 elegaic character is further highlighted: reworking Prop. 1.3.41(Cynthia weaving, waiting for lover, adopting for herself the role of faithful and devoted wife: Prop. 1.3.39-41 "Villain, O how I wish you could endure such nights / As you always inflict on wretched me! / Sometimes I cheated (*fallebam)* sleep with crimson thread". Cynthia paints herself as a respectable Roman matrona, with shades of Homer's Penelope. Ovid picks up on Propertius' point and aptly echoes the passage. Cynthia assumes Penelope's part: Ovid builds on the potential for overlap and has his Penelope adopt Cynthia's role).
10 *uiduas*: enallage (transferred epithet)
13ff. Jacobson observes that (aptly) hexameter about war, then pentameter concerning P's personal reaction
15 (assuming mss' *ab Hectore* wrong) reference to Memnon, leader of Ethiopians
17 patronymic (Patroclus, son of Menoetius); deceptive armour as wearing Achilles'

18 *dolos*: for which Odysseus famed
19 Tlepolemus (son of Hercules!) killed by Sarpedon, king of Lycia
22 *frigidius*: continuing cold idea.
23 dative *amori* taken with *consuluit* and *aequus*; “chaste” (contrast Helen/Paris)
24 suggestion that Odysseus' preservation is linked with Penelope's chastity which leads to divine favour.
28 “the fate of Troy has yielded to their own” (Knox)
30: recalling *Aen*. 4.79 *pendet … narrantis ab ore* (of infatuated Dido)
32 word order reflecting sense (Knox ad loc); see Fear p31 for relaxed atmosphere
33-6 Knox on echo of *Aen.* 2.29-30
37-8: Penelope taking credit for Telemachus' mission, contrary to the *Odyssey* (sent by Athena). Lying, trying to demonstrate her commitment by showing effort? (Homeric Penelope lies at *Iliad* 18.257-73 when she relates Odysseus command to her to marry) OR speaking the truth: Ovid setting record straight?
Nb no long report from Telemachus to Penelope about what Nestor has said in Odyssey. Nb no mention of Doloneia. Fear notes that contrast to uncertainty of information during Trojan war – but still indirect gradual chain of information, rather than wives hearing from husband
37 infinitive after verb of motion to indicate purpose
39-46: cf. *Il*. 10.331-502; see Knox ad loc for authenticity of 39-40
41 conjugal pride (or sarcasm?) and reproachful? Elegiac perspective on major incident. Nb Diomedes has the major part in *Iliad* 10. Does Penelope misrepresent Odysseus' role (Knox)? Or heard it differently? How was Odysseus seen in the Trojan war (Homeric poems and epic cycle)?
40ff.: *ausus es* BUT how heroic is killing by trickery and sleep (cf. *Aen.* 1.470 *prodita somno*)?
42 *nocturno … dolo* used elsewhere of P's weaving (see Knox ad loc). Husband and wife matched
46 *dictus es*: indirect
47-50 Elegiac perspective: the fall of Troy is without point if Odysseus does not return...
47-50: Fear p37 discusses effect of variation in tenses
48 wall>ground
50 “and I must forever submit to my husband's absence”
51 echo of *Aen*. 11.279-80 (Knox); *aliis / uni* juxtaposition emphasizes contrast between the way the situation has improved for others but not her
52 change to peace and farming (though worth the effort?); *captiuo* points up war legacy
53-6: see Knox for evocation of V. *G*.1.491-7
54 common idea of blood fertilizing soil but sinister (cf. 55 bones, which emphasise time passed)
55 *uirum = uirorum*
57 *uictor*; *nec scire mihi*: lack of knowledge; *morandi*: delay theme (nb an elegiac concern, viewed negatively, as well as an epic one). Here sexual dalliance?
58 *lateas*: as if deliberate! Fear p43 sees allusion to Greek etymological derivation of Calypso; *ferreus*: elegiac
59-62: cf. *Od*. 19; next person to receive letter= Odysseus...
62 physicality of letter
63 “we”..; imitation of *Od*. 3.4-5
incerta: stressing Penelope's lack of sure information
64-5: cf. Fear p46-7 on change in presentation of Nestor as valuable source
65 disingenuous (Knox ad loc: cf. *Od*. 17.118-49). Menelaus informative in Odyssey.
66 *lentus* and *abes*: repetition of diction
67-74: return to Troy; takes viewpoint further (Fear p49); significance of *levis*?
69 sc. “if Troy still stood”; “only” war to fear (and note emphasis on fear words eg 71)...; contrast Troy as source of fear earlier
70 *multis = cum querelis multarum mulierum* (brachylogy); *querela*; cf. 8 *quererer* (elegiac resonance)
71 fearing everything: elegiac perspective

74 *morae*; see Fear (p52) on move from singular to plural
75ff suspicious. Fear suggests she doesn't want to appear too shrewish
75 see Knox on diction register; Knox ad loc “knowing you men and your lust”; Knox on Ovid putting into Penelope's mouth accusation made against Propertius, Prop. 3.19.1-2
76 what foreign lover? Has heard about Calypso; see also references in Knox ad loc for Hellenistic tradition of amorous Odysseus
77 *rustica* “provincial” (cf. *rudes*, of wool): cf. *Od*. 5.214-20 (Odysseus to Calypso). Nb weaving of Penelope should be praised not mocked
78 *sinat*: generic subjunctive (“quae...”: “the sort who...”)
80 *reuertendi ... abesse* contrast
81-96 contrast between Penelope keeping constant under strain and Odysseus whose fidelity she suspects. For pressure cf *Od*. 15.16-17 (Athena to Telemachus) and 19.158-9 (Penelope to “beggar”)
81 *uiduo … lecto*: deserted bed but cf. 10
82 *cogit*: “tries to force”; moras: theme of delay
83 *tua* (cf. Lindheim p48 on locating herself in relation to her husband) ; see Knox ad loc for prosaic *oportet* (indignation?)
84: *semper*; contrast the *Odyssey* (bow contest to chose husband). Sense that Penelope is responding to her literary persona, as faithful wife of Odysseus? Is that what it means to “be” Penelope? Lindheim (p48) discusses in terms of frozen and epitaphic image
88 hostile, possibly with hint of sexual aggression
90 *uiscera nostra* / *tuae ...opes*
91 Medon: name not found in Odyssean list of suitors?
92 for word patterning see Knox
94 *sanguine*: but how much did Odysseus get his hands dirty?
95 see Knox ad loc for unusual rhythm; see Knox ad loc. for engagement with Odyssean presentation of Melanthius
97-116 see Knox ad loc on disorganized sequence of thoughts
97 *uxor*: see Knox
97-8 cf. *Od*. 14.173-4; impression of powerlessness but see Lindheim p49; Telemachus still *puer*? See Knox ad loc.
99-100: see Knox. Muddled?
103 Philoetius the cowherd and Eurykleia the nurse
105 *ut qui sit*: causal
115 End: cf. Lindheim (p50) on as seen through gaze of others
Herself as *anus* (insecure? NB earlier as catch; beautifully young, though not according to Penelope in *Od*.): what of Odysseus? (who will turn up as aged beggar...). Contrast *puella*. Knox suggests ironic reference to Prop. 2.9.8 *illum expectando facta remansit anus*.