

acts of Bacchus worship performed by women describe the role of women in the *Aeneid*. P. argues convincingly that Dido's connection with maenadism is related to the Euripidean portrayal of bacchic frenzy as opposed to being simply a metaphor. In the fifth chapter ("Mourning Glory: Ritual Lament and Roman Civic Identity"), P. turns to the role of women's ritual acts in establishing a civic identity for Aeneas and his people. Nevertheless, she takes some interpretational opinions for facts, for example, "the two dead children of Hecuba act as catalysts for the unleashing of her powerful vengeance" (p. 149) although it has been a topic of a major discussion in Hecuba scholarship what really causes Hecuba's actions towards Polymestor.

In the sixth chapter (an updated version of P.'s 2002 article "Vergil's Ajax: Allusion, Tragedy and Heroic Identity in Vergil's *Aeneid*"), P. impressively examines the reliance of the identity of Ajax in Vergil's epic on Sophocles' tragic Ajax. P. also commendably studies the identities of Dido and Turnus in connection with the tragic subtext. In the final chapter ("Contesting Ideologies: Ritual and Empire"), P. discusses the epic and tragic intertexts in the *Aeneid* and how they shape the poem's relationship with Augustus' ideological programme. In general, the argument that Greek tragedy is a key to understanding the *Aeneid's* portrayals of rites and ritual action is impressively examined by P. As P.'s study is only the first book-length study on the topic, it is likely that it will be followed by many future studies.

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LAUREL FULKERSON: *The Ovidian Heroine as Author: Reading, Writing, and Community in the Heroides*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2005. ISBN 978-0-521-84672-2. XI, 187 pp. GBP 50, USD 88.

Ovid's *Heroides*, the collection of letters by mythological women to their lovers, is one of the most ambiguous works in the Roman literature and it has evoked intense discussion, even criticism, among modern scholars. The letters it consists of have been condemned as monotonous, repetitive and naïve, and sometimes the whole corpus has been considered little more than a poorly-articulated manifestation of lament. In her monograph, Laurel Fulkerson attempts to question the traditional conception of the *Heroides* as an expression of poor rhetoric and sappy sensitivity. Instead of the heroines' inability to have an effect on their lovers, and the unfortunate outcome of their letters, Fulkerson focuses on the struggle itself – the process of writing and reading the women are involved in, and the way they reform their traditional stories.

The concept of community is essential to Fulkerson's approach. She looks at Ovid's heroines as forming a metaphorical community and studies their letters in continuous relation to each other. Fulkerson's quintessential idea is to look beyond the similarities in the letters and see them, not as formal and repetitive singular works, but rather as an ongoing discussion between fictitious women who read and write, and inspire and affect each other. She argues that the heroines' letters are in fact not ineffective at all, for even though the women fail to persuade their lovers to return, they do have a very powerful impact on each others' writing – and on the way the reader interprets their stories. Fulkerson criticizes previous studies for concentrating merely on certain individual letters of the corpus and for failing to see Ovid's oeuvre as a balanced whole. This is a fresh viewpoint, since so far there has been little comprehensive treat-

ment of how the letters of the *Heroides* engage with each other and form a comprehensible and interactive entity.

Gender, authority and the power of poetry are concepts crucial to Fulkerson's study. Leaning on textual and linguistic analysis, she questions the traditional master narratives about the mythological Greco-Roman women, and challenges the reader to consider how many and what kinds of narratives influence our understanding of classical myths, and our reading of sources about them. Fulkerson herself describes her work as "post-feminist": rather than gender for its own sake, her interest is in gender's role in the construction of authorial power (pp. 5–6). Differing from previous studies, she uses the concepts of community and authorship as a way to approach Ovidian poetics as a whole, rather than merely notions of feminine and femininity within it. The heroines express the feminine voice of a male poet, but their writings are not merely expressions of femininity.

Fulkerson approaches her subject through vivid examples and case studies. In each chapter, she presents to the reader a few letters she considers as being especially dependent on each other. Through these examples she handles the essential themes of her study: dangers and benefits of communal reading and writing, and the immense power that the written word might have over people's actions and choices. I find it laudable that the author has been able to include so many various and diverse letters of the *Heroides* in her study, including some that have hitherto received little attention in modern scholarship. Fulkerson has attempted to create and deliver a balanced overall picture of the corpus, and this broad and candid approach indeed helps her argue her idea of continuous interplay between very different kinds of letters.

The author's argumentation is at its most convincing in the second chapter, when she examines the construction of a literary persona in the letters of Hypsipyle and Medea, comparing their coincidental effect on each other. Fulkerson presents the construction of the two letters and their authorial personages as a clever and deliberate intertextual play on Ovid's part, succeeding in puzzling the reader and evoking thoughts about close connections between individual letters of the corpus. Fulkerson highlights the authorial power that Ovid's heroines obtain through their rhetorical self-fashioning. Through writing, the heroines are able to alter the traditional stories about themselves, and shape our way of reading the classical myths. Another example of the author's perceptive analysis is chapter three, where Fulkerson, through the letters of Canace and Hypermestra, concentrates on Ovid's heroines' consciousness of themselves as storytellers, their considerable rhetorical skills and their ability to take the audience into account. Here the author succeeds best at what she claims to be her purpose, namely to "reframe the charges of reiteration and ineffectiveness of traditional scholarship" (p. 67).

Fulkerson's ability to detach herself from the traditional way of reading the *Heroides* and her creative approach to the personages within the corpus are the greatest advantages of her study. Nevertheless, the tendency to study the mythological heroines as independent authors within Ovid's literary work occasionally causes problems as well. Fulkerson treats the heroines as authors, and examines their writing as an effective literary tool with real consequences on other letters and on our reading of common mythological tales. At times, this evokes confusion in the reader and makes the limits of reality and literature blur. Because Fulkerson focuses strongly on the fictitious women behind the letters, the poet occasionally seems to be left somewhat overshadowed. The relative absence of Ovid in the first six chapters of the book raises further questions concerning authorial power and the reframing of literary tradition. To what degree can we really consider the *Heroides* to have impacted the classical heroines' later

renown? How intentionally did Ovid reframe their reputation? Is there an alternative story or a female voice in the *Heroides* that can be traced, and if so, what could have been the poet's motive for creating it? These are questions that, in my opinion, could have been more extensively examined throughout the work.

Some of the issues mentioned above are briefly studied in the last chapter, which focuses on gender and power through writing. In an intriguing and perceptive way, Fulkerson concludes by comparing the post-exilic literary person of Ovid to the heroines of his corpus, and is, indeed, able to point out certain interesting similarities: the obsessive focus on literature, feeling of being rejected, longing for a community and a tendency to re-write his own story over and over again. Fulkerson states as the main theme of the *Heroides* poetry's ability to make a difference in the physical world, to impact people's choices and alter the reader's conceptions of the world. The tragedy of Ovid's life was that he learned this lesson when it was already too late and he had been exiled for his provocative poetry. Fulkerson seems to consider the Ovidian heroine as an expression of the poet's own exilic *persona*: with no control over his own ending, he still has the power to, through writing, redefine his own character and influence readers' conceptions about what really happened. Therefore writing is both an incredibly powerful tool and a deadly dangerous weapon. "To write is to make oneself vulnerable", as Fulkerson states (p.151), yet, in the end it is the only means to make oneself heard.

Beside the need to be heard, the bottom line of the book seems to be the heroines' desperate need to belong to and be part of a group – be that a family or a literary community – and to define themselves by that group. This, rather than the wish to persuade a deceitful lover to return, appears as the main reason for their writing, reading and claiming authority. Considering the significance Fulkerson places on the theme of belonging, it could have been more comprehensively discussed in the book. I wish there had been a chapter dedicated to the subject, but as it is, this theme only emerges now and then in most examples. Nevertheless, all in all Fulkerson has achieved a genuinely interesting study on the subject that has been dominated by somewhat one-sided and prejudiced views for a long time. She has succeeded in reframing the charges of reiteration and ineffectiveness from traditional Heroidian scholarship, and presents a refreshing hypothesis of a coherent community of fictitious female writers, all having an effect on each other in continuous, timeless continuum. Fulkerson laudably handles the different genres of classical literature and plausibly describes the tragic and epic heroines' efforts to fulfill the demands of the role of an elegiac author and mistress. Her study raises interesting issues concerning gender, genre, authority and the power of literature, and hopefully these themes will be taken into account in forthcoming discussion and research. The book is written in an agreeable style that is pleasant to read. Even though the subject requires some familiarity with classical mythology and Latin poetry, the author's arguments are expressed in vivid and clear rhetoric that will likely make the book enjoyable to laymen and scholars alike. The brief, yet comprehensive work is completed by an appendix ("*The authenticity (and "authenticity") of Heroides 15*"), an inclusive bibliography and both a general index and an *index locorum*.