

pro- or anti-Augustus debate as less significant than the fact that the assignment of epic and contemporary Roman accoutrement is mixed. The essential aim of the anachronisms is, P. concludes, aesthetic, the heightening of the appeal of the epic for Virgil's contemporary readers.

The book is a model of logical construction in an arresting treatment of a subject never systematically studied before. P.'s illustrations, mostly from the Vatican Virgil, add superbly to the cogency – and charm – of the undertaking.

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## THE *HEROIDES* IN THEIR SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT

DRINKWATER (M. O.) *Ovid's Heroides and the Augustan Principate*. Pp. x + 179. Madison, WI and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2022. Cased, US\$79.95. ISBN: 978-0-299-33780-3.  
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In this study of Ovid's *Heroides* D. advocates for reading the collection within its sociohistorical context rather than reading the letters with primarily literary approaches, which has been the general tendency of scholarship. She asserts that the *Heroides* should be read politically in the same way as Ovid's later works and Augustan elegy more broadly. Drawing on P. Rosenmeyer's observation (*Ramus* 26 [1997], 47) that Ovid can use the disempowered female voices of the *Heroides* to express his own feelings as a Roman man, D. argues that reading the *Heroides* politically can contribute to 'understanding the effect of Rome's dramatic changes on its intellectual citizen elite' (p. 4). In undertaking this approach, she identifies concerns latent in the collection – subtle and not necessarily consciously expressed – about political change and its cost for the Roman elite, including their shifting status and access to power in the early principate. She also extends her argument beyond the earlier single letters of the collection to suggest that in the later double letters, after witnessing the further development of the principate, Ovid confirms the concerns subtly expressed in the single letters and criticises Augustus more directly.

Each of D.'s five chapters and the coda focus on one letter or letter pair. Her choice to draw from both single and double letters enriches her argument. In the introduction she succinctly discusses the dating of the collection and the relevance of its two periods of composition for her argument (p. 7). As D. acknowledges, she is 'proposing readings of texts that are notoriously hard to pin down, composed in a period in which the totalizing nature of the Augustan discourse makes the identification of subversion or support nearly impossible' (p. 9). Her identification of similar concerns in the earlier single *Heroides* and the later double *Heroides* and exile poetry strengthens her case for the latent concerns of the single letters. D. selects as her first six examples the letters most directly related to war and its aftermath: Penelope (*Her.* 1), Briseis (*Her.* 3), Oenone (*Her.* 5), Dido (*Her.* 7), and Helen and Paris (*Her.* 16–17). Her rationale is that these letters contain the greatest contemporary relevance for a generation grappling with post-civil-war upheaval and

political change. She organises her discussion of the letters not by their order in the collection, but by tracing in reverse the development of the Trojan War (p. 7). In doing so, she also traces a progression from Ovid's more subtle and general criticisms of the early principate to more direct criticisms of Augustus (p. 10). In the coda D. uses a final letter pair, Acontius and Cydippe (*Her.* 20–1), as a case study in applying her reading strategy to the rest of the letters.

The first two chapters begin with more traditional intertextual treatments of Dido's and Penelope's letters, but D. uses this intertextual investigation to ask broader political questions. The first chapter is especially effective in demonstrating how her sociohistorical framework influences an intertextual reading. She argues that Ovid's engagement with Virgil is not of literary importance alone. Drawing on I. Ziogas's discussion of Augustus as *auctor* of the principate and endorser of the *Aeneid*'s narrative ('The Poet as Prince', in: H. Baltussen and P.J. Davis [edd.], *The Art of Veiled Speech* [2015]), D. suggests that Dido's claim in her address to the deceased Sychaeus that she was deceived (*decepit idoneus auctor*, *Her.* 7.105) does not implicate only Aeneas as deceiver. Rather, the term *auctor* can also implicate Virgil and even Augustus as deceptive authorities (p. 33). Ovid's engagement with Virgil is not merely a playful exploitation of ambiguities: 'He changes the chief ideology put forth in the *Aeneid*, insisting on giving his elegiac Dido a "subtly different" voice that amplifies her whispers of dissent from the epic's overall narrative, whispers that are already present within it' (p. 38). D. thus presents Dido's questioning and correction of Virgil as 'part of a wider scheme that provides a similarly skeptical reading of Augustan cultural propaganda throughout the *Heroides*' (p. 14). The 'whispers of dissent' that Dido and the other heroines provide go beyond mere re-readings of their source texts to express latent concerns of elite Roman men about Augustan authority and political changes in the early principate.

The next two chapters take more theoretical approaches to address changing status and powerlessness in Briseis' and Oenone's letters, concerns particularly relevant to elite Roman men during the early principate and, later, to Ovid in exile. D. offers a Lacanian analysis that reads Briseis as futilely attempting to establish a stable identity within her changing reality. She then draws parallels to elite Roman men contemplating the changed political situation and their new relationship with Augustus, 'suspended between the *gravitas* of their republican roles and their diminished importance in the principate' (p. 63). D. notes that Ovid's Briseis, while lamenting the loss of her home, position and family, directly blames her addressee, Achilles, for all these losses caused *Marte tuo* (*Her.* 3.45). Achilles is also responsible for Briseis' losses in the *Iliad*, but D. suggests that the more pointed assignment of culpability in this letter would be particularly relevant for Ovid and his readers under the principate: 'Loss of family, loss of political importance, and the necessity of living with one of the parties responsible – namely Augustus – either as a better bargain than continuing to fight or as the only remaining option seems a compelling possible subtext' (p. 75). D.'s consideration of Briseis' letter within this sociohistorical context reveals additional ways that it could resonate with Ovid and his contemporaries beyond its intertextual engagement in transplanting an epic character into an elegiac letter.

The final chapter identifies contemporary relevance and potential criticisms of Augustus in Paris and Helen's letter exchange. It also proposes that this letter pair advocates for the attentive and contextual reading employed in the previous chapters. D. evaluates Paris and Helen as 'readers' of the *Ars amatoria* and the single *Heroides*, arguing that Paris is a careless reader. Helen, however, is 'excellent at synthesizing lessons from a variety of sources and proceeding with the appropriate caution' (p. 112). D. thus suggests Helen as a model for readers of the *Heroides*, who should likewise read closely

and carefully. This chapter and the previous one are partly revisions of previously published articles, but D. here additionally considers the importance of the Augustan context. She thus suggests that Paris may not merely be a lover misapplying a text written specifically for the *Romana iuventus* (*Ars am.* 1.459), but also a representation of ‘a specific Roman youth, namely Octavian, similarly recognized late – in his case through a posthumous adoption – as the scion of a famous ruling family, and similarly about to embark on a war that would utterly change his sociopolitical world’ (p. 99). Helen, responding as the conflicted object of Paris’ advances, is a parallel for Rome, but specifically ‘a Rome conflicted about Octavian, a feeling that may not have lessened with his transformation into Augustus’ (p. 113). Helen and Ovid thus invite careful reading of both Augustus’ claims and the *Heroides* as a whole. They support D.’s argument for reading the collection as an expression of growing concerns about the Augustan principate, which the coda further exemplifies with Acontius and Cydippe’s letters.

This book provides innovative readings of a selection of Ovid’s *Heroides* within and in response to their political contexts and makes a strong case for reading the entire collection in this way. It offers a compelling invitation to follow D. in reading the *Heroides* through a sociohistorical lens.

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## SENECA AS A PHILOSOPHER AND WRITER

GRAVER (M.) *Seneca. The Literary Philosopher*. Pp. xii + 305. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Cased, £85, US\$110. ISBN: 978-1-107-16404-8.

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G.’s monograph represents a good example of the concept of emergence, wherein the whole exceeds the mere sum of its constituent parts. While eleven out of its twelve chapters have already been published as articles throughout the past couple of years, the book does not appear as a rehash. Not only has the material undergone revisions and updates for this publication, but when considered collectively, the chapters also present a comprehensive panorama of Seneca as both a philosopher and a man of letters.

Perusing the introduction is advisable for its invaluable insights and to learn more about G.’s perspective on crucial questions regarding Seneca’s philosophical oeuvre. G. stipulates some fundamental assumptions that underlie her interpretations. She regards the majority of Seneca’s writings as ‘formally therapeutic in nature’ (p. 3), aimed primarily at enhancing the lives of their recipients. Scholars should bear this intention in mind when interpreting Seneca’s texts, simultaneously recognising him also pursuing in his works more extensive (e.g. theoretical, literary etc.) interests that far transcend the mere provision of aid and counsel. Consequently, while therapy acts as a motivating factor behind crafting a text and shapes its structure to a certain extent, it does not curtail Seneca’s broader philosophical and literary aspirations.

Regarding the tragedies, G. holds a view that is a minority opinion, as she acknowledges. She does not consider the dramas to be by the same author as the