

THE ISOLATING EFFECT OF SOLA IN *HEROIDES* 10

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OVID'S INTEREST IN THE PSYCHOLOGY of his female characters has been noticed as much in the *Heroides* as it has in the *Metamorphoses*. This is perhaps more immediately visible in the *Heroides*, where the reader's attention is focused on a solitary female, without any other distracting characters.¹ Given the nature of the *Heroides*, it is reasonable to assume that the heroines would frequently refer to their abandoned and therefore solitary state, and such is the case. Charges of abandonment are legion, and are often joined with laments about being alone, regardless of veracity.² Some heroines, like Briseis and Medea, suffer a double separation: from their lovers and from their parental homes. In the character of Ariadne, Ovid is able to exercise his skill in an unique triple estrangement, as Ariadne is cut off from Theseus (her lover), from her family on Crete and, perhaps most importantly, from all visible signs of human civilization. This threefold alienation is underscored by Ovid's use of the adjective *sola*, which he applies twice to Ariadne herself and once to the island upon which she has been abandoned.³ The theme of loneliness assumes a distinctive significance in *Heroides* 10, as no other letter is marked by the triple repetition of a theme

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¹For discussion of the Ariadne figure in particular see the following works, cited hereafter by author's name alone: J.-M. Frécaut, "Un Personnage féminin dans l'oeuvre d'Ovide: Ariane," *La Femme dans le monde méditerranéen* 1 (1985) 157-162; Florence Verducci, *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart: Epistulae Heroidum* (Princeton 1985) 124-179; Constantinus Dragulescu, "Le Vocabulaire psychologique dans les *Héroïdes*," in N. Barber (ed.), *Ovidianum* (Bucharest 1976) 255-265; Howard Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides*, (Princeton 1974) 213-227; E. A. Schmidt, "Ariadne bei Catull und Ovid," *Gymnasium* 74 (1967) 495-501; Fritz H. Grantz, "Studien zur Darstellungskunst Ovids in den *Heroides*" (diss., Christian-Albrecht University, 1955) 74-159; for general discussions see V. A. Tracy, "Penelope and Medea in the *Heroides*," *CN&V* 16 (1972) 43-48; G. A. Seeck, "Ich-Erzähler und Erzähler-Ich in Ovids *Heroides*. Zur Entstehung des neuzeitlichen literarischen Menschen," in E. Lefèvre (ed.), *Festschrift E. Burck* (Amsterdam 1975) 436-470. For the text of the *Heroides*, I have used H. Dörrie, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae Heroidum Texte und Kommentare* (Berlin and New York 1971).

²See, for example, *Her.* 1.7-8, 49-50, 57-58; 2.1-2; 3.21-22, 25, 51-52, 61-62, 81-82; 6.109-112; 8.15-20, 101-102, 107-109; 9.33-36; 12.159-162, 191-195; 13.4, 105-106; 15.71, 77-78, 93-95, 185-186.

³The only other triple occurrence of *sola* is found in *Heroides* 16 (Paris to Helen). This differs from *Her.* 10 since the writer of the letter is a male, and he refers to his addressee as *sola*. Thus the term characterizes not the writer, but the image which the writer has of his addressee.

general to the *Heroides* as a whole (expressed by the adjective *sola*) and uttered by the writer herself. An examination of the occurrence of *sola* will reveal that Ovid uses the adjective with a particular force and purpose in *Heroides* 10 in order to create an Ariadne distinct from earlier models and exclusive to himself.⁴

Taking the letters in numerical order (if not by chronological order of composition), Ovid first employs the term *sola*, with reference to a female character, at *Her.* 3.97, when Briseis, given up by Achilles to Agamemnon, writes to Achilles to try to persuade him to reclaim her. In her letter, she sighs over the good fortune of the wife of Meleager, who was the only one who could change her husband's decision not to go to war: *Sola virum coniunx flexit—Felicior illa!* In this case, *sola* indicates the wife's primacy of influence over the husband and has no connotation of loneliness or solitude. Rather, it suggests superiority, and in this respect Meleager's wife Cleopatra is an object of envy for Briseis, who fears that she herself is incapable of influencing Achilles (3.98). The adjective becomes a positive asset for Cleopatra, expressing, in Briseis' opinion, a desired characteristic. The use of *sola* is then merely an expression of Briseis' wish to be able to influence Achilles as Cleopatra influenced Meleager. She does not complain of solitude or isolation, but of her frustration at Achilles' stubborn idleness. In this instance, the adjective *sola* is not really a matter of complaint. It refers to the writer of the letter merely by her own implied comparison.

The next occurrence of the term comes at *Her.* 7.84, when Dido laments the fate of Aeneas' first wife Creusa:

*Si quaeras ubi sit formosi mater Iuli—
occidit a duro sola relictā viro.*

Haec mihi narraras, <at me movere merentem.>

Inde minor culpa poena futura mea est. (7.83–86)

The passage forms part of the general stream of recrimination which Dido directs at Aeneas. As with the example in *Heroides* 3, Ovid has his heroine employ a comparative model as a method of subliminal influence. The recollection of past actions is apparently intended to shape Aeneas' future actions with respect to Dido. In this instance, Ovid indicates a sense of solitary abandonment by the collocation of *sola* and *relicta* in line 84. The negative sense of abandonment, rather than simply being left behind, is

⁴ Although there are clear parallels between Ovid's Ariadne and that of Catullus, Howard Jacobson is correct in reminding readers of the strong possibilities of Hellenistic and prose models (Jacobson 213). For a general listing of Ovidian and Catullan parallels, see J. N. Anderson, "On the Sources of Ovid's *Heroides*," (diss., John Hopkins University, Baltimore 1896) 78–90, as well as A. Palmer's commentary *P. Ovidi Nasonis Heroides with the Greek Translation of Planudes* (Oxford 1898; reprint, Hildesheim 1967) 373–380.

fostered by the encircling *duro viro* which focuses as much attention on the harsh husband as on the abandoned wife.

The reference to Creusa and Iulus in the verse preceding *sola* is designed to increase Aeneas' feelings of guilt to such an extent that he will be unwilling to run the risk of yet more guilt by leaving Dido behind.⁵ With her country, her *pudor*, and her pride at stake, Dido's attack on Aeneas is more direct than was Briseis' on Achilles, and Ovid reflects the importance of this attack with a more pointed use of *sola*. Aeneas is directly implicated in and bears full responsibility for Creusa's abandonment, especially since in Ovid's version of the story, Creusa is not allowed to hurry Aeneas on his way.⁶ However, Dido herself does not complain of her own solitude—abandonment, yes, but not of being left completely alone. Although these words have implications for Dido (who writes her letter as Aeneas is preparing to set sail), the identification with Creusa emphasises Aeneas' perfidy. The lack of self-address requires that *sola* remain in the realm of implication for the writer herself.

It is important for our interpretation of *sola* in *Heroides* 10 to remark that, in each of these two letters, *sola* is positioned close to the noun *vir* and that both terms occur in the same line. In 3.97 we find *sola virum*; in 7.84, there is only one intervening word (*relicta*) between *sola* and *viro*. Although the women in these examples are by necessity characterized as alone, the proximity of adjective and man denies their ultimate solitude. In each case, the woman's state is determined by the relationship to and the importance of the man in her life, an importance which Ovid has pointedly emphasized by his word order. Regardless of possible expressions of solitude or abandonment, the woman does not stand completely alone in her letter, but always in conjunction with a male. In effect, we are dealing here with pairs. The women write as part of a pair, understand their relationship as part of a pair, and expect their male counterparts to be equally pair-oriented. Indeed, one of the most common problems for Briseis and Dido, as for all of the women of the *Heroides*, is that their "other half" is missing and the male half does not value duality as highly as does the female half. Although Ovid has attributed to these characters elements of the adjective *sola*, it has a very limited sense for them in physical and psychological terms. Being alone is merely an aftermath of abandonment, not a primary cause for recrimination.

It is with his Ariadne letter (*Heroides* 10) that Ovid defines the term *sola* strictly with reference to his heroine.⁷ Naturally, the story of Ariadne left

⁵This manipulation of guilt reaches its peak in the latter half of Dido's letter, as she simultaneously hints at pregnancy and threatens a double suicide (*Her.* 7.135–138).

⁶Contrast the final meeting of Aeneas and Creusa in Vergil (*Aen.* 2.771–795).

⁷*Heroides* 15 has been eliminated from the present discussion because of the questions concerning the authenticity of the letter. Jacobson (227–228) provides a sound

behind on the island of Dia lends itself well to a discussion of the theme of solitary abandonment and Ovid is not averse to exploiting the situation to its fullest extent. Certainly, none of the other heroines of Ovid's *Heroides* finds herself in a similar predicament. Only Ariadne must endure the triple loss of home, family, and human contact.⁸ These losses are reflected in the barrenness of Ariadne's island and its lack of animal or human habitation (10.60–62). As Jacobson has pointed out, Ovid's description of the vast and desolate island on which Ariadne finds herself accords well with her feelings of isolation. Nature itself is at once both hostile and sympathetic to Ariadne as she struggles to come to terms with Theseus' departure.⁹ It is in the midst of these recorded struggles that Ariadne is characterized as *sola*. In each of the three occurrences, Ovid links the adjective to a sense of space, as Ariadne refers either to her own movements on the island or to the great encompassing void which surrounds her. In the first instance, the disappearance of Theseus' sails removes the only other sign of a human presence within Ariadne's sight:¹⁰

*Quid potius facerent, quam me mea lumina flerent,
postquam desierant vela videre tua?
Aut ego diffusis erravi sola capillis,
qualis ab Ogygio concita Baccha deo;
Aut mare prospiciens in saxo frigida sedi,
quamque lapis sedes, tam lapis ipsa fui.* (10.45–50)

The vanishing of Theseus' *vela* is the signal for Ariadne's first realization of how truly alone she is. The absence of Theseus from her side in their bed (10.11–12) and her inability to discover him anywhere on the shore (10.17–18) frighten her and cause her to panic, yet she retains the belief that The-

discussion of the pertinent arguments in favour of authenticity. See also M. Pulbrook, "The Original Published Form of Ovid's *Heroides*," *Hermathena* 122 (1977) 29–45. For opposing views, see R. J. Tarrant ("The Authenticity of the Letter of Sappho to Phaon [*Heroides* 15]," *HSCP* 85 [1981] 133–153), E. J. Kenney ("Liebe als juristisches Problem," *Philologus* 111 [1967] 212–232, at 213, n. 2), D. Vessey, ("Notes on Ovid *Heroides* 7," *CQ NS* 19 [1969] 349–361, at 359), H. Dörrie (*Der heroische Brief* [Berlin 1968] 76, n. 13; 80–81).

⁸This idea of triple loss is paralleled by Ariadne's perceived deception by three forces: *somnus, ventus, fides*. As she herself says, *proditum sum causis una puella tribus* (*Her.* 10.118).

⁹Howard Jacobson has provided a thorough and sympathetic interpretation of Ovid's depiction of the relationship between Nature and Ariadne: "Ovid seeks, for instance, to describe the island in terms that harmonize with this mood [of spaciousness, desolation, solitude] or expand it" (Jacobson 220).

¹⁰Ariadne complains that Theseus was "snatched" from her (*ereptus* 10.43), as if some outside agency were responsible for their separation. Although this absolves Theseus of the charge of abandonment, it also suggests that Ariadne sees herself as fighting alone against unseen and malevolent forces.

seus has only somehow forgotten about her; so she attempts to attract his attention (10.21, 35–36, 39–42). Yet even her glimpse of Theseus' ship as it sails away does not strike her as forcefully as its irrevocable disappearance on the horizon. It is at this point that she begins to comprehend the significance of her solitary position. The vanishing of the sails means that there is no other living being visible in Ariadne's new world. The island itself reveals only a rocky hill dotted with sparse bushes (10.25). From her rock on the hill, Ariadne has nothing to look at but the encircling, empty sea (10.49, 61). At the instant realization of such isolation, Ariadne becomes oppressively *sola* (10.47).

The encircling *diffusis capillis* (10.47) lends to the *sola* further negative emphasis.¹¹ Verducci points to the depiction of women in elegy, whose dishevelled hair added to their beauty, and remarks that the "disarray of the hair [offers] a sensual foretaste of the disheveled pleasures of the night".¹² Although this may certainly be an indication of Ariadne's experiences, Verducci denies the sincerity of Ovid's depiction, terming it a trivialization and parody of the Catullan model. She disputes the Ovidian Ariadne's concentration on her own predicament in comparison with the Catullan Ariadne, but this self-preoccupation seems to me to be one of Ovid's deliberate departures from his model and a major component in his characterization of Ariadne. Further, the negative contrast between night and day is strengthened if one does accept that Theseus and Ariadne spent the night together as lovers. Ariadne's disbelief at awakening alone then becomes even more plausible. As well, her gesture of running her hands through her hair in shock and dismay (*diffusis*) evokes the traditional female lament for the dead.¹³ This two-fold significance of Ariadne's hair (love and lamentation) enforces the picture of an Ariadne distraught not only because Theseus has left her, but also because she is suddenly, and frighteningly, alone. Her movement, as well as her subsequent tears, reveals Ariadne's need to re-

¹¹The only other occurrence of *diffusus* in the *Heroides* is *Her.* 5.113–114, where Oenone relates her sister Cassandra's prophecy concerning the destruction of Troy: *Hoc tua (nam recolo) quondam germana canebat / sic mihi diffusis vaticinata comis.* Cassandra, like Ovid's Ariadne, is distressed at the catastrophe which threatens both Oenone and Troy, and is eventually carried away by her slaves *furentem* (5.121). The disquieting effect which Cassandra's words have on Oenone is reflected in Oenone's report that the hair on the back of her neck stood up (5.122). The *diffusus* of *Her.* 10.47 may hint equally at Verducci's "pleasures of the night" as well as Ariadne's anguish, similar in intensity to that of Oenone.

¹²Verducci 250.

¹³Grantz has clearly interpreted the psychological effect of the disappearance of Theseus' sails on Ariadne and her resultant tears: "Er [der Affekt] deutet zwar eine innere Lösung und Befreiung an, diese aber bleibt nur vorübergehend wirksam und wird dann mit den darauffolgenden, stärker dynamischen Affekten sofort wieder aufgehoben" (Grantz 106).

lease the tension and turmoil of her abrupt awakening. This attempt at release, however, fails, as Ariadne's ability to translate the given clues into concrete reality does not improve. Her only viable recourse at this point is to pace the shore in a forlorn numbness.¹⁴

As Jacobson has seen, the proximity of *sola* to *Baccha* is particularly effective, and it becomes even more intensive, I think, with the placement of *Ogygio . . . deo* in the same line, as they both contrast Ariadne's aloneness with the anticipated arrival of Dionysus and his band of Bacchantes,¹⁵ especially given the tradition in myth of Dionysus' arrival with his *thiasos*.¹⁶ The potentially overwhelming effect of such a riotous arrival on the solitary and bewildered Ariadne further concentrates attention on her present vulnerability.¹⁷ This contrast between the single and the plural is a recurring motif in Ovid's use of the term *sola* in his Ariadne letter. After a succession of plurals (*lumina, vela, diffusis capillis*), we are struck by the singular *sola*, which isolates Ariadne within a circle of multiplicity.

A few lines later, as Ariadne returns to her bed in disbelief that he who was there the night before is no longer present, she chastises it for restoring only one of the two bodies which had slept there and despairingly seeks some resolution for her state:

"Pressimus" exclamo "te duo, redde duos!
Venimus huc ambo; cur non discedimus ambo?
Perfide, pars nostri, lectule, maior ubi est?"
Quid faciam? Quo sola ferar? Vacat insula cultu;
non hominum video, non ego facta boum. (10.56-60)

The bed can only show her the imprint of who is not there (*vestigia* 10.53) and the absence of a human presence in Ariadne's bed is extended to encompass the absence of any *vestigia*, either human or animal, on the whole island. The connection of *sola* (10.59) to a sense of space is enlarged to

¹⁴In a more picturesque mood in the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid describes Ariadne thus: *Cnosis in ignotis amens errabat harenis* (*Ars Am.* 527). The *amens errabat* (i.e., mindlessly wandering) has none of the desperation of the *Heroides'* *diffusis erravi sola capillis*, despite the use of the same verb, because of the addition of *sola*. Alternatively, translating *amens errabat* as "wandering out of her mind" suggests a point beyond desperation and reaching the brink of hopelessness, which is not yet Ariadne's position in the *Heroides*.

¹⁵Jacobson 221.

¹⁶Such is the scene which Catullus envisages in his description of Ariadne's abandonment on Dia (64.251-264).

¹⁷Catullus' use of *sola* at a similar point in 64 refers not to Ariadne, but to the sand upon which she is standing: *utpote fallaci quae tum primum excita somno / desertam in sola miseram se cernat harena* (64.56-57). Similarly, the uses of *sola* at 64.154 and 64.184 also refer to geographical locations and not either to Ariadne herself or to other women. The sense of isolation in poem 64 is less psychologically oriented than in Ovid's version of the myth.

include not only Ariadne's solitary bed and the emptiness of her island, but also her uncertainty regarding her destination. In addition, Ariadne's problem is not merely that she has nowhere to go, but that even if she did have a goal, she would have to go alone.¹⁸ The loneliness Ariadne feels is emphasized by Ovid's use of the verb *vacat*—the island is not only empty, but destitute, devoid of habitation.¹⁹ Ovid then re-iterates this idea with line 60, which separates the elements of *cultus* into animals and men, neither of which has left any visible imprint on the island. Again, we find the emphasis on plurality in the first person plural verbs (*pressimus*, *venimus*, *discedimus* [10.56, 57]), the repeated *duo/duos* (10.56) and *ambo* (10.57), and in the assumption of duality in *pars nostri*, . . . *maior* (10.58). After the *sola*, the aforementioned separation of *cultus* into its constituent parts extends the idea of plurality, as does the plural use of *hominum* and *boum*. As in *sola* of 10.47, the effect here is an emphasis on Ariadne's singular isolation in a world of many. Despite her repeated attempts to see herself as a part of a pair (*duo* and *ambo* both mentioned twice; the assumption in *pars nostri* that Ariadne and Theseus together make a whole), even Ariadne's bed denies and refuses her duality. Ovid has not paired Ariadne with her lover nor even with an anecdotal comparison, as he had done with other figures. Ariadne remains a single, isolated entity.

In the final occurrence of *sola*, Ariadne almost sarcastically reminds Theseus to add her to his list of exploits:

*Ibis Cecropios portus patriaque receptus,
cum steteris turbae celsus honore tuae
et bene narraris letum taurique virique
sectaque per dubias saxea tecta vias;
Me quoque narrato sola tellure relictam;
non ego sum titulis subripienda tuis!* (10.125–130)

Here *sola* refers to the island itself, rather than to Ariadne.²⁰ However, she borrows the effect of the *sola* from the proximity of the *me*, so that the *sola tellure* only reinforces the previous image of Ariadne's solitude.

¹⁸ Catullus' Ariadne says: *nam quo me referam?* (64.177). She makes no reference to the fact that she must depart the island, or even find help on the island, alone.

¹⁹ Ovid has only two other uses of the verb *vacare* in the single letters of the *Heroides* (there is only one use in the double letters, *Her.* 20.156). The first, at *Her.* 4.18 (Phaedra to Hippolytus) refers to Phaedra's spotless reputation (. . . *crimine* . . . *vacat*), which, considering her whole story, must be taken with a measure of caution by the reader. The second is a more positive use by Medea in *Heroides* 12.3, when she complains to Jason that she had taken the time to help him when she was a Colchian princess. Neither occurrence of the verb has the connotation which Ovid has given *vacat* in *Her.* 10.

²⁰ As such, it parallels the use of *sola* in *Her.* 11.86, when Canace describes how her father ordered her infant son to be exposed in *solis locis*. Catullus also uses *sola* in a similar fashion in 64.57, 154, 184. In each of these cases, the *sola* refers to a geographical location.

The preceding references to the harbours of Athens and the labyrinth at Ariadne's home in Crete continue Ovid's practice of emphasizing her isolation by contrasting it to the world at large. Ariadne's *sola tellus* is even smaller here because of Theseus' anticipated return to hearth and home. Ovid aptly contrasts Theseus' *homecoming* with Ariadne's *homegoing*, she who left the death of her step-brother behind her. She could hardly expect an equally warm reception, even if she could manage to return. She is no longer panic-stricken, but rather cynically contrasts Theseus' good fortune with her own.

Despite the fact that, in this example, *sola* refers to the island and not to Ariadne, it is nevertheless surrounded by plural references: first Theseus' return to the *Cecropios portus* and *turbæ*, next the double nature of Ariadne's step-brother (*taurique virique*), followed by the *saxea tecta* and *dubias vias* of Crete, and finally, Theseus' achievements (*titulis tuis*). When even the island is stranded in the midst of plurality, Ariadne herself becomes the exemplification of singularity.

The three examples of *sola* from Ariadne's letter also contrast strongly with the letters of Briseis and Dido because they are not linked to the term *vir*, or indeed any other word indicative of a similar male presence. At 10.48, the pentameter following *sola*, there is a reference to Dionysus. At 10.60, Ariadne refers to *hominum*, emphasizing their conspicuous absence. However, these references do not carry the overtones of a more intimate relationship as conveyed by the term *vir*. Nor is there any personal involvement between the *Ogygius deus* or the existence of humans and the abandonment or solitude of our heroine. As with the *sola* of 10.59, Ariadne is unable to pair herself with any other figure. When she attempts to do so with her brother, she finds death instead of love.

The lack of anecdotal references in Ariadne's letter further separates her from previous models and serves as another factor isolating her from humanity. Ovid avoids establishing an empathetic link between Ariadne's experiences and emotions and those of another character. There is no common font of pathos from which Ariadne, as the writer, may draw comfort or elicit sympathy or guilt from her addressee. When Ariadne compares her actions to those of a bacchante (10.48) she finds an example of intense emotion which provides little positive support. Instead, the impression of a bacchante serves only to emphasize her separation from civilized society. The veiled parallel to Niobe (10.49-50), although evoking images of similar desolation and grief, nevertheless places Ariadne in a cold world, apart from other humans and without the benefit of sympathetic contact.²¹ By such references and by the omission of more positive anecdotal allusions, Ovid

²¹The tradition that Niobe's insult to the goddess Leto's fecundity was in part responsible for the death of her children places Niobe in a different position from Ariadne.

further emphasizes Ariadne's desolate situation and its importance to her characterization.

Ariadne's abandonment on a deserted island aggravates her situation to a degree not experienced by the other heroines of the *Heroides*. Her letter is dominated by the inescapable fact of her solitude. Heroines like Briseis and Dido write their letters knowing that they do have the potential to fill the empty space beside them, should they desire to do so. Ariadne is so overcome by her isolation that, at the end of her letter, she can only envisage completing her pair if Theseus returns to collect her bones after her death, which is hardly a positive image of duality. Because of her particular situation, she is not given the option of choosing another mate.²² Ariadne's world remains for the most part centred on the island. She exists in a vacuum, for although she refers briefly to her parents, her family, past and probable future events, she is cut off physically, mentally and emotionally from the outside world. She thus becomes the epitome of *sola*, and *sola* becomes a central, rather than peripheral, complaint in her letter. The direct relationship between the adjective and the writer adds an immediacy and power which the other letters lack.

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Ariadne does not suffer abandonment from Theseus as a result of a direct action on her part.

²²Despite the popular tradition that Dionysus comes to Ariadne's rescue, his presence in the *Heroides* is not assured nor may it be entirely welcome. Schmidt suggests that his appearance would only add a new terror for Ariadne, not a salvation (494).