Isabella Whitney and George Turberville: Mid-Tudor Heroidean poetry and questions of precedence

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Isabella Whitney and George Turberville are often mentioned in the same breath, and it is little wonder. It is well known that this pair of mid-Tudor authors evinced a mutual fascination with the female-voiced complaint form; their earliest works, which emerged in the mid-1560s, responded in overt ways to the ancient Roman poetry of Ovid. Much has been made of the generic and stylistic debts of *The Copy of a Letter* (c. 1566–67)—the first work published under Whitney's name (or, rather, her initials)—to Ovid's *Heroides*, a classical collection of first-person missives translated into English by Turberville as *The Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso* (c. 1566–67). To a lesser extent, scholarship has also recognized intertextual connections between *The Copy of a Letter* and *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* (c. 1565–67), an auto-miscellany of Turberville's original compositions that similarly brims with what Raphael Lyne calls "*Heroides*-like material."[1]

When introducing *The Copy of a Letter*, scholars typically reference the near-contemporary publication of *The Heroycall Epistles*, presenting Turberville's translation as a crucial contextual key to understanding Whitney's epistolary verse. The presumed temporal sequencing of these two works is sometimes made explicit via claims that *The Copy of a Letter* was "published directly following … Turberville's circulation in print of his translation of Ovid's *Heroides*" or that *The Copy of a Letter* "digested … Turberville's just published translation … for [new] urban readerships."[2] At other times, the same chronological assumptions are more implicitly conveyed. *The Heroycall Epistles* are variously said to have

"provided an epistolary structure for [Whitney] to emulate," to have served as her "immediate thematic influence," and to have (along with "other English sources") likely "supplied all of Whitney's mythological material."[3] Hearing "echoes of Turberville's translation" in *The Copy of a Letter*'s undeniably Heroidean lines, critics have figured the male poet as Whitney's "possible mentor."[4] Correspondingly, she is portrayed as a reactive and receptive figure who "dr[e]w upon other works, especially … Turberville's."[5] Whitney is often depicted as a writer whose output was cannily shaped by a shrewd recognition of the saleability of Turberville's *Heroycall Epistles* in the literary marketplace: she perceived that "the lament of the abandoned mistress [was] enjoying a vogue in England after ... Turberville's translation"; she deliberately adopted a "style [that] became popular after … Turberville's translation"; she cleverly "[c]apitaliz[ed] on the popularity of … Turberville's … translation."[6] Though less frequently evoked, the relationship between *The Copy of a Letter* and the epistolary poetry in Turberville's roughly contemporaneous *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* has been conceived in equivalent terms. If we accept that similarities between these texts go beyond the authors' generic use of "a common language," then these parallels must demonstrate that Whitney was "directly borrowing images" from Turberville's previously printed lyrics.[7]

This essay challenges the widely accepted portrait of Whitney as an artist building upon solid Turbervillean foundations. Reviewing the intertextual connections between their works and asking anew what we can deduce about the historical emergence of *The Copy of a Letter, The Heroycall Epistles,* and *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* in the 1560s, I seek to query the commonly assumed directness and direction of influence between Turberville and Whitney. Ultimately, I suggest it may be just as plausible that Whitney helped to shape Turberville's Heroidean aesthetics as it is that Turberville provided the pattern for Whitney's.

Whitney, Turberville, and Mid-Tudor Ovidianism

Although the central argument in this essay is fundamentally one of chronology, I want to put Whitney's and Turberville's tangled publication timelines aside for the moment and to lay some initial groundwork by reviewing the intertextual links between these authors' earliest outputs. The linchpin in this textual conglomeration is Ovid's *Heroides*, a collection of first-person complaint poems that take the form of letters written in the purported voices of well-known literary and legendary characters. Often remembered for "the impression they create of psychological authenticity," Ovid's Latin epistles are overwhelmingly (though not exclusively) presented from the vantage points of classical tradition's romantically abandoned heroines, including figures such as Penelope, Oenone, Dido, Ariadne, Phyllis, and Medea.[8]

It is difficult to overestimate the impact that Ovid's *Heroides* had upon European literature of the late medieval and early modern eras. In England, these letters were frequently referenced (and sometimes even presented in miniaturized versions) by medieval authors including Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower—perhaps most notably in the former's *Legend of Good Women*, where the cast of female complainants overlaps considerably with the list of heroines treated in Ovid's anterior work. For Whitney, Turberville, their immediate predecessors, and their mid-Tudor contemporaries, these Middle English channels remained significant vernacular conduits for the dissemination of Heroidean aesthetics and narratives. Interest in female-voiced complaint was on the rise as Whitney and Turberville were beginning their respective literary careers. A number of Heroidean-sounding pieces can be located in the printed miscellanies and auto-miscellanies that appeared in the early years of Elizabeth I's reign. In addition to featuring a partial translation of *Heroides* 1 (Penelope's epistle to Ulysses), Richard Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* (1557), for instance, contains such titles as "An answer in the behalfe of a woman of an uncertain aucthor," "The lady forsaken

of her lover, praieth his returne, or the end of her own life," "The ladie praieth the returne of her lover abiding on the seas," "The complaint of a woman ravished, and also mortally wounded," and two separate poems identically described as "Complaint of the absence of her lover being upon the sea."[9] Moreover, "Egloga septima" in Barnabe Googe's *Eglogs, Epytaphes, and Sonettes* (1563) is likewise a female-voiced amatory complaint.[10] And, though no complete copy of the c. 1565 edition of *A Handefull of Pleasant Delites* is now known to survive, the extant 1584 edition of this musical miscellany indicates that it quite possibly included such female-voiced ballads as "The scoffe of a Ladie, as pretie as may be, to a yong man that went a wooing," "The lamentation of a woman being wrongfully defamed," "A proper Sonet, of an unkinde Damsell, to her faithful Lover," and "The complaint of a woman Lover."[11]

Emerging against the backdrop outlined above, Turberville's was the first complete translation of Ovid's *Heroides* to be published in English.[12] Across the volume's two dozen letters, Turberville experimented with transforming Ovid's elegiac couplets into poulter's measure, fourteeners, and blank verse, and, following the conventions established in continental editions of the *Heroides*, he prefaced each epistle with an explanatory "Argument" establishing the legendary context for the letter's supposed genesis. No doubt, this work's earliest audiences would have perceived *The Heroycall Epistles* not only as a constituent part of a wider vernacular tradition reaching back to figures like Chaucer and Gower, but also as a potential schoolboy study aid. After all, as scholars such as Jonathan Bate and Lynn Enterline have emphasized, Ovid's Latin *Heroides* featured prominently in the humanist curriculum of the period.[13]

Let us now turn to the much-remarked Heroidean character of *The Copy of a Letter*. This work is essentially a short miscellany, and the title page of the sole surviving copy describes the collection's contents thus:

> *The Copy of a letter, lately written in meeter, by a yonge Gentilwoman: to her unconstant Lover. With an Admonitio[n] to al yong Gentilwomen, and to all other Mayds in general to beware of mennes flattery. By Is. W. Newly joyned to a Loveletter sent by a Bacheler, (a most faithfull Lover) to an unconstant and faithles Mayden*.[14]

Inside, one discovers a short poetic address from "The Printer [Richard Jones] to the Reader" and four—rather than the three mentioned on the title page—verse epistles. The first two letters ("To her unconstant Lover" and "The admonition by the Auctor, to all yong Gentilwomen: And to al other Maids being in Love") are identified as Whitney's work. To this effect, both are attributed to Is. W. or I. W. This opening pair of epistles is followed by an internal page announcing a further poem by W. G. After this, we find not only (as one might expect) "A Loveletter, sent from a faithful Lover: to an unconstant Mayden" signed by one W. G., but also an additional letter entitled "R. W. Against the wilfull Inconstancie of his deare Foe E. T. Whiche Example may justly be a sufficient warnying for all Yongmen to beware the fained Fidelytie of unconstant Maydens" signed by R. Witc.

In "To her unconstant Lover," the first of *The Copy of a Letter*'s verse missives, Whitney's female epistoler is a highly characterized, recently jilted woman.[15] She addresses an unnamed lector—a promise-breaking man who has left her to marry another. In so doing, she tangibly aligns herself with the legendary women of Ovid's *Heroides*: this "Tudor *herois,*" as she has been dubbed by M. L. Stapleton, professes herself "as true a Love, / as dwelt in any Coast."[16] Her erstwhile lover is correspondingly compared to an unflattering array of classical heroes who are said to have achieved "perpetuall Fame" (and, indeed "shame") "for their unfaithfulnes."[17] Whitney's epistoler singles out Aeneas (abandoner of Dido), Theseus (abandoner of Ariadne), and Jason (serial abandoner of both Hypsipyle and Medea) for particular censure, and she is likewise disapproving of Paris, who "brought destruction unto Troy" via "the Grecian Rape" of Helen.[18] In a demonstration of her own unceasing virtue, however, Whitney's epistolary persona follows this castigation of her

lover's unethical behaviour with a display of personal beneficence. Though wronged, she voices the ostensibly generous—and quite possibly ironic—wish that the new object of her lector's affections be imbued with Helen's beauty, Penelope's chastity, and Lucretia's constancy.

Whitney's "Admonition," *The Copy of a Letter*'s second epistle, is similarly embellished with mythological allusions. This piece is principally aimed at an imagined audience of women, and Whitney's authorial persona draws on literary examples to offer her female lectors "good counsell"—the sort of counsel that she herself regrettably lacked when "deceived [of] late" (an intratextual gesture back towards the scenario explored in "To her unconstant Lover").[19] Alleging that only "triall shal declare [a man's] trueth," she instructs her imagined audience of *ingénues* to "Beware of fayre and painted talke."[20] While Scylla (rejected by Minos), Oenone (deserted by Paris), and Phyllis (forgotten by Demophoon) are all presented as *exempla in malo*, Hero (who is said to have prudently "trie[d] Leanders truth") is contrastingly presented as the letter's single *exemplum in bono*.[21] It is thus in both epistolary form *and* allusive content that Whitney's compositions are strikingly Heroidean: the tales of Dido's, Ariadne's, Medea's, Hypsipile's, Penelope's, Oenone's, and Phyllis's respective romantic desertions are memorably related in *Heroides* 7, 10, 12, 6, 1, 5, and 2, and paired epistolary exchanges between Paris and Helen and Leander and Hero constitute Ovid's *Heroides* 16–19.[22]

Like *The Copy of a Letter*, Turberville's *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* translates Heroidean situations and rhetoric into a contemporary Tudor context. The romance that lazily unfolds throughout this auto-miscellany's pages features a core—if somewhat loosely conceived—series of lyrics supposedly penned by the characters "Tymetes" (whom the audience is tempted to read as Turberville's own lightly fictionalized persona, despite his paratextual protestations to the contrary) and "Pyndara" (a figure who possibly corresponds

with the volume's teenaged dedicatee, Anne Dudley, Countess of Warwick). Throughout the collection, the letters of the *Heroides* furnish Turberville not only with a bevy of exempla, but also with specific models for fictionalizing epistolary discourse: he tangibly borrows Ovidian techniques and replicates Ovidian preoccupations in the verses attributed to the two English lovers.[23] Moreover, the "sustained interest in the idea of constancy" that Melih Levi identifies as this collection's primary "anchor" is a preoccupation *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* conspicuously shares with Whitney's *Copy of a Letter*.[24] The ultimately inconstant love interest of Turberville's Tymetes is emphatically hailed as "a second … / … *Helen*," thereby directly aligning Pyndara with the Ovidian lector of *Heroides* 16 and the Ovidian epistoler of *Heroides* 17.[25]

Elizabeth Heale has previously called attention to some "strikingly close" similarities between *The Copy of a Letter* and *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*, similarities that extend beyond the works' mutual genetic ancestry in Ovid's *Heroides*.[26] Indeed, specific correlations in phrasing and imagery link the two opening epistles attributed to Is. W. in *The Copy of a Letter* with those of Turberville's Pyndara. In *"*Counsell returned by *Pyndara* to *Tymetes,* of constancie," for instance, Turberville's female epistoler substantiates her argument that "Women are / more trustie than…men" by citing the "foule defame" of Aeneas alongside the "Traytors name" of Jason and the *"*yll" reputation of Theseus.[27] As Turberville's Pyndara puts it,

> they their faithfull Friendes
> that savde their doubtfull lyves
> Forsooke at last, and did disdaine
> to take them to their wyves,
> They brake their vowed hestes,

by ship away they went:

And so betrayde those siely soules

that craft nor falsehood ment.[28]

Notably, Whitney cites this same triad of heroes to illustrate much the same point in "To her unconstant Lover."

Further similarities can be found in another of Pyndara's letters, which sounds remarkably like Whitney's "Admonition." This piece centres on exposing "the craft / that is in subtile men," and it particularly singles out those sweet-talkers who tell "sundrie women sundrie tales / … to win their loves" yet proceed to "give them up in plaine" after "attain[ing]" their affections.[29] Whereas Turberville's Pyndara references "The Crocodile by kinde" that "a floud of [false] teares doth shed" and muses "Yf she that reades this rime, / be wise as I coulde wishe, / She will avoyde the bayted hooke," Whitney's epistoler—likewise addressing an imagined audience of female lectors—employs the same imagery to make equivalent claims: she avers that "Some [men] use the teares of Crocodiles, / contrary to their hart," and she expansively develops the angling metaphor of the trusting, naïve woman as "a little Fish that carelesse is."[30]

Timelines and Chronology

As my consideration of the generic, conceptual, and verbal resonances between *The Heroycall Epistles, The Copy of a Letter,* and *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* indicates, there are good reasons for juxtaposing Whitney and Turberville and considering these authors' earliest outputs in tandem. At this juncture in my argument, though, I want to turn to the issue of these works' chronology and address it head on. What can the Stationers' Register and surviving copies tell us about the convoluted publication histories of these lyric collections? As I will demonstrate, the precise date at which each of these three texts first reached print in the 1560s is hardly conclusive. However, existing evidence appears to

contradict the oft-repeated truism that Turberville's near-contemporaneous English works served as Whitney's chief sources and models.

Let us begin with a re-examination of the timelines relating to Turberville's two earliest publications. As Hyder E. Rollins noted over a century ago, just when *The Heroycall Epistles* and *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* were printed is a matter for conjecture, and consideration of relevant entries in the Stationers' Register yields some potential surprises.[31] To begin with, it is possible that *The Heroycall Epistles* may have been initially printed in a series of instalments rather than as a full volume set of twenty-four verse epistles. In the summer of 1566, Henry Denham licensed for publication "a boke intituled *the fyrste epestle of OVIDE*" (presumably Penelope's epistle to Ulysses).[32] A mere eight entries later—which Rollins estimates to be the space of a day or two—Denham subsequently licensed "*an epestle of OVIDE beynge the iiijth epestle &c*" (presumably Phaedra's epistle to Hippolytus).[33] It was not until several months afterwards, however, that Denham licensed for publication "the Reste of the Epestles of Ovide."[34]

Most copies of the earliest extant edition of Turberville's full *Heroycall Epistles* contain a colophon dated 19 March 1567, though both "full" and "extant" are key words here. It is possible that Denham strategically registered yet did not actually print individual translations of *Heroides* 1 and 4. His successive acts of registration may have been a mechanism for announcing Turberville's forthcoming, as-yet-incomplete translation and of firmly establishing Denham's own commercial claim over what was predicted to be a highly vendible text. Alternatively, Denham may have, for similar reasons, actually printed and sold copies of *Heroides* 1 and 4 (either individually or together) in pamphlet or broadside form to drum up public interest in the months prior to the full publication of *The Heroycall Epistles*. While unusual, such a marketing tactic would not have been entirely unique. Entries in the Stationers' Register indicate that another of Turberville's English translations, *The Eglogs of*

the Poet B. Mantuan Carmelitan, was likely printed in multiple instalments by Henry Bynneman.[35] Yet another analogue for this second scenario can be found in the publication history of Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In 1565, William Seres issued an edition of *The Fyrst Fower Bookes of P. Ovidius Nasos Worke*, Golding's as-yet-incomplete rendition of the Roman text. In the prefatory materials to this partial translation, Golding clearly signalled his intention to later "persever in the full accomplishement of all the whole woorke."[36] This ambition was realized, and Seres published a corrected and fully completed version in 1567. If the object of Seres and/or Golding was to snuff out competition with this expedited and serialized publication strategy, it seems to have worked: another would-be-translator of this same text, Thomas Peend, reports he had invested "some time in translating *Ovids Metamorphosis,* and had achyved [his] purpose in parte therof" before he fatefully "receyved copyes … from the Prynter" of "those foure bookes of *Metamorphosis …* translated all redye" by Golding and decided not to reduplicate his rival's ongoing efforts.[37]

While it is now impossible to say whether or not English translations of individual letters from the *Heroides* were printed by Denham as he awaited Turberville's delivery of the full *Heroycall Epistles*, what we can establish with relative certainty is that Turberville seems to have been completing this Ovidian translation alongside his work on a second, expanded edition of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets.* There is, again, some ambiguity about when and in precisely what form this auto-miscellany initially appeared in print, for no copy of the conjectured first edition is known to survive. The 1567 edition of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*, however, makes a prominent title page claim that it is "Newly corrected with additions." The phrasing here suggests that a prior—and presumably slimmer—version was in print circulation before that date. This is reconfirmed elsewhere in the 1567 edition's paratextual matter, where Turberville claims to have previously "published this…treatise" and states that in the second edition he has "add[ed] moe" to what was available "before."[38]

Basing his assessment, in part, upon the death dates of some of the figures memorialized in *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*'s titular epitaphs, Rollins has speculated that the now-lost first edition of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* was likely published in or after 1565.[39]

Conjecturing a date of publication for the first edition of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* is complicated by the fact that it does not appear to have been registered (a not altogether uncommon occurrence in this period). However, the second edition was entered into the Stationers' Register by Denham in the spring of 1567—seemingly, some months after the same printer's registration of "the Reste of the Epestles of Ovide." What is more, Rollins has shown that "attentive reading of [Turberville's] poems and prefaces" reveals a number of cross-references between these two works.[40] A piece addressed "To the Reader" in *The Heroycall Epistles*, for instance, promises audiences: "if thou shewe thy selfe friendly in well accepting this provisio[n], thou shalt be invited to a better banquet in time at my hands … as soone as occasion wil serve."[41] That Turberville meant the "better banquet" coming "soone" to be understood as the forthcoming, expanded version of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* is clarified in a parallel address "To the Reader" found in the 1567 edition of his auto-miscellany, which announces that Turberville has now fulfilled "the promise in [his] Translation."[42]

To sum up: a first edition of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* (exact contents unknown) was probably published in 1565 or possibly later; Turberville's translations of *Heroides* 1 and 4 may have been printed in the summer of 1566, but the full text was probably not published until March 1567; the second edition of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* was almost certainly not published until some point after March 1567. Having established this much, I now want to ask where Whitney's *Copy of a Letter* might fit within this reconstructed timeline of Turberville's earliest publications.

Significantly, the entry in the Stationers' Register that immediately follows Denham's registration of *Heroides* 4 in the summer of 1566 is Jones's entry "for the pryntinge of *the Copye of a letter lately wretten in myter by a yonge gentelwoman to hyr unconstaunte lover &c.*"[43] If both Jones and Denham were relatively prompt about issuing these works post-registration, this means that *The Copy of a Letter* would have been published at almost precisely the same moment as Turberville's translations of *Heroides* 1 and *Heroides* 4—assuming, of course, that these individual letters *were* actually printed rather than merely registered by Denham at that point.[44] It also means that Whitney's *Copy of a Letter* must have appeared several months prior to Turberville's completed edition of *The Heroycall Epistles* and the better part of a year before the revised and enlarged second edition of his *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets.*

There are further ambiguities in relation to Whitney's publication timeline that merit scrutiny. On the title page of the sole surviving copy of *The Copy of a Letter*, Whitney's missives are said to be "Newly joyned" to the work of R. W. (an authorial figure also referred to in the volume as R. Witc.). It is thus worth reviving a question previously posed by Lynette McGrath: does this mean "that Whitney's poems ha[d] already appeared elsewhere … independent of this new 'joyning'," or does it instead imply that "W. G.'s and R. Witc.'s poems … have been recycled here in a new conjunction with Whitney's new poems"?[45] This question should also be considered in light of the persuasive case that Michelle O'Callaghan has built to suggest that the only surviving copy of *The Copy of a Letter* "belongs not to the first edition, but to a subsequent edition."[46] Using bibliographic evidence, O'Callaghan argues for "a publishing history in which a single-authored collection [containing only *The Copy of a Letter*'s two Is. W. poems] was subsequently turned into a little anthology of female and male complaints."[47]

There are a few distinct possibilities to ponder. It may be that the Stationers' Register entry of 1566 represents a now-lost first edition of *The Copy of a Letter* that contained only the Is. W. poems. Alternatively, the Stationers' Register entry of 1566 might be for a version of *The Copy of a Letter* that "Newly joyned" pre-existing Is. W. material with new epistles by W. G. and R. Witc. This second scenario would mean that the Is. W. missives had been previously printed (though left unregistered) at an earlier date. In sorting between these options, much hangs on that ambiguous "*&c*." in Jones's 1566 entry. Does the record in the Stationers' Register refer to Whitney's "Admonition," or does this "*&c*." refer to the W. G. and R. Witc. poetry? To add a further layer of complexity, we should remember that Jones, who began his career in 1564–65, served as one of London's most prolific publishers of broadside ballads during this period.[48] Beyond the possibilities delineated above, one can easily imagine yet another scenario in which "To her unconstant Lover," and/or the "Admonition" were disseminated in printed broadside format some time before they were reissued by Jones as a small—and then, subsequently, as a slightly larger—pamphlet publication. This would follow the general pattern set by another of Jones's roughly contemporaneous publications, *A Handefull of Pleasant Delites*. It has been demonstrated that this anthology, which was registered around 1565, was comprised entirely of lyrics that "had, before their collection in [Jones's] miscellany, been printed on broadsides."[49] This, in conjunction with the fact that Jones was frequently fined for printing unlicensed material, means we cannot rule out the possibility that one or more of Whitney's Heroidean poems was circulating in printed form well before Jones's entry for "for the pryntinge of *the Copye of a letter lately wretten in myter by a yonge gentelwoman to hyr unconstaunte lover &c.*" during the summer of 1566—perhaps even predating the appearance of the now-lost first edition of Turberville's *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*.[50]

Whitney Beyond Turberville's Long Shadow

Having reconstructed, to the best of my ability, the convoluted publication timelines for *The Copy of a Letter*, *The Heroycall Epistles*, and *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*, I now want to consider the implications, starting with the presumed relationship of dependency between *The Copy of a Letter* and *The Heroycall Epistles.* The evidence suggests that, contrary to popular belief, it is highly improbable that Turberville's *Heroides* translation served as primary referent for Whitney as she was composing "To her unconstant Lover" and the "Admonition." Rather, both *The Copy of a Letter* and *The Heroycall Epistles* emerged during a period in English literary history when interest in Heroidean aesthetics was on the ascendancy—a literary phenomenon that similarly gave rise to the Tymetes and Pyndara materials in *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*. If Whitney's *Copy of a Letter* was not, in actual fact, specifically inspired by or responding to Turberville's *Heroycall Epistles*, this means we must accept that her conceptions of Ovidian epistolarity and complaint were shaped through alternate channels. One way of reading *The Copy of a Letter*'s Heroidean aesthetic is to set it more decisively against other printed pamphlets and lyric anthologies circulating in the 1560s and/or the period's vibrant ballad culture.[51] It is also worth asking whether Whitney's Ovidian poetry may be more profoundly Chaucerian than scholars have typically recognized.

I would note that some of the hermeneutic turns that characterize Whitney's Ovidianism in *The Copy of a Letter* and that have been implicitly posited as unique in contemporary scholarship may be better understood as typical of her literary milieu, in which interpretation of the *Heroides* continued to be largely mediated by medieval literary tradition. It has been observed of Whitney, for example, that she specifically "call[s] upon women of the past whose virtues have inspired men to vicious actions," "deconstructs … classical heroes by applying a pro-woman rather than an epic criterion to their careers," and "alters the literary tradition of Ovid's *Heroides* in order to focus on the treachery of men rather than the

helplessness of women."[52] Yet such a demythologizing approach to classical epic is a defining feature of the *Heroides,* and this aspect of Ovid's work was often amplified in medieval adaptations. Whereas Ovid's anterior poetry had cultivated readers' sympathies for the forsaken heroines to whom he gave epistolary voices, medieval European literature frequently takes this one step further by more definitively casting the "heroic" deserters of women such as Dido or Ariadne in distinctly non-heroic terms as oath-breakers and deceptive rhetorical manipulators. This general trend is evident in works such as Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, which remained a primary channel for the dissemination of Ovidian abandonment narratives throughout the Tudor era.

Certainly, it is no coincidence that the vast majority of the "Ovidian" exempla Whitney cites in *The Copy of a Letter* (i.e. Dido, Ariadne, Medea, Hypsipile, Phyllis, Lucretia, and Scylla) also feature prominently in *The Legend of Good Women*. What is more, the particular classical heroes that Whitney's epistoler—and, in fact, Turberville's Pyndara—single out for their duplicity are likewise presented as liars in this same Chaucerian text. Partway through his Dido legend, for instance, Chaucer's narrator pauses to editorialize:

> O sely wemen, ful of innocence,
> Ful of pite, of trouthe and conscience,
> What maketh yow to men to truste so?
> Have ye swych routhe upon hyre feyned wo,
> And han swich olde ensaumples yow beforn?
> Se ye nat alle how they ben forsworn?[53]

Chaucer's joint legend of Hypsipile and Medea opens by castigating Jason for similar crimes:

> Thow rote of false lovers, Duc Jasoun,
> Thow sly devourere and confusioun
> Of gentil wemen, tender creatures,

Thow madest thy recleymyng and thy lures
To ladyes of thy statly aparaunce,
And of thy words farced with plesaunce,
And of thy feyned trouthe and thy manere,
With thyn obesaunce and humble cheere,
And with thy counterfeted peyne and wo.[54]

And Chaucer's legend of Ariadne, another narrative illustrating "the grete untrouthe of love," correspondingly presents Theseus as a "false lovere [who] begyles / His trewe love."[55] The legacy of Chaucerian-tinged Ovidianism in the mid-Tudor era extends well beyond the corresponding citation of unfaithful classical heroes in *The Copy of a Letter* or *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*. Indeed, for another representative example, one might look to the Heroidean piece entitled "The lady forsaken of her lover, praieth his returne, or the end of her own life" in Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* (1557). There, the "wery" female plainant addresses a male who "sw[o]re [he] loved [her] best" only to leave her for another.[56] Comparing her "present painful state" to that of "poore Dido" in a manner that sounds very Whitney-like indeed, the speaker pertinently recalls how "false Eneas did hym stele" away from the Carthaginian queen and, "Regarding not what he had sed," thus "left [her] slepyng in [her] bed."[57]

One reason why the identification of *The Copy of a Letter* as a response to *The Heroycall Epistles* has taken such a firm hold in scholarly literature is, no doubt, the historical plausibility of this suggestion.[58] How else would a female author of Whitney's relatively undistinguished social status have accessed classical texts if not via a handy English translation? As argued above, moving away from the firm framing of Whitney as a Turbervillean disciple allows us to resituate *The Copy of a Letter*'s Heroideanism, inviting us to place this work within the broader milieu of a Chaucerian-inflected mid-Tudor literary

culture and to give a new primacy to Whitney's much wider range of English vernacular precedents and analogues. That said, we should also query whether Whitney's undoubted awareness of works such as *The Legend of Good Women* or the female-voiced complaints in Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* and contemporary ballad culture can fully account for the *The Copy of a Letter*'s sophisticated engagement with Ovid's *Heroides*—and, in fact, with the Roman poet's wider oeuvre.

If chronology indicates that she was not reliant on Turberville's *Heroycall Epistles*, we must weigh the increased likelihood that Whitney read Ovid in Latin. I am far from the first to submit that Whitney must have "had at least a smattering of formal education" since "her works reveal some knowledge of the classics," yet I would contend that the depth and breadth of her classical awareness remains generally underappreciated.[59] On this point, I would reiterate the recent comments of Stapleton, who, noting that "virtually all her commentators insist [Whitney] knew no Latin," observes that where and how she "[r]etrieved … obscure information" about Ovid's oeuvre therefore "remains mysterious."[60] Perhaps rather too much has been read into Whitney's seemingly autobiographical self-portrait as a domestic servant in her second work, *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573), and rather too little into her claim that she is so overly familiar with the contemporary humanist canon as to have "waxt wery" of re-reading authors like Mantuan, Virgil, and Ovid.[61]

Assuming that Whitney accrued her knowledge of Ovid exclusively through her acquaintance with key Middle English precursors and mid-Tudor lyrics raises particular problems for our interpretation of the "Admonition." In *The Copy of a Letter*'s second missive, Whitney's epistoler makes a direct reference to what "Ovid … [wrote] within his Arte of love," or *Ars Amatoria*—a mock-didactic guide to seduction that was not destined to be fully translated into English for many decades to come. This text is, Whitney's persona accurately suggests, where deceitful men might learn the particular "knacke" of "wet[ting]

their hand[s], & touch[ing] their eies / so oft as teares they lacke," and she aligns the *Ars Amatoria*'s tutelage with a more general cultivation of male duplicity.[62] It is admittedly possible that Whitney could have learned of the *Ars Amatoria*'s rather scurrilous reputation via passing references in earlier English texts. To take one example, a poem entitled "Of the sutteltie of crafty lovers" found in *Songes and Sonettes* reports:

> Such waiward waies have some when folly stirres their braines
> To fain and plain full oft of love, when lest they fele his paines.
> And for to shew a griefe such craft have they in store,
> That they can halt and lay a salve wheras they fele no sore.
> …….
> one of these which haue old Ovids arte in ure,
> Can seke the wayes unto their minde a woman to allure.
> As round about a hyve the Bees do swarme alway,
> So round about the house they prease wherin they seke their pray.
> And whom they so besege, it is a wonderous thing,
> What crafty engins to assault these wily warriers bring.[63]

However, there are particular features of the "Admonition" that make it seem as though Whitney had a more comprehensive knowledge of the *Ars Amatoria* and its contents than could have been harvested from such brief literary citations.

Whitney's epistoler is correct when she contends that the *Ars Amatoria* teaches men to "wet their Cheekes by Art."[64] As the relevant passage in Ovid's text puts it,

> *Et lacrimae prosunt: lacrimis adamanta movebis:*
> *Fac madidas videat, si potes, illa genas.*
> *Si lacrimae (neque enim veniunt in tempore semper)*

Deficient, uda lumina tange manu.

> [Tears too are useful; with tears you can move iron; let her see, if possible, your moistened cheeks. If tears fail (for they do not always come at need), touch your eyes with a wet hand.][65]

Moreover, the moralizing yet world-weary tone that Whitney's epistoler takes in this letter bears a striking, yet curiously inverted, resemblance to the narrative persona of the *praeceptor amoris* that Ovid himself adopts throughout his amatory canon. And it also bears noting that the imagery of fishing as amatory pursuit—though, admittedly, a commonly recycled metaphor in early modern literature—is one that memorably recurs throughout Ovid's poetic corpus, with the highest concentration of such instances appearing in Book 1 of the *Ars Amatoria*.[66] It seems hardly coincidental, then, that subsequent to citing Ovid's "Arte of love" by name, Whitney's "Admonition" devotes more than thirty lines to exploring "the Fish that reason lacks" as a metaphor for the beguiled, rhetorically captivated woman.[67]

If Whitney knew the Latin *Ars Amatoria* as well as it appears, it seems only reasonable to assume that she knew Ovid's *Heroides* in Latin, too. Although Whitney's poetry is also clearly steeped in the Chaucerian-inflected Ovidianism typical of the mid-Tudor era, she seems also to have had a means of accessing information about Ovid and his Latin works that was not solely restricted to gleanings from earlier English literature. In other words, her familiarity with Ovid's poetic corpus indicates either that she read Latin herself or was in the habit of conversing with someone who did (and who was both willing and able to convey a detailed knowledge of Ovid's works to her at second-hand).

Whitney and Pyndara

In the previous section of this essay, I sought to demonstrate how reading *The Copy of a Letter* as a work that predates rather than postdates *The Heroycall Epistles* may change our

perception of the former. Whitney's work may look, on the one hand, more Chaucerian and more intimately connected to a wider range of early and mid-Tudor texts. On the other hand, it may also look more learned and more decidedly humanist in orientation—quite possibly a direct response to Ovid's Latin poetry. In this essay's final section, I want to turn, by way of conclusion, to revisit the mystery of *The Copy of a Letter*'s relationship with Turberville's *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets.*

That Whitney's epistolary persona and Turberville's Pyndara sound alike is clear, but what we should make of this fact is less so. There are simply too many confounding variables to say with any degree of confidence whether correspondences in language and imagery mean that Whitney was echoing Turberville or vice versa. Our inability either to precisely date the lost first edition of Turberville's auto-miscellany or to definitively pin down the year and even form in which "To her unconstant Lover" and the "Admonition" first circulated in print prohibits us from making any declarative statements about chronology. Furthermore, the fact that the first edition of Turberville's work does not survive means that it cannot be established with any certainty whether the Whitney-like poems of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* were present in the auto-miscellany's earliest instantiation or if they were added only later in the expanded second edition. Paratextual materials certainly refer to the fact that the author produced "moe Sonets" at some point leading up to 1567. Turberville's designation of these additions as "Sonets"—which, as Cathy Shrank has shown, was a fairly broad generic term in mid-Tudor usage—may imply that at least some of the supplementary poetry was amatory in nature.[68] It is therefore entirely possible that Turberville's extra "Sonets" included pieces in Pyndara's voice such as "Counsell returned" and "The aunswere of a woman to hir Lover"—in other words, those poems that seem closest to the Is. W. epistles in *The Copy of a Letter*, texts which certainly had been published well before the second edition of *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* appeared in print.

One way that we might logically account for the conceptual and textual resemblances between "To her unconstant Lover," the "Admonition," and the Pyndara materials in *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* would be to posit, as Heale has, that Whitney drew inspiration from verse letters found in the now-missing first edition of Turberville's auto-miscellany.[69] This would mean that she partially modelled her own female persona in *The Copy of a Letter* upon that of a fictive, Heroidean-sounding woman as ventriloquized by a male contemporary who was then gaining visibility as "the most important professional poet in London."[70] If the emergence of Whitney's epistles did indeed postdate the publication of Turberville's relevant female-voiced pieces, this also raises the slightly uncomfortable likelihood that the voice of Whitney's epistoler—so often acclaimed in our own time for its apparent proto-feminism—would have been ironized for mid-Tudor readers *au courant* with the latest developments in English poetry. After all, such audiences would have recognized that, despite her mythologically allusive denigrations of male fidelity, the fickle Pyndara ultimately proves to be the "unconstant" party in *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*, romantically betraying and abandoning the ever-faithful Tymetes before the end of Turberville's sequence. And yet another distinct and intriguing possibility exists. Given what we can reconstruct of these texts' chronology, it seems just as reasonable to assume that Whitney influenced Turberville's Heroidean aesthetics as it is to suppose that Turberville influenced Whitney's. I want, then, to conclude with the following observation: it may well be the case that the man emerging as "the most important professional [male] poet in London" in the mid-1560s, in fact, modeled the voice of his epistolary heroine Pyndara upon a female contemporary's pre-existing Ovidian persona.

[1] Raphael Lyne, "Writing Back to Ovid in the 1560s and 1570s," *Translation and Literature* 13, no. 2 (2004): 151.

[2] Rosalind Smith, "'Woman-Like Complaints': Lost Love in the First Part of *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*," *Textual Practice* 33, no. 8 (2019): 1344; Michelle O'Callaghan, "London and the Book Trade: Isabella Whitney, Jane Anger, and the 'Maydens of London,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Women's Writing in English, 1540-1700*, eds. Danielle Clarke, Sarah C. E. Ross, and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 294.

[3] Paul D. Stegner, "Complaint" in *The Oxford History of Poetry in English: Sixteenth-Century British Poetry*, eds. Catherine Bates and Patrick Cheney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 342; Paul A. Marquis, "Oppositional Ideologies of Gender in Isabella Whitney's *Copy of a Letter*," *The Modern Language Review* 90, no. 2 (1995), 317; Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 90.

[4] Belinda Jack*, The Woman Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 139; M. L. Stapleton, "Letters of Address, Letters of Exchange," in *A Companion to Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Catherine Bates (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 367.

[5] Felicity Sheehy, "Reading Isabella Whitney Reading," *Studies in Philology* 118, no. 3 (2021): 495.

[6] Ann Rosalind Jones, "Nets and Bridles*:* Early Modern Conduct Books and Sixteenth-Century Women's Lyrics," in *The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and Sexuality*, eds. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (London: Methuen, 1987), 65; Tina Kronitiris, *Oppositional Voices: Woman as Writers and Translators in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1992), 153 n 10; Mary Ellen Lamb, "Isabella Whitney and

Reading Humanism," in *Women's Bookscapes in Early Modern Britain: Reading, Ownership, Circulation*, eds. Leah Knight, Micheline White, and Elizabeth Sauer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 46.

[7] Elizabeth Heale, "Misogyny and the Complete Gentleman in Early Elizabethan Printed Miscellanies," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 246.

[8] Florence Verducci, *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart: "Epistulae Heroidum"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 15.

[9] References to Tottel's *Songes and Sonettes* throughout this essay refer by page number to the influential, revised second edition of 1557, as edited by Paul A. Marquis: *Richard Tottel's Songes and Sonettes*: *The Elizabethan Version* (Tempe: ACMRS, 2007), 24–25, 171, 145–46, 119–20, 206, 13–14, 17–18.

[10] Barnabe Googe, *Eglogs, Epytaphes, and Sonettes* (STC 12048; London, 1563), sigs. C3r–C7r.

[11] I refer by page number to the 1584 edition of *A Handefull of Pleasant Delites*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins: *A Handful of Pleasant Delights* (1924; New York: Dover, 1965), 12–14, 50–51, 56–57, 68–69. For a suggestion that Whitney herself may have authored "The complaint of a woman Lover," see R.J. Fehrenbach, "Isabella Whitney and the Popular Miscellanies of Richard Jones," *Cahiers Elisabéthains* 19 (1981): 85–87.

[12] Turberville's translation included not only the twenty-one letters of the *Heroides* generally regarded as genuine today, but also three spurious replies (from Ulysses to Penelope, Demophoon to Phyllis, and Paris to Oenone) penned in the fifteenth-century by Angelo Sabino. On the Sabino letters, see Lyne, "Writing Back," 145–46.

[13] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993); Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, and Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[14] I have silently regularized early modern usage of u/v and i/j here and throughout this essay.

[15] Throughout this essay, I employ William C. Dowling's terminology of "epistoler" and "lector," as defined in *The Epistolary Moment: The Poetics of the Eighteenth-Century Verse Epistle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 12.

[16] Isabella Whitney, *The Copy of a Letter* (STC 25439; London, c. 1566), sig. A2r. Subsequent references to *The Copy of a Letter* are parenthetical. For Whitney as "Tudor *herois,*" see Stapleton, "Letters of Address," 366.

[17] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sig. A3v.

[18] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sig. A3v.

[19] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sigs. A5v, A8v.

[20] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sigs. A6v, A6r.

[21] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sigs. A7v.

[22] Here and throughout this essay, I have, for clarity, consistently referred to the epistles of the *Heroides* by the numbers used in modern editions of the text (which vary somewhat from those found in Turberville's translation).

[23] On the Heroidean character of this auto-miscellany, see Lindsay Ann Reid, "'The Argument to the Whole Discourse' and Other Etiological Tales in Turberville's *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets*," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts, VI: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2019), 121–41.

[24] Melih Levi, "George Turberville, Constancy, and Plain Style," in *Audience and Reception in the Early Modern Period*, eds. John R. Decker, Mitzi Kirkland-Ives (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

[25] George Turberville, *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* (STC 24326; London, 1567), sig. B3r.

[26] Heale, "Misogyny", 246.

[27] Turberville, *Epitaphes*, sigs. D3r–D4v.

[28] Turberville, *Epitaphes*, sig. D4r.

[29] Turberville, *Epitaphes*, sigs. E6r, E7r.

[30] Turberville, *Epitaphes*, sigs. E6v, E7v; Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sigs. A6r, A7v.

[31] Hyder E. Rollins, "New Facts about George Turbervile," *Modern Philology* 15, no. 9 (1918): 129–54.

[32] Edward Arber, ed., *A Transcript of the Register of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640 A.D.,* 5 vols. (London, 1875–94), I:328.

[33] Arber, *Transcript*, I:329.

[34] Arber, *Transcript*, I:335.

[35] On Bynneman's multiple entries for Turberville's *Eglogs*, see Arber, *Transcript*, I:334, 340. Of potential interest here is the fact that Whitney mentions reading Mantuan at the outset of *A Sweet Nosgay*—though it is not certain she specifically refers to Turberville's English translation: *A Sweet Nosgay* (STC 25440; London, 1573), sig. A5v.

[36] Arthur Golding, *The Fyrst Fower Bookes of P. Ovidius Nasos Worke, Intitled Metamorphosis* (STC 18955; London, 1565), sig. A1v.

[37] Thomas Peend, *The Pleasant Fable of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis* (STC 18971; London, 1565), sigs. A2r–A2v.

[38] Turberville, *Epitaphes*, sig. *2r.

[39] Rollins, "New Facts," 154. This dating is upheld in Hankins, *The Life and Works*, 35.

[40] Rollins, "New Facts," 132.

[41] George Turberville, *The Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso* (STC 18940; London, 1567), π8r–π8v.

[42] Turberville, *Epitaphes*, sig. *5r.

[43] Arber, *Transcript*, I:329.

[44] Notably, the particular dramatic situations (married love, adulterous/incestuous love) recalled in *Heroides* 1 and 4 mean that these letters stand out as some of the epistles in Ovid's collection to which Whitney's pieces in *The Copy of a Letter* bear the *fewest* superficial resemblances.

[45] Lynette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England: "Why on the Ridge Should She Desire to Go?"* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 133.

[46] Michelle O'Callaghan, "'My Printer must, haue somwhat to his share': Isabella Whitney, Richard Jones, and Crafting Books," *Women's Writing* 26, no. 1 (2019): 18.

[47] O'Callaghan, "'My Printer," 18. O'Callaghan's argument is further developed by Kirk Melnikoff in "Isabella Whitney amongst the Stalls of Richard Jones," in *Women's Labour and the History of the Book in Early Modern England*, ed. Valerie Wayne (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 147–48.

[48] On Jones's career, see Kirk Melnikoff, "Richard Jones (*fl.* 1564–1613): Elizabethan Printer, Bookseller and Publisher," *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography* 12, no. 3 (2001): 153–84.

[49] Hyder E. Rollins, ed., *A Handful of Pleasant Delights (1584) by Clement Robinson and Divers Others* (1924; New York: Dover, 1965), viii. For *A Handefull*'s registration, see Arber, *Transcript*, I:313.

[50] For Jones's repeated fines, see Arber, *Transcript*, II:847, 849, 854.

[51] Recent examples of such readings include: Melnikoff, "Isabella Whitney"; O'Callaghan, "London and the Book Trade"; and Lindsay Ann Reid, "The (Lost) Tune of 'Raging Love' and its Reverberations in Isabella Whitney's *Copy of a Letter*," *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 102, no. 1 (2020): 103–120.

[52] Maggie Ellen Ray, "'The Simple Fool Doth Trust / Too Much before He Try': Isabella Whitney's Revision of the Female Reader and Lover in *The Copy of a Letter*," *Early Modern Women* 6 (2011): 131; Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540–1620* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 45; Allison Johnson, "The 'Single Lyfe' of Isabella Whitney: Love, Friendship, and the Single Woman Writer," in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700,* eds. Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, and Lorna Hutson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 124.

[53] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. Larry D. Benson, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), lines 1254–59.

[54] Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, lines 1368–76.

[55] Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, lines 1890, 2226–27.

[56] Tottel, *Songes and Sonettes*, 145.

[57] Tottel, *Songes and Sonettes*, 146.

[58] Another reason may be a false sense of parallelism: Whitney's later *Sweet Nosgay* (1573) *is* explicitly positioned by the author as a response to a male contemporary's slightly earlier work—in that instance, Hugh Plat's *Flouers of Philosophy* (1572).

[59] Betty Travitsky, "The 'Wyll and Testament' of Isabella Whitney," *English Literary Renaissance* 10, no. 1 (1980): 78.

[60] Stapleton, "Letters of Address," 368.

[61] Whitney, *Nosgay*, sig. A5v.

[62] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sig. A6r.

[63] Tottel, *Songes and Sonettes*, 203.

[64] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sig. A6r.

[65] Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* in *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. J. H. Mozley, rev. G.P. Goold (1929; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004): 1.659-62.

[66] See, for example, Ovid, *Ars Amatoria,* 1.45–50, 387–96, and 755–70.

[67] Whitney, *Copy of a Letter*, sig. A8v.

[68] On the remarkably wide range of poems classified as "sonnets" by Turberville and his contemporaries, see Cathy Shrank, "'Matters of Love as of Discourse': The English Sonnet, 1560–1580," *Studies in Philology* 105, no. 1 (2008): 30–49.

[69] Heale, "Misogyny", 246.

[70] Rollins, "New Facts," 136.