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Sensorial Intermedialities in Roman Letters: Cicero, Horace, and Ovid

<https://doi.org/10.1515/tc-2019-0002>

Abstract: In recent years, much progress has been made towards elucidating the function of ekphrasis in Roman epistolography, especially with relation to the writings of Seneca and Pliny. Following on from these precedents, this article mines the epistles of three prominent Roman letter-writers, Cicero, Horace, and Ovid, for their intermedial elements. The motifs of oral quotations, handwriting, and human tear stains, which interweave the sources analysed, are shown not only to straddle the borders between distinct media, but also to engage with multiple senses as a result of their multiple medialities. Oral quotations integrate speech into written texts and thus necessitate both sight and hearing. Handwriting likewise consists of both a ‘basic mediality’ – the visual – and a ‘qualified mediality’ of chirographic distinctiveness, and thus necessitates not only perception via sight but also recognition. Tear stains, which range from the actual smudges in Cicero’s missives to metaphorical ones in Tears don’t feature in Horace’s letters. Ovid’s epistles, are in turn geared both towards sight and touch, since they simultaneously alter the letter’s appearance and surface. However, these intermedial connections have different effects in prose and poetry epistles: they enable the former to transcend the very category of ‘letter’, but confine the latter within the epistolary genre by characterising them in material terms.

Keywords: Epistolography, Cicero, Horace, Ovid, intermediality, mediality, multisensoriality, letters

This chapter aims to make advantage of brevity by pointing, only, towards possible ways ancient letters could be assessed in light of intermedial theory. Three Romans, Cicero, Horace and Ovid, are read here both in relation to each other and according to three particular compositional features of their epistolary works which can be deemed to align with some of the basic terminologies of intermedial theory. I will argue that these features of epistolary composition – specifically, oral quotations, the sender’s handwriting, and the stains said to be left by the sender’s tears – read productively as various types of ‘intermedial connec-

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tions', which bond the artifact of the letter to extrinsic social habits and cultural practices for a variety of purposes, certainly rhetorical and perhaps phenomenological. The three main categories of mediality, namely 'basic', 'qualified' and 'technical', come into clearer focus when these epistolary features are interpreted as intermedial connections.¹ Because the artistic works under consideration in this chapter are literary in form, instances of connection between medialities are semiotic in nature, since compounds of medial categories in literature are made predominantly by means of reference, or address, from the literary medium to the extraneous medial phenomenon.² However, the possibility that connections between medial forms in Roman letters may be other than referential, even material or substantive, will be considered. Finally, as a further point of consideration, when these intermedial connections and medial categories in Cicero's *prose letters* are read in conjunction with those in his Roman inheritors who composed letters *in poetic form*, intermedial theory can provide insight into ways later epistolographers engaged creatively with the form and legacy of Cicero's epistolary corpus.

With regard to the effects and purpose of the three types of intermedial connections I identify here, I propose that quotations, handwriting, and tears appeal to and act upon three corresponding sensory faculties of the letter's recipient. First, oral quotations cue the auditory faculties of the reader; the spoken quality of reported discourse is foregrounded by the epistolographer in productive tension with the script of the letter as artifact. Quotations acquire force in virtue of the condition of their 'basic mediality' of sound, and can appear as one of two types of 'qualified mediality', either 'aesthetic', most commonly in the form of poetry, or 'non-aesthetic', discourse either spoken or overheard by the epistolographer. Second, the sender's handwriting makes use of its condition as an artificial image, a 'basic mediality' which is essentially visual, and also of the 'qualified mediality' of its chirographic distinctiveness, in order to mediate

1 Technical language is borrowed here from the recent work of Bruhn 2016, 13–22, who surveys and distills the history of intermedial theory. A 'basic' mediality would be the fundamental, constitutive element by which an artificial product affects human sense (sound, tone, rhythm, words, color, texture, still or moving image, etc.). A 'qualified' mediality refers to the form into which basic medialities are arranged, and may be broadly categorized as either 'aesthetic' (poem, symphony, etc.) or 'non-aesthetic' (legal document, newspaper article, etc.). And 'technical' mediality is the corporeal or material-technological interface from which the artificial product mediates (paper, canvas, projection screen, etc.).

2 Alternatively known as 'intermedial reference', which consists in any reference made in literature to other artistic or medial forms like music, painting, film, etc.; cf. Rajewsky 2005, 52–53. Ekphrasis would be the *locus classicus*.

socially determined signals exclusively to the faculty of sight of the letter's recipient. Third, the stains and smudges on the papyrus, whether actual in the original letters of Cicero or purported in Horace's and Ovid's poetic letters, made by tears of a sender in distress can be said to mediate not only with the recipient's eyes but potentially with the recipient's sense of touch, as the 'technical mediality' that is the paper of the letter itself is materially compromised and altered by contact with the lacrimal substance.

Throughout this chapter I wish to make a further argument that these three sensory intermedial connections and the categories of mediality which subtend them function differently in their capacity to act upon human senses depending on whether the genre of the letter is prose or poetry. In prose letters of Cicero, intermedial connections serve to affect a transcendence of the letter as an artifact. Cicero's appeals to the senses of sound, sight, and touch aid the reader in looking past the material limitations of the missive as an inferior substitute for the sender himself; these intermedial connections conjure a sensorially defined proxy of the sender or his social environment to mitigate the shortcomings of the letter for which Cicero frequently begs apology. In poetic letters of Horace and Ovid, these same types of intermedial connections serve the converse purpose, to reaffirm and reinforce the defining material qualities of letters. Poetic letters make a curiously pronounced and consistent effort to draw attention to their medial identity as scripted artifacts in ways markedly different from Cicero's epistolary practice. These differences in the function of intermedial connections are predicated, I suggest, on fundamental, if always negotiable, differences in the modalities of reception of prose and poetic letters, for prose letters can be regarded, in the first instance, as intended to be read in solitude prior to communal recitation or publication, while poetic letters, as poems, are composed to be listened to by an audience gathered for a recitation.³

³ Using the four categories of Elleström 2010, 17–24, the differences in the modalities of prose and poetic letters as distinct media are numerous: materially, prose letters exist in a physical sense in order to be apprehended visually in the first instance, while poetic letters do not need to be seen by an audience listening to a *recitator*, nor even held in the hand of one who has committed the poem to memory; sensorially, prose letters are apprehended by the eyes as well as the hands, while poetic letters need only affect the ear; spatio-temporally, prose letters are defined by their dimensional and material qualities and may be read, in part or in whole, multiple times, while poetic letters can be apprehended independent of their material-aesthetic features and are typically bound to a fixed, sequential iteration; semiotically, the prose letter is designed for interpretation by a particular reader in the first instance, while poetic letters always lend their messages and meanings to a more general audience beyond the ostensible addressee.

Obviously this differentiation between the private and public consumption of Roman letters is schematic and reductive; there is reason to believe writers composed letters with a mindfulness of the possibility they could be read aloud upon receipt.⁴ For the purposes of this chapter, however, this distinction between prose and poetry will be applied to elucidate better the potential of intermedial connections in their particular discursive environments. The following observations about Cicero's letters present a necessarily provisional provocation, but they outline normative platforms to evaluate the same epistolary features which occur in the works of his literary inheritors.

1 Attuning epistolography (or, 'Thus said/wrote the poet')

Regarding Cicero it is safe to say that letters are the form of communication most embarrassed by their own medial condition. Epistolary discourse is defined as a frustrated version of the qualified mediality of live conversation or public speech. As Cicero frequently mentions, especially to his close acquaintances, letters are a poor substitute for being there in person, and at best create an illusion of a face-to-face conversation.⁵ Writing can never fully recapture the myriad permutations of facial expression and non-verbal signals which can be easily apprehended by the eyes during an interpersonal interaction.⁶ Letters require careful elaboration if they are to be sufficient testimony of a true friend's esteem and concern, as when Atticus had to take pains to reassure Cicero that he need only send a letter rather than travel to meet with him in person.⁷ Indeed, one of the highest forms of praise a letter can receive is that it is worthy of being read aloud in a gathering for the pleasure of others; in becoming a performance piece such a letter would in

⁴ A complex issue: see, for instance, White 2010, 89–99.

⁵ For how Cicero's letters compensate for the intimacy of the absent person, see, for example, De Giorgio 2015, 87–106; Eden 2012, 11–48; White 2010, 18–21. For Cicero, even if he has nothing new to share with Atticus, the act of writing to a close friend can be an end in itself, since writing can be a visual proxy for speaking with someone (Cic. *Att.* 12.53).

⁶ Speech act theory has crystallized the differences between written and spoken style; cf. Johnson 2010, 17–25. Cicero, himself aware of the inadequacy of script, does his best to reassure his friend Ligarius that his conversation with Caesar left a positive outlook for his restoration from exile based on Caesar's eyes, face and nonverbal cues, more easily perceived than reported in writing (Cic. *Fam.* 6.14.2).

⁷ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 13.47.

effect transcend its textual constraints.⁸ Inasmuch as they can only ever aspire to replacing oral communication, Cicero's letters are explicitly aware of their technical medialities (paper or tablets) and of their basic and qualified medialities (written words, discourse).

If orality presumes communal engagement and physical presence, and if epistolary script presumes privacy and separation from community, then letters, whenever they take the opportunity to 'sound off' and appeal to the ear of their recipient, can be interpreted as extending beyond their scripted limitations. Quotations of oral discourse, when the sound of the human voice is markedly foregrounded on the page, are therefore an ear-catching locus where the tension between the basic medialities of sound and script can be evaluated.⁹ Moreover, this tension between orality and writing can be analyzed in quotations both poetic (i. e. 'aesthetic qualified mediality') and non-poetic ('non-aesthetic qualified mediality'). The genre of the letter itself, whether it is prose or poetry, also needs to be taken into account when evaluating quotations. In light of these discursive possibilities, four possible configurations of generic and medial types are possible when evaluating quotations in letters: prose letters which quote prosaic and poetic discourse, and poetic letters which (claim to) quote discourse which could be either prosaic or poetic. This latter category will be the more intriguing from the standpoint of intermedial theory, especially in light of Cicero's habits of quotation in his letters.

Poetic quotations in Cicero have been catalogued and surveyed with scholarly interest, and only some general observations about his use of poetic quotations are necessary here. Quotations in Cicero have been characterized 'self-directed' insofar as they are used for protreptic purposes to frame a difficult social or political situation and also to cast Cicero and his acquaintances into various theatrical or mythical roles of the original context of the quote.¹⁰ Notably, quotations are almost always introduced as being *spoken* by a poet, whether named or not; in terms of medialities, the orality of poetry foregrounded by 'thus spoke the poet' ('*ut ait poeta*') can be actually heard as pushing at the boundaries of the scripted epistle. Nor are such parenthetical markers always necessary, since Cicero can deploy and weave quotes into his epistolary voice seamlessly. For example, in a reply to C. Trebatius Testa, a well-read young colleague who has been venting his despair at being cut off from the pleasures of Roman culture and civilization while in Gaul with Caesar, Cicero gifts his friend with various quotes from Ennius'

⁸ Messalla's report on Cicero's family is so artful as to merit public delivery (Cic. *Att.* 15.17.2).

⁹ Fuller treatment of this premise is by Tischer in this volume. For ways that verse quotations in Latin prose can be framed in formal terms of the Aristotelian enthymeme, see Mannering 2008.

¹⁰ Cf. White 2010, 99–115.

Medea. In these quotes Cicero teasingly and sympathetically portrays both himself and his recipient by turns in the role of the title character suffering from exile and estrangement, and provides Trebatius with resonant sound bites of cultured living to help return him, if only imaginarily, to his civilized community by way of medial qualities of metre, rhythm, musicality, stagecraft, cultural display, etc., which define poetic quotations.¹¹ If it can be agreed that oral discourse *bespeaks* community, then these poetic quotations reassuringly take Trebatius out of his remote and isolated predicament and bring him home to his familiar milieu.

Finally, by virtue of the fact that poetic quotations, with or without introductory markers like ‘thus said the poet’, can be used more than once, quotations in Cicero can be said to be characterized by a quality of iterability. In six letters Cicero quotes Homer’s Hector with ‘I feel shame before the Trojans’ to cast himself as arch-defender of republican values and the Optimate cause.¹² Poetic quotations in virtue of their qualified mediality as aesthetically conditioned discourse, and also of their basic medialities of metre and heightened rhythm, are iterable and have the potential for reuse and repurposing across multiple contexts.

The medial qualities of poetic quotes in Cicero are even more apparent when contrasted with oral quotations whose qualified mediality can be classified as non-poetic, or non-aesthetic, in nature – that is, *oratio recta* reported from a conversation or speech overheard. These non-aesthetic quotes are lacking in many of the qualities of their aesthetic-poetic counterparts, such as protreptic value, contextual versatility, and potential for reiteration. In serving the basic function of reportage, non-aesthetic quotes can typically be used only once in reference to a single event, and are not likely to be redeployed across different contexts. While non-aesthetic quotes have their own testimonial value within the rhetoric of epistolarity, they are relatively unassuming when evaluated according to aesthetic criteria.

However, when we consider the epistles of Horace, the rules which governed the medial aspects of oral quotations in Cicero’s prose letters change. Intermedial theory can make clear these differences. In striking contrast to Cicero, Horace embraces the scripted nature of his letters. These poems, which as such are produced for oral delivery and auditory reception in a communal setting, consist-

¹¹ Cf. Cic. *Fam.* 7.6. Trebatius himself seemed preoccupied with the proper domain and use of literature, song and ritual language; cf. Habinek 2005, 83. As the subsequent dedicatee of his *Topica*, the philosophically inclined Trebatius would mature from political protégé to literary conduit for Cicero to foster ties of friendship with a wider audience; cf. Baraz 2012, 156–173; Griffin 1995, 331–339.

¹² And consistently so in Greek (‘αἰδέομαι Τρώας’, Hom. *Il.* 6.441; Cic. *Att.* 2.5.1; 7.1.4; 7.12.3; 8.16.2; 13.13.2; 13.24.1); cf. Hoffer 2007, 87–106.

ently pose or masquerade as written texts reserved for singular recipients.¹³ The material inadequacies inherent to Cicero's letters are reconceived as empowering sources of capability by Horace. The act of writing itself defines the power not only of epistolographers but also of professional poets. Poems and songs (i. e. *carmina*) are portrayed as the products not of oral composition but of writing, as Horace imagines his friend and fellow poet Tibullus writing songs in the country.¹⁴ Even Homer and Ennius, the supreme oral epicists, are portrayed as crafting their poems by means of writing under the helpful influence of wine.¹⁵ Poems are to be judged not only for how they impress the ears but also the eyes of Caesar Augustus by the aesthetic polish of their script and material presentation.¹⁶ And a collection of poems should be a source of pleasure not only for the eyes but also for the hands in virtue of its tangible qualities as a book.¹⁷

In Horace's epistles there is paradoxical tension between writing and speaking unlike anything to be found in Cicero. The basic medialities of sound and script relate to each other differently in poetic epistles. Where Cicero effaces the overall technical mediality of letters as well as poetry, Horace embraces them by foregrounding the artistry of writing on paper or tablet. The import of the difference in this medial relationship is made evident in quotations. When intermedial connections in the form of either poetic or non-poetic quotations occur in Horace's epistles, the quoted oral discourse undergoes noteworthy transformations as it is garnered and blended into his poetic epistolary discourse.

First, with regard to poetic quotations in poetic letters, Horace may quote lines from a poet in the manner of Cicero, even naming the source author, as when he presents to Maecenas lines spoken by Telemachus *as though* direct and unexpurgated from Homer:

haud male Telemachus, proles patientis Vlixei:
 'non est aptus equis Ithace locus, ut neque planis
 porrectus spatiis nec multae prodigus herbae;
 Atride, magis apta tibi tua dona relinquam.'
 (Hor. *Ep.* 1.7.40–43)¹⁸

¹³ Cf. Morrison 2007, 107–131; McNeill 2001, 62–69.

¹⁴ Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 1.4.3.

¹⁵ Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 1.19.2–3, 6–7. On poets and their writing process, see also Hor. *Ep.* 1.3.30–31; 5.30–31; 15.25; McNeill 2001, 69–76.

¹⁶ Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 1.13.17.

¹⁷ Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 1.19.32–34.

¹⁸ 'Telemachus, son of suffering Ulysses, hit the mark when he said, 'Ithaca isn't the right place for horses, neither spread out with wide plains or abundant with grass. I'll leave the gifts as more suited to you, Menelaus.'

The illusion of transparency and accuracy of this poetic quote is conditioned by a formulaic marker similar to the epistolary practice exemplified in Cicero.¹⁹ This (non-)quote from Homer is mediated through several discursive filters and authorial decisions: the language, obviously, is changed from Greek to Latin; nine lines of Homer (cf. *Od.* 4.600–608) are condensed to three; and, more subtly, the robust epic-heroic hexameter is tempered by Horace's deconstructed epistolary hexameter attuned to everyday speech patterns. Unlike Cicero's practice, this quotation from another poem is nowhere near as direct as it purports to be.

Furthermore, according to Bruhn's intermedial terminology, this quotation may be categorized not as a straightforward intermedial connection between two genres of epistle and epic but more aptly as a form of 'transformational/transfermational' intermediality by the ways in which Horace adapts Homer. In transferring and transforming these lines from Homer, Horace does not so much 'medially project' *ipsissima verba* from Homer to accord synchronically with his epistle's narrative logic as much as he adapts and reimagines a full segment of Homer's narrative, thoroughly and diachronically, into his moral and epistolary sensibilities. Key to his project of adaptation, Horace emphasizes 'fitness' and appropriateness, ringing his three line re-composition of Telemachus' words with *aptus* to fasten Homeric sentiment tightly to his epistolarity. The reference here to Telemachus' portrayal of Ithaca's landscape is motivated by the epistolary context of the quotation, which serves to grace Horace's decline of an invitation from Maecenas to leave the tranquility of his residences in Tivoli and Taranto to come back to Rome (Hor. *Ep.* 1.744–45). Some degree of irony is detectable, though, when Horace draws the analogy between the scenario of Telemachus with his own. Like Telemachus, Horace feels at home with the landscape befitting his character, but, if we keep the rest of the epic analogy in mind, Maecenas' Rome is decidedly different from the Spartan landscape of his Homeric counterpart, Menelaus. Horace leaves Maecenas to the crowded, oppressive bustle of Rome, a terrain not exactly ideal for pasturing horses in the way Sparta was thought to be. In this example of transform-/transfermational intermediality, the poet attenuates the grandeur of the Homeric master-text to render the import of his 'quote' appropriate to his own sensibility, rationing (Horatianing, even) the wide expanses of epic pastures to suit his preferences aptly while also striking a modestly ironic contrast to Maecenas' understanding of the good life.²⁰

¹⁹ As when Cicero namedrops Terence for some pithy insight to his brother (*ut ait Terentius, Fam.* 6.12.25; cf. *Andria* 189).

²⁰ One tactic in this letter's overall strategy to find compromise between freedom and dependence in the patron-client relationship; cf. McCarter 2015, 135–137.

When we listen in to quotations of non-aesthetic discourse in Horace's poetic epistles, even more differences from Ciceronian epistolarity will strike the ear. What in Cicero's letters would otherwise be a speech act of historical but not aesthetic value, i. e. reported once and not iterable, becomes in Horace's letters aesthetic in value, and acquires all of the qualities that poetic quotations have in Cicero's letters. In Horace direct discourse either from anonymous or named individuals can be reported. An example of the former would be the mysterious voice which advises Horace to recuse himself from social engagement as well as certain poetic genres:

est mihi purgatam crebro qui personet aurem:
 'solue senescentem mature sanus equum, ne
 peccet ad extremum ridendus et ilia ducat.'
 (Hor. *Ep.* 1.1.7–9)²¹

It is unclear who speaks here, possibly the voice of public opinion or even some intrinsic *daimonion*. And the ludic metaphor of the horse, rider and racecourse maps onto his identity and prior lyric output in complex ways.²² But the qualified mediality of Horace's poetry into which he inserts the direct discourse enhances its language into something distinct from its non-aesthetic ordinariness. The salutary advice for Horace to free himself acquires universal, aphoristic validity when shaped into these two full lines of verse: the prominent sibilance in line 8 softens the sting of the harsh reality of Horace's senescent poetic vigor; the subsequent enjambment of 'stumbling' (*peccet*) foregrounds the risk of public (cf. *ridendus*) humiliation he runs; and the image of the fallen horse splayed out on its belly (*ilia ducat*) makes for a painful substitution of the poet's normal profession of producing verses (i. e. *versus deducere*).²³ When non-aesthetic discourse, whether from a public or internal voice of censure, is rendered into the aesthetics of Horatian epistle, the medially transformational effects result in this discourse gaining resonance and broader applicability which would otherwise be lacking in similar instances in Ciceronian epistle.

Finally, the discourse of reported conversation between named individuals undergoes more radical aesthetic alterations in Horace than what happens in Cicero.²⁴ An anecdote about L. Marcius Philippus, prestigious lawyer from a

²¹ 'The word now comes without letup to my unimpeded ears: 'The prudent thing is to let the old steed go free before he stumbles, a public punch-line on his last gasp.'

²² Cf. McCarter 2015, 26–31.

²³ Cf. Hor. *AP* 129; *Ep.* 2.1.225.

²⁴ One such example, for the sake of comparison, would be the reported dialogue between Cicero and Gaius Capito regarding Caesar (*Cic. Att.* 13.33a.1).

family of consuls, and Volteius Mena, a sidewalk vendor, serves as a cautionary tale about the loss of freedom that comes with client status.²⁵ But it can also illustrate how direct quotation of medially non-aesthetic discourse is altered by its insertion into the qualified mediality of hexametrical epistle. Horace captures the full arc of their relationship, from chance encounter on the street to Mena's calamitous experience running a farm. Their final exchange runs:

quem simul aspexit scabrum intonsumque Philippus,
 'durus' ait, 'Vultei, nimis attentusque uideris
 esse mihi.' 'pol, me miserum, patrone, uocares,
 si uelles' inquit 'uerum mihi ponere nomen.
 quod te per Genium dextramque deosque Penatis
 obsecro et obtestor, uitae me redde priori.'
 (Hor. *Ep.* 1.790–95)²⁶

Romans did not normally engage in dialogue with a mind to completing their interlocutor's hexameter, but this parlance can happen in the qualified mediality of Horatian epistle. To express his solicitous concern for Mena's appearance and wellbeing, Philippus makes productive use of enjambment (*esse mihi*), leaving the conclusion of his discourse-*as-verse* incomplete in order to compel his client to answer, thereby completing the rest of the hexameter while providing an explanation for his visible distress. The complicated relationship between patron and client is characterized on one level by superficial egalitarianism, conveyed through the symmetrical positioning of the verbs of speech (*ait*, *inquit*). But as critical words pile up in onerous pairs on the client (*scabrum-intonsum*; *durus-attentus*; *obsecro-obtestor*), it is Mena(/Horace) who feels the burden of dependence.

The finer differences in terms of mediality between conversation as reported here and one reported at length in a letter of Cicero's would warrant further consideration. However, what is noticeable in Horace is that just as these oral poems pose as scripted letters, aesthetic hexameters masquerade as quotidian discourse (i. e. *sermo*) in these intermedial connections. In Horace's poetic letters, which are attuned to the ear, non-aesthetic quotations become rhythmic to the point of becoming quotable and worthy of recitation in their own right. The transformative process which non-aesthetic direct discourse undergoes in the Horatian

²⁵ An anecdote charged with tense ambiguity; cf. McCarter 2015, 137–146.

²⁶ 'The moment Philippus saw Volteius grimy and disheveled he said, 'You seem to me to be under strain and too much work.' 'Patron,' he replied, 'if you want to call me by my true name, then call me unhappy. I beg you, by your guardian spirit, by your right hand, by your household gods, take me back to my previous life.'

missive renders the ordinary extraordinary, in contrast to the more aesthetically, if not rhetorically, limited possibilities of reportage in Ciceronian epistolarity.

2 In the field of vision: autograph letters

In this section I will focus on an intermedial connection which appeals exclusively to the faculty of sight, namely the unique style of the sender's handwriting. The variety of intermedial possibilities that a sender's handwriting can have in letters will become clearer when the poetic letters of Ovid are considered against Cicero's prose. Ovid's letters provide a testing ground to explore what can happen when a mediality which can be perceived only by the eye is replicated through poetry, an inherently oral discourse crafted for the ear.

Handwriting in Cicero's letters and the reasons which inform his and others' choices for autography have received scholarly attention.²⁷ It is worth stating explicitly, however unedifying the observation may be, that the hand script in the original letters of Cicero the man is forever lost to us. Whenever he mentions he is or is not writing in his own hand, therefore, we must acknowledge and overlook, momentarily, this disjunction between what is printed on the page before us and what is professed to be there. The ways in which types of handwriting are noted in Cicero's letters are myriad, but some explicit signal of its presence or absence is normally provided.²⁸ More than a basic mediality, the missing handwriting could be classified as a qualified mediality in its own right: it has unique aesthetic value which signals to the recipient's eye Cicero's manual and personal involvement, an indicator of the degree of his attention, concern and trust as sender. When writing to a close friend, Cicero begs Atticus to infer how busy he is since the letter has been dictated to a secretary.²⁹ Those letters written by Atticus' scribe Alexis give pleasure to Cicero by their similarity to Atticus' handwriting, but the evident differences, however subtle and, for the purposes of Cicero's wider readership, irrecoverable, also leave Cicero upset because they betray how ill Atticus must be feeling.³⁰ Handwriting in letters may also play a consequential, if not altogether

²⁷ Cf. White 2010, 64–67; Henderson 2007, 49–53.

²⁸ For example, a letter to Atticus begins in the hand of his secretary and alerts to a change to Cicero's own hand when he wishes to discuss the confidential matter of a will; the change in penmanship could not be detected by a reader other than Atticus without explanation provided (Cic. *Att.* 11.24.2).

²⁹ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 2.23.1.

³⁰ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 7.2.3.

reliable, role in forging political alliances. Munatius Plancus explains to Cicero that he was initially confident that Lepidus, before defecting to Antony, could be counted on to join the war effort because he trusted letters written in his own hand as indicators of his discretion and commitment.³¹

Cicero's epistolary corpus attests the social and even political significance of autography. The visual-aesthetic mediality of handwriting takes on new meaning, though, when we consider references to autography in letters composed to appeal to the ear by way of oral performance, rather than for ocular consumption in the first instance. Interestingly, nowhere in his epistles does Horace draw attention to the style of his own hand in his epistles. Ovid, however, makes considerable use of the intermedial significance of handwriting in his autobiographical letters from exile and in his fictional *Heroides*.³² In poetic epistles, composed not only for private consumption but with communal audiences in mind, descriptions of autography can be understood along hermeneutic lines similar to passages of ekphrasis. While not described to the same degree of detail as ekphrasis might be, the visual style of the handwriting in poetic letters is captured and conveyed in ekphrastically verbal ways, which are not intended to be seen on paper but to be visualized in the audience's imagination. Again, to state more of the obvious, poets do not need to design different styles of handwriting when fashioning literary epistolographers; when explicitly referring to the presence or condition of a character's handwriting, poets may presume literary facility on the part of their readership or audience to supply the chirographic variations in their own mind's eye. As a result, when image and narrative are linked at the synchronical nexus of an intermedial connection, similar to what might be experienced in moments of ekphrasis, there is an intriguing tension between the alleged visibility and condition of the sender's handwriting in the letter and the prosodic qualities of the poetry itself which attests its visibility.

In the opening of one of his exile letters to his wife, Ovid expects that she will immediately notice and wonder (*miraris*, *Ov. Tr.* 3.3.1) why the handwriting is not that of her husband (*quare / alterius digitis scripta sit*, 1–2). By anticipating her immediate misrecognition and confusion over the letter's handwriting, and by endeavoring to account for the uncharacteristic appearance of a letter ostensibly addressed by him to her, Ovid defines himself as a committed, caring husband who knows his wife's mind and the depth of her worry.³³ The psycho-

³¹ I. e. *credidi chirographis eius*, *Cic. Fam.* 10.21.1.

³² For the epistolary conventions in both collections, see Fulkerson 2016, 29–80; Spentzou 2003, 123–159.

³³ Elsewhere Ovid composes to immortalize his wife in poetry as Homer did for Penelope; cf. *Ov. Tr.* 1.6.21–22; McGowan 2009, 181–183.

logical strain of exile has weakened his physical health (*aeger eram*, 2) to the point he had to dictate his words; the extraordinary distance and strangeness of his environment (*aeger in extremis ignoti partibus orbis*, 3) imposes one more degree of distance between himself and his beloved addressee, as the preferred intermedial connection normally supplied by the qualified mediality of his own handwriting is further attenuated by its conspicuous absence. Even referring to his failed attempt at writing by the metonymy of fingers (*digitis*) is suggestive of the way in which his strength normatively connoted by his hand (i. e. *manus*) has been enervated and dispersed. It is in a sense different from Cicero's autographical letters, however, that the audience must imagine, rather than apprehend visually, this chirographic discrepancy. This letter in its medially aesthetic form as a poem presumes the recipient to be Ovid's wife but also a wider audience, who apprehend the features of Ovid's handwriting aurally as the letter is recited. In a letter to Aemilius Macer, himself a relative of Ovid's wife, the hand script is again identified with the poet himself, as both the recognizable features (cf. *notitia*, *Ov. Exp.* 2.10.5) of the script (cf. *manus*, 7) and the signet impression (*gemma*) on the wax seal risk fading from his friend's memory over time. Again, the chirographic style, although it purports to be manifestly evident to the eye, must be supplied by the imagination of the listener-recipient to this poem pretending to be an epistle. And yet, in this letter, there is a new possibility that Ovid may survive independent of his material, intermedial traits, as long as Macer's concern for Ovid himself endures (*exciderit tantum ne tibi cura mei*, 8).³⁴ Now and again, the qualified mediality that is the 'real' autography of Ovid himself is connected to his poetic letters as a medial projection of his selfhood defined chirographically. As an intermedial connection in a poem, though, Ovid's chirography is always originally fictitious, at once deriving its authority from autographic conventions as attested by Cicero while also fostering the innovation of epistolary tropes.

Ovid uses the medial possibilities of handwriting in greater variety in his earlier epistolary collection, the fictional, non-autobiographical *Heroides*. With almost Ciceronian chagrin, Ariadne acknowledges the limitations of letters as a substitute for the sender, and crafts a vivid portrait of her physical degradation to fill the mind, if not the actual eyes, of her lover Theseus (viz. *nunc...non oculis sed qua potes adspice mente*, *Ov. Her.* 10.135). Although her disheveled hair and tear-soaked clothes can only be reported, evidence of her corporeal discomposure is manifestly visible in the unevenness of her handwriting. Ariadne draws a clear

³⁴ Ovid's efforts to invest this poem with an aura of sacredness would add further appeal to Macer in his office as *vates*; cf. McGowan 2009, 154.

analogy between her body and the text on the page, shivering to an almost epic degree as ‘her body shakes like fields of grain whipped by northerly gales’ (*corpus ut impulsae segetes aquilonibus horret*, 139).³⁵ Her hand, as an extension of her body, is also unable to control itself under the psychological pressures resulting from abandonment, but the syntax of this couplet’s complementary pentameter condenses ideas which are kept conceptually separate in the hexameter. Where two nouns, *corpus* and *segetes*, are positioned as comparable to each other in the hexameter, in the subsequent pentameter a single noun is endowed with similar qualities which had defined these: ‘and the lettering printed by my quivering finger falters’ (*litteraque articulo pressa tremente labat*, 140). Just as *littera* fronts its line in clear symmetry with *corpus*, it is also modified by a participle (*pressa*) of the same meaning as what modifies fields of grain in the simile (*impulsae segetes*). The result of the pentameter’s deceptively straightforward syntax is to invert the roles of agents and objects in the hexameter: where the ‘corporeal grainfields’ are impacted by powerful natural forces, the lettering is pressed and distorted by the unreliable corporeal instrument that is (held in) the trembling forefinger (*articulo tremente*).³⁶ Just as Ariadne’s body is subject to overwhelming anxieties, the qualified mediality of her handwriting is subject to her bodily discomposure. The evenhanded symmetries and composure of this syntactically coordinated couplet work hard to guide Ariadne’s penmanship, strengthening the grip of the message while the hand itself falters (*labat*).³⁷

Pens are not the only tool which epistolographers can use to leave indelible markings in the *Heroides*. The dramatic stakes are higher in the subsequent poem, a suicide note by Canace who has been sentenced to death by her father, wind king Aeolus, in outrage over her incestuous affair. She begins by apologizing to her lover (and brother) Macareus for any illegible smears (*caecis ... lituris*, *Ov. Her.* 11.1) on her letter resulting from the blood spilled from her self-inflicted wound. In the third line the mechanics of her writing are visualized for the reader as the scroll on which the letter is currently being written is framed by the right hand which holds the pen (*dextra tenet calamum*, 3) and the left which holds the drawn sword (*strictum tenet altera ferrum*, *ibid.*): just as the pen in the right hand is positioned opposite the sword in the left, so too epistolary inscription is to be viewed as analogue to fatal incision. Here, just as Canace’s writing hand

³⁵ Ariadne’s horrified paralysis by the winds capsizes the intertextual reference to Aeneas fleeing from Carthage (*Verg. Aen.* 4.310), and may anticipate her theophanic encounter with Bacchus; cf. Battistella 2010, 101 n. 136.

³⁶ Cf. Battistella 2010, 104 n. *ad loc.*

³⁷ Despite being the spokeswoman for all abandoned women, Ariadne seems to exert the most influence over the stories of other women in this collection; cf. Fulkerson 2005, 137–142.

will belong to a bloodless corpse at letter's conclusion, the letter is intermedially determined as lifeless artifact once the technical mediality of paper is stained by the basic medialities of ink and blood. The words on the page are ultimately written in the hand of a dead woman, and, despite the cruel irony that her father will change his mind, no reply is possible.³⁸ The construal of pen and sword as one and the same in this letter might also be reflected in how she foresees the fate of her newborn child.³⁹ Sentenced by his grandfather to be exposed, the boy, she believes, will experience the day of his birth as one and the same as the day of his death (*haec tibi prima dies, haec tibi summa fuit*, 114).⁴⁰ As primacy and finality are *dialed* together into the ephemerality of the child's lifespan, the flow of Canace's ink on the page is ultimately sentenced at the last line (*mandatum persequar ipsa patris*, 127) to be replaced by fatal outpouring of blood. This letter is composed by two manual instruments, pen and dagger, which produce essentially different yet equally indelible fluids, ink and blood, which interact with and define the technical mediality of the page; one fluid makes communication possible in the qualified mediality of writing while the other permanently silences the sender's voice just as its capability to blot and smear threatens to render the words on the page unreadable.

Perhaps the most vivid, complex and varied use of scribal instruments is found in Dido's letter to Aeneas. She wishes that both her lover and we the wider audience could visualize the image of her in the act of writing (*adspicias utinam, quae sit scribentis imago*, *Ov. Her.* 7.183); and, similar to Canace, she has pen in hand and sword within reach (*scribimus, et gremio Troicus ensis adest*, 184), as one will imminently be replaced by the other. But the inscriptive actions and even the liquid substances which Dido must manage are more varied than Canace's. For one, Dido must anticipate not only the overflow of her life's blood but also struggle to write through copious tears: 'Down across my cheeks my tears will fall onto the drawn sword, which will soon be stained by blood instead of tears' (*perque genas lacrimae strictum labuntur in ensem, / qui iam pro lacrimis sanguine tinctus erit*, 185–186). The tears which fall down her cheeks to her sword prefigure the blood which will stain the Trojan's sword. With considerable prosodic space occupied by tears (*lacrimae*) in both lines of this couplet, face and sword are characterized in equal measure by tears and, thus, placed in conceptual equivalence with each other. Flecked with tears, both death-dealing weapon and parts of Dido's body undergo transformations of their surface appearances, changes

³⁸ Cf. Fulkerson 2005, 70–72, 82–86; Williams 1992, 201–209.

³⁹ Her letter is even characterized as a newborn baby; cf. Spentzou 2003, 156–157.

⁴⁰ Again she will be tragically mistaken; cf. Casali 1995, 510–511.

which could anticipate the transformative impact of these liquids once they are spilled on the material surface of the letter itself.⁴¹ Even the sword is a material realization of another lethal if metaphysical instrument, the invisible projectile weapon of love originally hurled at Dido's breast, itself the conventional metonymy for the psyche: 'Now is not the first time my breast is struck by a weapon: here is the site of the wound of savage love' (*nec mea nunc primum feriuntur pectora telo: / ille locus saevi vulnus amoris habet*, 189–190).⁴² The closing lines of this poem are overdetermined by various acts of staining, incising and imprinting, all of which expose the vulnerability of the technical mediality of the epistle just as Dido's body, mind and even the weapons, material or metaphysical, associated with her are subject to material alteration.

But Dido does even more than become the letter itself. The letter's last four lines are the most materially and medially complex as Dido turns her hand, literally, to the instrument and qualified mediality most suited to memorialization. By drafting the words to be engraved on her tombstone, Dido's pen and the elegiac couplet itself are refigured as chisel and epitaph respectively.⁴³ Such virtual transformations undergone by the writing tool and elegiac form are part of a broader pattern, for Dido anticipates two other, radical material transformations she will experience after death: first, her body will be turned to ash after cremation (*consumpta rogis*, 193), and she will be replaced, completely and ultimately, by her gravestone, as she identifies her selfhood with the artifact as such with 'I am inscribed' (*inscribar*, 193). The transformation of Dido into her tumulus is paralleled by the conflation of one mediality with another, for the tombstone's marble (cf. *marmore*, 194) is endowed not only with the power of speech but with the aesthetic quality of song, as the inscription is categorized generically as *carmen* (*ibid.*). As oral discourse is chiseled onto mineral edifice, Dido proves she has the power to make marble sing. The final couplet of the letter forms the epitaph: 'AENEAS PROVIDED THE CAUSE AND SWORD OF DEATH / DIDO DIED BY THE USE OF HER OWN HAND' (*PRAEBUIT AENEAS ET CAUSAM MORTIS ET ENSEM / IPSA SUA DIDO CONCIDIT USA MANU*, 195–196). Even though Aeneas may have provided the reason and means for Dido to kill herself, by concluding her letter with the emphasis on the actions of her hand (*usa manu*), Ovid's suicidal

⁴¹ Farrell 1998, 335–336, notes how through the spillage of various fluids here Dido's act of writing is made parallel to her act of suicide.

⁴² The multivocalic, parodic relationship between *Heroides* 7 and Virgil is discussed by Miller 2004, 57–72.

⁴³ Ovid's elegies feature more inscriptional formulae than any other Augustan poet, and it has been noted how his Dido asserts her agency through drafting her epitaph here and at *Fasti* 3.549–50; cf. Ramsby 2007, 115–121; Lindheim 2003, 97, 223 n. 86.

epistolographer reveals her extraordinary manual adroitness, that of someone capable of applying pen to paper as a medial analogue of chisel to stone – and, in a matter of moments, of sword to breast. As the pen she is holding in her hand is transmuted into both chisel and sword, Ovid’s epistolary Dido makes incisive comments and gestures by numerous technological means to fashion a nexus of multiple intermedial connections.

3 *Sunt lacrimae epistularum*

Finally, I will consider the intermedial function of human tear stains in letters, both literally and lacrimally. I begin from the premise that the sender’s attestation of his tears during the epistolographic act itself can plausibly be more than a social or cultural trope, that it is possible to imagine the script could be materially blotted and smeared, and even the papyrus tangibly warped, by the sender’s own tears. When the letter is altered in those spots where ophthalmic secretion makes contact with paper fibre, the artifact of the letter is materially transformed by the bodily testament of the sender’s distress. In terms of intermediality, such a material alteration resulting from contact between paper and saltwater can be classified first as ‘intermedial combination’, or compound of different material substances, according to historically attestable instances from Cicero, and also as ‘intermedial connection’, or reference, in the fictional context of a poetic letter. A partially dampened letter is to some degree categorically distinct from a letter which in its normative condition should be dry, intact and uncontaminated. Such contamination made by tears to the paper and to the script is detectable not only to the eye of the reader but also, potentially, to the sense of touch, as the warping of the papyrus can be felt by a recipient’s fingers. But tears themselves may also pose something of a challenge to medial theory: while paper is most rightly classified, using Bruhn’s terminology, as a technical mediality, it is not entirely clear whether we should construe them as basic or aesthetic medialities, for tears are not only bodily substances induced, say, by reflexive response to grit in the eye, but also socially and culturally significant, their production determined by the circumstances and reasons behind a person’s anguish.⁴⁴ Perhaps medial classification of tears can be only and always fluid, as the significance of tears on epistolary paper does vary from one author and situation to the next.

⁴⁴ Cf. Vingerhoets 2013; Kappas 2009, 419–438.

For Cicero, there is an antagonistic opposition between tears and epistolography, the production of the former compromising the latter. He is at his most tearful while writing from exile.⁴⁵ While in Thessalonica, on 5th October 58 BC, Cicero cannot bring himself to his wife and daughter without shedding copious tears (*non queo sine plurimis lacrimis scribere*, Cic. *Fam.* 14.2.1).⁴⁶ Cicero accepts full responsibility for his family's distress, and the act of responding by letter functions as an acknowledgement of his failure as husband and father to provide for their happiness (*ibid.*). Later, on 25th November, after learning of his wife's financial straits Cicero's epistolographical challenges worsen, as the force of his tears (*tanta vis lacrimarum*, Cic. *Fam.* 14.1.5) has intensified to the point of incapacitating him from writing anything more (*non queo reliqua scribere*; cf. 14.4.1). In both instances the production of letter and tears is synchronical. The tension between these processes may itself be sourced in the essential, material incompatibility between saltwater and paper, for in a letter written only two days later, Cicero indicates that his teary response nearly soaked (*prope delevi*, Cic. *Fam.* 14.3.1) three whole letters he received from a mutual friend reporting Terentia's predicament. Hyperbole notwithstanding, lacrimal saltwater is the enemy of letters, whether one is being composed or has just been received; when these two medialities are combined, tears can forestall the writing process as they threaten the letter's legibility and overall material integrity.

More insight into the cultural and literary value of tears for Romans can be found in Ovid's letters, where the poet taps the semiotic fluidity of teardrops for all their multivalence, but also uses their potential for intermedial connectivity to foster conceptual confluences. Apart from his elegiac output Ovid's autobiographical letters from exile can provide a broader context for the possible meanings of tears in various social circumstances, meanings which can help inform particular references to tears poured during the act of epistolography itself.⁴⁷ On the day of his departure from Rome, for instance, bystanders who had no prior connection to him are said to have given tears as proof of their sympathies (*lacrimas animi signa dedere sui*, Ov. *Tr.* 1.8.28). At this moment, tears function as an unambiguous signifier of mental disposition and solidarity. Tears may also substitute for words when grief overwhelms the ability to speak; whenever language is cut off by weeping (*si fletu scindentur verba*, Ov. *Exp.* 3.1.157), tears, noiseless and virtually insubstantial, are figured as having the physical weight of

⁴⁵ Cf. Kelly 2006, 110–125; Claassen 1999; Hutchinson 1998, 25–48.

⁴⁶ For the family situation during his exile, see Treggiari 2007, 56–75.

⁴⁷ Tears in Roman love elegy can be shed for humor and levity and even out of resentment; cf. Fögen 2009, 179–208; James 2003, 99–122.

the human voice (*lacrimae pondera vocis habent*, Ov. *Exp.* 3.1.158; cf. *Her.* 3.4).⁴⁸ And when an unnamed friend embraces Ovid to shed a teary goodbye upon his face, the poet goes as far as conflating the friend's tears with his words, as if oral discourse itself is liquefied into a manifestation of loyalty which Ovid can imbibe (*lacrimas ... tempore quas uno fidaque verba bibi*, Ov. *Tr.* 3.4.39–40). Lacking the capacity to express sound themselves, tears are nevertheless a tangible, even potable, form of speech.

In light of these various meanings and poetic figurations, the moments when tears (are said to) make contact with the paper of Ovid's letters can be considered, but under the qualification that 'paper' should be understood provisionally, since Ovid's letters, *qua* poetry, perform the act of letter writing to an audience who can listen to an oral delivery of his compositions as easily as read them in published form. Ovid's letters, that is, are not dependent primarily on the technical mediality of paper in the way Cicero's letters are, and in their capacity as oral art forms can forsake the material-technological projection surface that paper affords while an audience apprehends their content through their ears rather than eyes in the setting of a recitation. The purpose of Ovid's self-conscious inter-medial combinations between tears and ink upon his putatively material paper is to supplement the imagination of such an audience by compensating for the absence of an actual letter, *qua* technical mediality, in their hand. As with other types of epistolary intermedial connections, poetic letters use tears in order to sustain the fiction of the material letter, and even elaborate on the material harm they can do which is only mentioned in Cicero. Ovid imagines his third book of *Tristia* in a rough and sorry state, in one line making a punning correlation between their epistolary form (*littera*, Ov. *Tr.* 3.1.15) and the smears and erasures visible to the recipient (*suffusas ... lituras*, *ibid.*): these exile letters are littered, and literally, with smudges resulting from the poet's tears, which are recognized as causing actual harm to his physical work (*laesit opus lacrimis ipse poeta suum*, 16).⁴⁹ Because poetic letters do not come into actual contact with lacrimal fluids, the poet seems to go to somewhat greater lengths than Cicero to acknowledge the physical risks they pose.

The *Heroides* stand out for the way Ovid's fictional epistolographers explicitly draw the reader-listener's eye to the confluence of their tears with the act of writing letters. Ovid's Sappho confesses that writing to her fugitive lover is exac-

⁴⁸ Speech loss is concomitant with social death in the exile letters; cf. Natoli 2017, 80–139.

⁴⁹ A paronomastic reminder that all texts are subject to various forms of corruption; cf. Hinds 1985, 30 n12. Already in his first book of *Tristia* Ovid has used the elegiac mode to act out the exile's experience of sea journey; cf. Henderson 1997, 153–166.

erbat by an outpouring of tears from her eyes (*scribimus et lacrimis oculi rorantur abortis*, *Ov. Her.* 15.97), and forthrightly directs her addressee's attention to the stains they leave on a specific part of her letter. The explicit signposting – her direction to 'look closely' (*adspice*, 98) at the prominent smearing (*multa litura*, *ibid.*), the specificity of location (*in hoc loco*, *ibid.*) of the tears on the page – is symptomatic of the fiction of the materiality of the letter. Were this letter delivered in paper rather than oral form, the staining would be self-evident and could speak for itself, and not require such discursive measures to identify the lacrimal vestiges; the averred conspicuity of 'this locus' is belied by the fact no actual page is held in the listener's hand. Furthermore, in a way that is almost compensatory, Sappho's deictic markers function to control the flow of her tears: by irrigating her tears to 'this locus' (wherever that may be) on the letter, lacrimal overflow, which in its otherwise unpredictable effusiveness might damage an actual letter, is mitigated, and the intermedial effect is circumscribed as a splashy, provocative highlight.⁵⁰ As Sappho reaffirms the fiction of materiality of the poetic epistle, the boundaries around the tears provided by this imaginary locus provide reassurance the letter will not be ruined.

The purported visibility and tangibility of tears can also be used to bridge the physical distance between the recipient and the distraught sender. Stepmother Phaedra seals the last couplet of her epistolary imprecation with her tears (*addimus his precibus lacrimas*, *Ov. Her.* 4.175) for good measure (*quoque*, *ibid.*), but invites Hippolytus to look beyond the words on the page he is reading (*verba precantis / qui legis*, 175–176) and imagine he actually sees the author herself in the act of shedding them (*et lacrimas finge videre meas*, 176). As the prayers themselves (*precibus*) are identified with the person who is actively speaking them (*precantis*), so are the tears on the page (*addimus ... lacrimas*) to be seen (*videre*) not merely as dried, vestigial traces but as warm, flowing rivulets on the face of the writer herself (vividly conclusive *meas*). The lacrimal sphragis here brings the tearful Phaedra before the reader's eye, if not into our hands.⁵¹ Ariadne, too, uses her tears near the end of her letter to implore her lover Theseus to return, but packages them with strands of hair she has torn out in grief: 'Grief-stricken I show you what remains of my hair; I beg you by my tears, caused by your deeds'

⁵⁰ Her tears in particular may emblemize the liquidity of this poem's authorial identity and latent rivalry between Ovid and Sappho; cf. Rimell 2006, 149–154. My own emphasis is on the rhetorical and discursive choices which image authorial control as such, whether Ovid's or Sappho's.

⁵¹ The intimate tangibility of this teary coda which reaches the senses of the recipient would be consistent with the transgressive habits of this Phaedra who, unlike Euripides' housebound predecessor, abandons the limits of her home to hunt in wild spaces; cf. Bolton 2009, 278–280.

(*hos tibi qui superant ostendo maesta capillos; / per lacrimas oro, quas tua facta movent*, *Ov. Her.* 10.147–148). In this instance, however, the epistolary missive is figured in terms of Ariadne's anatomy and physical characteristics more generally. In sending the letter to Theseus, Ariadne intends for the reach of her hands to transcend the watery gulf between them (*tendo trans freta lata manus*, 146). And if these hands, weary from beating her breast (*plangendo ... pectora lassas*, 145), can metonymically be signified by her own handwriting, then for Theseus to read her letter is to see the physical toll his departure has taken on multiple parts of her body. Such intermedial connections to parts of Ariadne's corporeal self – breast, hand(script), hair, tears – in these the closing lines transmute the letter into an almost bodily representation of the woman herself.⁵² The special attention placed on her body serves ultimately to charge Ariadne's last plea for Theseus to turn his ship around before death reduces her to nothing but bones (*ossa*, 150), the mortal support structure which undergirds the various body parts and features Theseus has just glimpsed.

In all these examples Ovid draws attention to the ways the material integrity of the letters is compromised by contact with lacrimal fluids, and even how the poet's own body, like the paper itself, suffers fresh pains as he composes with tears.⁵³ Where Cicero only indicates, Ovid explores more fully a paradox inherent to the medial combination of saltwater and paper: the physical vestige of the epistolographer, who wants nothing more than to be present with the recipient, jeopardizes the very means of their communication, as tears dropped on the letters provide signs of their devotion and sincerity but also smear, compromise and potentially obliterate the words of the heart. Because of their medial fluidity, tears threaten to silence the sender's epistolary voice while simultaneously, combinationally, rendering partial contact with a vestige of the sender him- or herself visible, if not tangible.

⁵² Her powerlessness contrasts with Phaedra who in her sexual maturity can reach seductively beyond the confines of home and epistle. Ovid's Ariadne is defined by failure to escape the liminal space of the isolated shoreline and also, by ultimately surrendering her story to Theseus (10.125–130), to rewrite her story from a feminine perspective apart from the male literary tradition; cf. Pieper 2012, 233–236; Battistella 2010, 2–8; Bolton 1994, 42–50.

⁵³ Cf. *Ov. Tr.* 4.1.89–98.

4 The apple of his eye: *Heroides* 21

The last poem of Ovid's *Heroides*, and the last letter considered here, centers on a technical mediality which comes in the form of fruit. While in a temple of Diana, a young woman unwittingly betroths herself to a suitor whom she has never met by reading aloud an inscription on an apple he discreetly rolled her way etched with words to the effect: 'I swear by Diana to marry Acontius'.⁵⁴ However reflexive or unintentional, the act of speaking the oath in the sacred space binds Cydippe to Acontius.⁵⁵ For Cydippe, the apple forms the core of her life-altering event. The apple is itself the first correspondence she received from Acontius, and is even portrayed as a kind of epistolary 'missive' when it was ballistically delivered at her feet (i. e. *mittitur ante pedes*, *Ov. Her.* 21.107). Acontius has created a recipe for success with his special kind of communicative medium. Once the apple is used as material projection surface in combination with the qualified mediality of his inscription (*carmen*, *ibid.*), Acontius can roll out his pomoscript.⁵⁶ Even Cydippe, blighted by lovesickness, begins to resemble the paleness of the apple, her complexion drained under Diana's withering affliction.⁵⁷

In this fruity confluence of medialities, distinctions between locution and writing become challenged and problematized for Cydippe. At the heart of her reluctance to marry is a debate over the validity of words spoken aloud without premeditation, consent or conviction.⁵⁸ Cydippe's reflexive recitation of the inscription conditions her reply to Acontius, as when she admits to her conscious effort to read his letter in silence for fear he might trick her again with another clever binding speech act.⁵⁹ Most interestingly, as she recounts the moment she found the apple Cydippe cannot even bring herself to write out the original inscription, catching her hand before it commits the oath to the script of her letter: 'Careful! I nearly swore the oath to you again now!' (*ei mihi! iuravi nunc quoque paene tibi!*, 108). For Cydippe, writing out the inscription in her letter cannot be done without it effectively becoming a speech act which reinforces the

54 Ovid's scenario is rooted in Callimachus' *Aetia* Fr. 67–75, while the love apple as symbol of the desirability and perishability of beauty stems from Greek tradition; cf. Littlewood 1968, 147–181.

55 The rhetorical debate between the letter and spirit of the 'law' invoked in this and its preceding poem is discussed by Kenney 1979, 400–404.

56 For the fiction of inscribing apples in Hellenistic epigram (the *mēlogram*?), see Scodel 2003, 262–268.

57 Cf. *Ov. Her.* 21.215–217; Rimell 2006, 170–716.

58 Esp. *Ov. Her.* 21.133–150.

59 Cf. *Ov. Her.* 21.1–4.

oath. Exactly how transcribing the same words on the letter might acquire the illocutionary force of swearing the oath aloud (again, *iuravi*) in the eyes and ears of the divine is not entirely clear.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, so traumatic has the memory of the fateful, if not yet fatal, recitation become for Cydippe that encountering the *carmen* again in any medial form courts unforeseeable danger. In this letter, the basic medialities of sound and script have been merged at the nexus of the appley dapply inscription; merely writing without speaking could redouble the oath, or bear even more bitter fruit.

And so, our encounter with Roman letters can be sweetened by intermedial theory, which can peel back layers of significance, slice narrative and epistolarity into the full spread of their constituent communicative elements, and serve up an almost sensory awareness of the epistolographer and the material qualities of the letter itself. Under intermedial theory, the means by which we consume such letters becomes more clearly apprehended as a multisensory encounter with eyes, ears and hands. And it deserves to be seen how other ancient texts and genres, when treated with even application, may become newly, hermeneutically, fertile.

Acknowledgements: My thanks go to the conference organizers and attendees for their generous comments and helpful observations, to the editors for their care and patience, and to John Henderson and the anonymous reviewers for their attention and thoughtfulness. All translations are mine.

⁶⁰ For a history of the silent reading controversy in ancient reading cultures, see Johnson 2010, 3–9.