



The Severed Word: Ovid's "Heroides" and the "Novela Sentimental" (Princeton Legacy Library)

Marina Scordilis Brownlee

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In this wide-ranging study Marina Scordilis Brownlee investigates the importance of the letter--often a complex interplay of objectivity and subjectivity--in the establishment of novelistic discourse. She shows how Ovid's *Heroides* explore the discourse of epistolarity in a way that exerted a lasting effect on Italian, French, and Spanish works of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, especially on the fifteenth-century Spanish *novela sentimental*, or "sentimental romance." Presenting this proto-novelistic form as a highly original rewriting of Ovid, Brownlee demonstrates that its language model interrogates rather than affirms the linguistic referentiality implied by romance. Whereas the ambiguity of the sign had been articulated in fourteenth-century Spain (most notably by the *Libro de buen amor*), it is the fifteenth-century *novela sentimental* that fully grasps the existentially, novelistically dire consequences of this ambiguity. And in the process of deconstructing the referentiality that underlies romance, the *novela sentimental* reveals itself to be a discursively essential step in the evolution of the modern novel.

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