



THE GODS' DELAY: OVID, *HEROIDES* 7.21

ABSTRACT

This note makes a new argument for van Lennepe's conjecture di at Ovid, Heroides 7.21 against the manuscript reading te.

Keywords: Ovid; *Heroides*; Dido; Aeneas; textual criticism; intertextuality

At the beginning of her letter to Aeneas, who seems to be resolute in his decision to set off from Carthage, Ovid's Dido tries to persuade him to stay resorting to the argument that he is currently abandoning something he already has—namely, the rule over the newly founded city which she has entrusted to him—in order to leave and look for a land that he still has to find, not to say possess (*Her.* 7.13–16 *facta fugis, facienda petis; quaerenda per orbem | altera, quaesita est altera terra tibi. | ut terram inuenias, quis eam tibi tradet habendam? | quis sua non notis arua tenenda dabit?*). Even more painfully, Aeneas is also abandoning a woman whose love he has betrayed: but—provided that everything else may succeed—which other *uxor* will he possibly set at his side who might love him as much as Dido (7.21–2)?

omnia ut eueniant, nec di tua uota morentur,
unde tibi, quae te sic amet, uxor erit?
21 di *van Lennepe* : te *codd.*

This is a challenging, even heart-breaking, question for both Dido and Aeneas, not for the readers of Virgil's *Aeneid*, who know that Aeneas will reach Italy and marry Lavinia, albeit after a long and difficult war.¹ Editors tend to accept van Lennepe's conjecture *di* at line 21 ('even if everything should happen and the gods should not delay your wishes'), which seems to ameliorate the universally transmitted *te* of the manuscripts.² It is not easy to understand the meaning of Aeneas' (not) being held up/entangled by his own *uota*, whereas someone's wishes are more frequently the object, not the subject, of delay.³ As the closest parallel for *uota* being delayed by

¹ But will Aeneas really love Lavinia? Ovid seems to elaborate a problematic issue of Virgil's poem: cf. P.E. Knox, *Ovid Heroides: Select Epistles* (Cambridge, 1995), ad loc.; P.A. Miller, 'The parodic sublime: Ovid's reception of Virgil in *Heroides* 7', *MD* 52 (2004), 57–72, at 68 in the context of an intertextual approach I will be following.

² Cf. D.J. van Lennepe, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Heroides et A. Sabini Epistolae* (Amsterdam, 1812²), 35 (text) and 199 (critical note). For a discussion, see L. Piazzì, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Heroïdum epistula VII: Dido Aeneae* (Firenze, 2007), ad loc.

³ H. Dörrie, 'Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte von Ovids *Epistulae Heroidum*, Teil I', *Nachr. Akad. Wiss. Göttingen, Philol.-Hist. Kl.* 5 (1960), 113–230, at 165 explains the manuscript reading *te* as an interpolated gloss of *tua uota*. The main difficulty I would see with an understanding of *nec te tua uota morentur* as 'and should your wishes not make you wait' = 'should your wishes be soon accomplished' is the plain conceptual repetition of the line's first half *omnia ut eueniant* (for whose variants, see the apparatus criticus of H. Dörrie, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae heroidum* [Berlin and New York, 1971], ad loc.). G. Rosati, *Ovidio: Lettere di eroine* (Milano, 1989), ad loc.

gods, as well as the strongest case in favour of the text correction, both van Lenep and subsequent commentators compare *Her.* 18.5 *nam cur mea uota morantur ... ? [sc. di].*⁴

However, this is hardly the most apparent reason why we should read *di* at *Her.* 7.21. In these lines, Dido offers one of those typical cases in the *Heroides* in which the future development of the mythical narrative is alluded to—a development which the writing heroine cannot be aware of yet, or can at least just imagine, while the hidden author (Ovid) stimulates the reader to catch the allusion to the literary model that provides the continuation of the current story.⁵ In lines 13–22, Dido’s questions concerning the expected uncertainties of Aeneas’ own city foundation compared to the present facts (‘First you need to find the land you are looking for; provided that you find it, who will lend you its full possession? When will you be able to found a city like Carthage? And whence shall a wife come who loves you as I do?’) remind the reader of the difficulties Aeneas will have to face in *Aeneid* 7–12, the second half of Virgil’s epic—namely, the war against the Latins for the land possession through marriage with King Latinus’ daughter.⁶ In this context, Dido’s seemingly innocent hint at the possibility that the gods might not delay (*nec ... morentur*) the fulfilment of Aeneas’ wishes cannot but look like an all too accurate foreshadowing of how, on the contrary, there will be *one* goddess, namely Juno, who will do her best to make the resolution of Aeneas’ troubles come later than hoped for (*Aen.* 7.313–16):

non dabitur regnis, esto, prohibere Latinis,
atque immota manet fatis Lauinia coniunx:
at trahere atque **moras** tantis licet addere bebis,
at licet amborum populos excindere regum.

The (unconscious) irony of Dido’s words as well as the (conscious) play of Ovid’s allusion rest on the fact that in our couplet the elegiac heroine’s dispute about Aeneas’ all-but-carefree future culminates in the focalization on his wife-to-be, whose love for him will never equal Dido’s own;⁷ this will happen for sure, even if Aeneas should meet no other obstacles, even if (all) the gods should support him in his enterprise. But this is the point: not every god will make things easy for Aeneas, as Juno will precisely find in the war’s delaying function (*morae*) the only way in which she can at least postpone (*morari*) the eventual accomplishment of a destiny she does not like.⁸

seems to be the only scholar to interpret *morari* as ‘hold, detain’, i.e. here in Carthage. Planudes’s translation avoids the personal accusative: καὶ μὴδὲν διατρίψασαεν αἰ εὐχάσι σοι.

⁴ Other parallels for *uota morari* include *Ov. Her.* 19.95, *Met.* 8.71; *Juv.* 14.250.

⁵ This technique has been illustrated in the seminal studies of A. Barchiesi, *Speaking Volumes: Narrative and Intertext in Ovid and Other Latin Poets* (London, 2001), 29–47, 105–27, especially at 107–17 on the role of the ‘future’ in the *Heroides*.

⁶ Cf. P. Kuhlmann, ‘*Sed iubet ire deus*. Argumentation und poetologische Kritik in Ovids *Dido-Brief*’, *Philologus* 147 (2003), 254–69, at 259–60.

⁷ On the heroines’ obsession with rivals as typical (elegiac) feature of the *Heroides*, see G. Rosati, ‘L’*elegia al femminile: le Heroides di Ovidio (e altre heroides)*’, *MD* 29 (1992), 71–94, at 80–2.

⁸ On Juno’s delaying role in the *Aeneid*, see P. Hardie, ‘Augustan poets and the mutability of Rome’, in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus* (London, 1992), 59–82, at 70. On delay (*mora*) as ‘an important generator of the epic plot’, cf. P. Hardie, ‘Closure in Latin epic’, in D.H. Roberts, F.M. Dunn and D. Fowler (edd.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton, 1997), 139–62, at 145–6.

Intertextuality as well as the very peculiar literary self-positioning of Ovid's *Heroides* may thus help detect a further and, as I believe, much more compelling argument for the old, and good, conjecture *di* at *Her.* 7.21.

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doi:10.1017/S0009838823001003