

## **In Sickness or in Health? Love, Pathology and Marriage in the Letters of Acontius and Cydippe, Ovid's *Heroides* 20–1**

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This chapter offers a new interpretation of the themes of love and pathology in the epistolary pair of elegies of Acontius and Cydippe in Ovid's *Heroides* 20–1.<sup>1</sup> According to this interpretation, Ovid challenges the narrative of the couple's happy marriage in Callimachus' *Aetia* (fr. 67–75, Pfeiffer/Harder) by exploiting specific cues embedded in the Callimachean episode proper.<sup>2</sup> Pathology is key to this interpretation, as Ovid's Acontius appears not so much obsessed by love as unhealthy obsessive, and Ovid's Cydippe seems to suffer not so much from lovesickness as from actual physical disease. As will be argued, both the mental obsessiveness and the physical disease may be linked to Acontius being presented in the Callimachean episode as a descendant of the Telchines, a cue which has not been fully (if at all) discussed in scholarship so far. Moreover, this cue may be seen as related to conspicuous incompatibilities between the personalities of the hero and the heroine in their Heroidean letters, e.g. through Acontius' fixation on Cydippe's looks and disregard for what she wants in contrast to her stress on a person's inner qualities and the importance of consent. Finally, this interpretation sheds new light on a long tradition of scholarly debate over the very last couplet in the second of the two letters, *Her.* 21.247–8, whose sense has proven especially hard to grasp.

### **Introduction**

Ovid's *Heroides* 20–1 is famously one of four sources of this story in ancient literature, all of which pivot on erotic desire, illness and a wedding.<sup>3</sup> The others are Xenomedes' Cean chronicle,<sup>4</sup> Callimachus' *Aetia* fr. 67–75 (Pfeiffer/Harder) and Aristaenetus 1.10 (Bing and Höschele). The following are the story's main events, which are relevant for the argument in question: Acontius sees Cydippe during a religious festival on the island of Delos, and

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank xxx,

<sup>2</sup> For further examples of how Ovid exploits such cues in the Callimachean narrative, see Thorsen (2019).

<sup>3</sup> Love and/or disease are second in importance only to poetics in the treatments of the story in its ancient sources in Barchiesi (1993), Barchiesi (1999), Acosta-Hughes (2009), Lang (2009), Rynearson (2009), Kazantidis (2014) and Cairns (2016). See Thorsen (2019) on the metapoetic qualities of Cydippe. For less romantic approaches to the tale, see Rosenmeyer (1996), Kuhlmann (2005) and Rynearson (2009, 355), referring to Rosenmeyer. The present argument corroborates the less romantic interpretations of the letters.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Huxley (1965).

immediately falls in love with her. He then tricks her into swearing that she will marry him, by inscribing an oath on an apple, which she unwittingly reads aloud in the temple of Diana. Cydippe subsequently returns to her home island of Naxos and her father repeatedly attempts to marry her to her fiancé. Each time, she is stricken with life-threatening diseases. At last, the father consults the oracle of Apollo, which responds that the illnesses are due to Cydippe breaking her oath by trying to marry a man different from the one whose name she uttered in the temple of Diana. Finally, Cydippe is cured, she marries Acontius, and the two become the ancestors of the prosperous Acontiadae, a noble family of his native island of Ceos. Notably, this last element remains only a future possibility in *Heroides* 20–1, as the epistolary form does not allow for actual closure, unlike the other sources of the tale, which apply a third-person perspective.<sup>5</sup> This non-closural quality of the Heroidean<sup>6</sup> form facilitates the new interpretation in question. The argument follows the lines of enquiry of the volume as a whole, focusing first on the theme of love, then on that of pathology, and finally on the marriage between Acontius and Cydippe.

### 1. *nota certa furoris*: Love

Without doubt, love is a major theme in *Heroides* 20–1. This element is especially conspicuous in Acontius' letter. And yet, despite being linked to issues that are generally at home in love literature, such as marriage<sup>7</sup> and writing, including the kind which involves descriptions of the beloved,<sup>8</sup> the passion of Ovid's Acontius is characterised by a surprisingly obsessive nature, centred on ideas of harm and violence, submission and superiority.

Thus, Acontius can claim: *si noceo quod amo, fateor sine fine nocebo* (*Ov. Her.* 20.34, 'if I harm that which I love, I confess I shall harm endlessly').<sup>9</sup> To this, Cydippe responds:

<sup>5</sup> See Thorsen (2019) for further reflections on this quality in *Heroides* 20–1 and Thorsen (2018a) for the same in *Heroides* 18–19.

<sup>6</sup> Although the term occurs in previous scholarship as well, I borrow it from Fulkerson (2005) to refer to Ovid's generic innovation (cf. *Ars* 3.366, *ille novavit opus*), which scholarship now associates with both the so-called single and double *Heroides*; cf. Knox (1995) and Kenney (1996), despite the fact that the latter also includes letters from heroes.

<sup>7</sup> Callimachus' story of Acontius and Cydippe is widely considered a model for Latin love elegy; see e.g. Hunter (2013). Yet it should be noted that marriage is precisely the point at which Callimachus' model story and Latin love elegy are incompatibly distinct, as the relationships depicted by the Latin love elegists remain extra- or anti-marital; cf. e.g. Thorsen (2018b). It is not entirely clear in any of the sources whether Cydippe is already betrothed to another man before she unwittingly promises to marry Acontius; if she is, then Acontius' approach also qualifies as adultery, as he is claiming his right to marry a girl who is already promised to another man; cf. Ziogas (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Emblematically represented in Callimachus' version, which may have circulated separately from the *Aetia* as an epyllion under the title of 'Cydippe', thus underscoring how much of a literary creation the beloved is; cf. *Rem. am.* 382; see Cameron (1995, 108) and Hunter (2013, 36). See also Wyke (1987), Keith (1994) and Ingleheart (2012).

<sup>9</sup> I use the text of Kenney (1996).

dic age nunc, solitoque tibi ne decipe more:  
quid facies odio, sic ubi amore noces?  
si laedis quod amas, hostem sapienter amabis;  
me, precor, ut serves, perdere velle<sup>10</sup> velis!  
(*Her.* 21.55–8)

Come, tell me, and do not deceive me in your usual manner: what will you do from hatred, when you harm me so from love? If you injure the one you love, then you will be wise to love your enemy; to save me you must bring yourself to wish my doom!

Acontius, however, not only confesses that he will ‘love and harm’ Cydippe endlessly; he also invites her to harm him freely, in an elaboration of the elegiac topos of *servitium amoris* (‘slavery to love’):

ante tuos liceat flentem consistere vultus  
et liceat lacrimis addere verba suis,  
utque solent famuli, cum verbera saeva verentur,  
tendere summissas ad tua crura manus!

...

ipsa meos scindas licet imperiosa capillos,  
oraque sint digitis livida nostra tuis.  
omnia perpetiar; tantum fortasse timebo,  
corpore laedatur ne manus ista meo.  
sed neque conpedibus nec me conpesce catenis:  
servabor firmo vinctus amore tui!  
(*Her.* 20.75–86)

Let me have leave to stand weeping before your face, and leave to add words which match the tears; and let me, like slaves in fear of bitter stripes, stretch out submissive hands to touch your legs! ... With your own imperious hand you may tear my hair, and make my face black and blue with your fingers. I will endure all; my only fear perhaps

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<sup>10</sup> ‘No satisfactory parallels have been adduced for the pleonasm ... However, none of the suggested emendations is really convincing ...’ Kenney (1996, 223).

will be lest that hand of yours be bruised on me. But bind me not with shackles nor with chains – I shall be kept in bonds by unyielding love for you.<sup>11</sup>

Acontius' embracing of *servitium amoris* may be seen as a confirmation of his role as a prototypical poet-lover.

And yet, there are certain features within his letter that call this assumption into question. An important aspect of the elegiac *servitium amoris* is that it is represented as an inescapable, unconditional and sometimes torturous<sup>12</sup> situation, as may be seen in Catullus,<sup>13</sup> Tibullus,<sup>14</sup> Sulpicia<sup>15</sup> and Propertius,<sup>16</sup> and in Ovid's own works.<sup>17</sup> However, Acontius' *servitium amoris* appears not to be inescapable, but rather a useful means of attaining a specific goal. Tellingly, Acontius underscores the idea that those who suffer must be rewarded: *passo sua praemia dentur* (*Her.* 20.67, 'only let him who endures have his just reward'). The pretend situation of Acontius' *servitium amoris* is also underscored by the fact that he claims that he will imitate the fear, but not actually suffer lashes like a slave (cf. *Her.* 20.77–8, above). Similarly, he claims that he does not really need shackles and chains, as his love will be enough (*Her.* 20.85–6, above). The gravest breach of the topos, however, occurs when he commands Cydippe – in the imperative – to play her part in the game of love elegy:

ignoras tua iura; voca; cur arguor absens?  
iamdudum dominae more venire iube.  
(*Her.* 20.79–80)

You do not know your rights: summon me! Why am I accused in my absence?  
Command me to come immediately, in the manner of a mistress of the house.

The similarity of this attitude to that of Briseis in her letter to Achilles – especially since Acontius mentions her right before his *servitium amoris* passage (*Her.* 20.69) – is striking: *domini iure venire iube!* (*Her.* 3.154, 'by your right as master, bid me come'). The irony is

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout I use the translations of the Loeb Classical Library, often in slightly modified form.

<sup>12</sup> For the topos in general see Copley (1947), Lyne (1979), Murgatroyd (1981) and Fulkerson (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. e.g. Catull. 68.136; 85; 99.3–4, 11–12.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. Tib. 1.1.55–6; 1.2.97–8; 1.6.37–8; 1.8.5–6; 2.3.11–30; 2.4.1–6.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. e.g. Sulp. [Tib.] 4.5.3–4.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. e.g. Prop. 1.12.18; 2.23.23–4; 3.17.41; for further observations, see Greene (2000).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. e.g. Ov. *Am.* 1.2.17–18; 1.3.5; 2.17.1; *Rem. am.* 73; 293. Consider also *Heroides* 3, on which see below.

equally striking, inasmuch as Briseis is a real slave as well as a lover.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, *servitium amoris* is a sheer fantasy to Acontius. For Cydippe is not really Acontius' *domina*; she may act according to the *dominae more* (cf. *Her.* 20.80, above), but only at Acontius' bidding, as he fundamentally retains the position of the master.<sup>19</sup>

This last point is important, for Acontius' idea of his superiority over Cydippe is soon revealed in his letter, when for a moment he addresses not Cydippe, but her fiancé, who is his rival:

quis tibi permisit nostras praecerpere messes?  
 ad sepem<sup>20</sup> alterius quis tibi fecit iter?  
 ...  
 elige de vacuis quam non sibi vindicet alter:  
 si nescis, dominum res habet ista suum.  
 (*Her.* 20.143–50)

Who gave you leave to reap my harvests before me? Who laid open the road for you to trespass on another's enclosure?<sup>21</sup> ... Choose from among those who are free one whom another does not claim; if you do not know, that chattel has a master of its own.

The passage discloses that Acontius regards Cydippe as his property: in fact, as his 'crop', *messes*, his 'fenced land', *sepem*, and 'that chattel' of his, *res ista*. The word *dominus* is here stripped of erotic connotations and simply means 'the owner'.<sup>22</sup> It is hard to imagine a description more remote from the elegiac topos of *servitium amoris*.

The stark contrast between Acontius' address to his rival and his pretence of *servitium amoris* draws attention to his ambiguous discourse, which on the one hand appears to be in line with the elegiac 'evidence' of love, and on the other is disclosed as aggressively obsessive. The obsessiveness matches with Acontius' professed readiness to employ tricks; he uses *insidia* (*Her.* 20.66), *fraus* (*Her.* 20.21–4, 34, and below), he is *dolosus* and *vafer* (see

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. *nec tamen indignor nec me pro coniuge gessi/ saepius in domini serva vocata torum/ me quaedam, memini, dominam captiva vocabat./ 'servitio,' dixi, 'nominis addis onus'* (*Her.* 3.99–102, 'And yet I am not angered, nor have I borne myself as wife because I was often summoned, a slave, to share my master's bed. Some captive woman once, I mind me, called me mistress. "To slavery," I replied, "you add a burden in that name"').

<sup>19</sup> See Burkowski (2012, 102–7). I am grateful to the author for this reference.

<sup>20</sup> See Hollis (1994).

<sup>21</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Heyworth for refining the English translation at this point.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Murgatroyd (1981).

below), and he intends to continue in the same deceitful way (*mille doli restant*, *Her.* 20.41).

In fact, Acontius even puts the blame on Love for this manipulative inclination:

te mihi conpositis (siquid tamen egimus) a se<sup>23</sup>  
adstrinxit verbis ingeniosus Amor.  
dictatis ab eo feci sponsalia verbis  
consultoque fui iuris Amore vafer.  
sit fraus huic facto nomen, dicarque dolosus,  
si tamen est quod ames velle tenere dolus.  
(*Her.* 20.27–32)

It was ingenious Love who bound you to me, with words (if I, indeed, did anything) that he drew up. In words dictated by him I made our betrothal; Love was the lawyer that taught me cunning. Let wiles be the name you give my deed, and let me be called deceitful – if only the wish to possess what one loves is deceit!

As seen from this passage, Acontius connects manipulative love with both marriage and writing. In this respect, he reflects essential qualities of Callimachus' Acontius, who is taught the art of love by the god himself (*Aet.* fr. 67.1–4). In Callimachus, this art is manifested in writing, which serves Acontius not only when he approaches his beloved through the oath inscribed on the apple, but also when he is unsure of the outcome of his approaches: he pines away with lovesickness and, in Cydippe's absence, carves verses about her beauty on the bark of trees (*Aet.* fr. 73). Perhaps in Callimachus'<sup>24</sup> and certainly in Ovid's version, Acontius dwells on the beauty of Cydippe through the medium of writing at the same moment that this beauty wastes away as a result of the illnesses from which she suffers. More precisely, Ovid's Acontius imagines that she looks blushing healthy and attractive (*Her.* 20.6, 53–64, 117–20), and comparable to a nymph:

tu facis hoc oculique tui, quibus ignea cedunt  
sidera, qui flammae causa fuere meae;

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<sup>23</sup> The text of the last metrical foot is problematic; see Casali (1997, 313–14). I am grateful to Stephen Heyworth for pointing this out, as well as for suggesting – supported by G – *arte*, despite some syntactical problems that may ensue from choosing this *lectio*.

<sup>24</sup> The fragmentary state of the text simply does not let us know for sure.

hoc faciunt flavi crines et eburnea cervix

...

et Thetidis qualis vix rear esse pedes.

(*Her.* 20.55–60)

This is your work, and that of your eyes, brighter than the fiery stars, and the cause of my flame; this is the work of your golden tresses and ivory throat ... and feet which Thetis' own I think could scarcely equal.

Even here, where Acontius addresses Cydippe, his appraisal of her looks is reminiscent of the way in which he reifies her when he is addressing his rival, her fiancé, in the sense that she is represented as an object: this time, one made of precious materials, rather than a 'harvest', 'fenced land' or 'chattel'.

In sum, Acontius' interest in Cydippe appears harmful (cf. *sine fine nocebo*, above), self-servingly manipulative (e.g. through his professed *servitium amoris* followed by his claim to be Cydippe's *dominus*), and reifying (e.g. through the comparison between Cydippe and commodities as well as precious objects) in a way that aggressively stresses his superiority and her subordination. It therefore seems accurate when Acontius describes this interest as bearing the 'certain mark of madness' (*nota certa furoris*, *Her.* 20.207), and if this madness indeed qualifies as love, it appears to be of a rather pathological kind.

### **3. *argenti color est*: Pathology**

The pathology of love is also prominent in the letter of Cydippe. In fact, disease holds much the same position in Cydippe's letter as love does in that of Acontius; like his passion, Cydippe's disease is also aggressive in nature (*Her.* 21.37–8, 54) and she links it both to wedlock (*Her.* 21.157–72) and writing (*Her.* 21.17–28; 207; 248). In fact, even the deity of wedlock himself, Hymenaeus, equates her (planned) wedding with disease on the verge of death (cf. also *Her.* 21.45):

nam quare, quotiens socialia sacra parantur,  
nupturae totiens languida membra cadunt?  
ter mihi iam veniens positas Hymenaeus ad aras  
fugit et a thalami limine terga dedit,  
vixque manu pigra totiens infusa resurgunt

lumina, vix moto corripit igne faces.  
saepe coronatis stillant unguenta capillis  
et trahitur multo splendida palla croco.  
cum tetigit limen, lacrimas mortisque timorem  
cernit et a cultu multa remota suo,  
et pudet in tristi laetum consurgere turba,  
quique erat in palla, transit in ora rubor;  
proicit ipse sua deductas fronte coronas,  
spissaque de nitidis tergit amoma comis.  
at mihi, vae miserae, torrentur febribus artus  
et gravius iusto pallia pondus habent,  
nostraque plorantes video super ora parentes,  
et face pro thalami fax mihi mortis adest.

(*Her.* 21.155–72)

For why is it that, as oft as the sacraments for marriage are made ready, so oft the limbs of the bride-to-be sink down in languor? Thrice now has Hymenaeus come to the altars reared for me and fled, turning his back upon the threshold of my wedding-chamber; the lights so oft replenished by his lazy hand scarce rise again, scarce does he keep the torch alight by waving it. Oft does the perfume distil from his wreathed locks, and the mantle he sweeps along is splendid with much saffron. When he has touched the threshold, and sees tears and dread of death, and much that is far removed from the ways he keeps; he shames to stand forth glad in a gloomy throng, and the blush that was in his mantle passes to his cheeks; with his own hand he tears the garlands from his brow and casts them forth, and dries the dense balsam from his glistening locks. But for me – ah, wretched! – my limbs are parched with fever, and the stuffs that cover me are heavier than their wont; I see my parents weeping over me, and instead of the wedding-torch the torch of death is at hand.

When Cydippe includes less sinister representations of marriage in her letter, the prospect of wedlock is predominantly associated not with Acontius, but her fiancé (*cui destinor uxor*, below), whom she portrays as Acontius' opposite in the sense that he is respectful, gentle and caringly worried:



nec tu credideris illum, cui destinor uxor,  
          aegra superposita membra fovere manu.  
assidet ille quidem, quantum permittitur, ipse  
          sed meminit nostrum virginis esse torum.  
et iam nescioquid de me sensisse videtur,  
          nam lacrimae causa saepe latente cadunt,  
et minus audacter blanditur et oscula rara  
          appetit et timido me vocat ore suam.  
nec miror sensisse, notis cum prodar apertis;  
          in dextrum vector, cum venit ille, latus,  
nec loquor, et tecto simulatur lumine somnus,  
          captantem tactus reicioque manum.  
ingemit et tacito suspirat pectore meque  
          offensam, quamvis non mereatur, habet.

(*Her.* 21.189–202)

Do not believe that he whose destined wife I am lays his hand on me to fondle my sick limbs. He sits by me, indeed, as much as he may, but does not forget that mine is a virgin bed. He seems already, too, to feel in some way suspicion of me; for his tears oft fall for some hidden cause, his flatteries are less bold, he seeks few kisses, and calls me his own in tones that are but timid. Nor do I wonder he suspects, for I betray myself by open signs; I turn upon my right side when he comes, and do not speak, and close my eyes in simulated sleep, and when he tries to touch me I throw off his hand. He groans and sighs in his silent breast, and he suffers my displeasure without deserving it.

Moreover, while Cydippe, like Acontius, writes about her body, her self-portrayal is very dissimilar to the objectifying image Acontius draws of her in his letter – a fact that she explicitly comments upon: *si me nunc videas, visam prius esse negabis/ 'arte nec est' dices*

*'ista petita mea'* (*Her.* 21.221–2 ‘Should you see me now, you will declare you have never seen me before, and say “No art<sup>25</sup> of mine ever sought to win that girl!”’).<sup>26</sup>

Paradoxically, the connection between Acontius’ art/trick and the deterioration of Cydippe’s body actualises the relevance of his Telchinian ancestry. Certainly, the idea that Acontius is a Telchinian is contentious and has yet to be discussed in scholarship – naturally so, one might add, as it seems entirely incompatible with the well-established understanding of Acontius as the prototypical Callimachean poet–lover.<sup>27</sup> In the prologue of Callimachus’ *Aetia*, the Telchines are ‘ignorant men who are no friends of the Muse’ (νήιδες οἱ Μούσης οὐκ ἐγένοντο φίλοι, *Aet.* 1.2), and famously represent the artistic adversaries of the poet. Furthermore, the Telchines occur twice more in the Callimachean corpus in a less metaphorical capacity, which nevertheless serves to stress how they negatively mirror the ideal artist, as represented by the Callimachean poet. One of these instances is in the story of how Zeus punished the Telchines’ hubris through their extinction, sparing but a few:

ἐν δ’ ὕβριν θάνατόν τε κεραύνιον, ἐν δὲ γόητας  
Τελχῖνας μακάρων τ’ οὐκ ἀλέγοντα θεῶν  
ἠλεὰ Δημόνακτα γέρων ἐνεθήκατο δέλτοις  
καὶ γρηῦν Μακελώ, μητέρα Δεξιθέης,  
ᾧς μούνας, ὅτε νῆσον ἀνέτρεπον εἶνεκ’ ἀλ[ι]τρῆς  
ὑβριος, ἀσκηθεῖς ἔλλιπον ἀθάνατοι  
(*Aet.* fr. 75.64–9)

The insolence and the lightning death and therewith the wizards Telchines and Demonax who foolishly disregarded the blessed gods, the old man [Xenomedes] put in his tablets, and aged Macelo, mother of Dexithea, the two of whom the deathless gods alone left unscathed, when for sinful insolence they overthrew the island.

Next, the Telchines occur in an episode which highlights their metallurgical skills: ἄορι τριγλώχινι, τό οἱ Τελχῖνες ἔτευξαν (*Callim. Hymn* 4.31,<sup>28</sup> ‘the three-forked sword which the

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Heyworth kindly suggests, in private communication, that *arte* here also encompasses the meaning ‘trick’. I have chosen to retain the word ‘art’, as it reveals the metapoetic aspects of Acontius and Cydippe’s discourse.

<sup>26</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Heyworth for refining the English translation at this point.

<sup>27</sup> See Thorsen (2019) with references.

<sup>28</sup> The passage occurs in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Delos* – a text that Cydippe’s letter shows especially intimate knowledge of (*Her.* 21.65–114).

Telchines fashioned’). Thus, while the Telchines may be readily identified as ‘famous artists’ (Stat. *Theb.* 2.247, *notique operum Telchines*) and excellent, hence envied, metallurgists,<sup>29</sup> they are also wizards and sorcerers,<sup>30</sup> that is, possessors of ‘the evil eye’,<sup>31</sup> as well as poisoners of food.<sup>32</sup> The ambiguity is also seen in the fact that the Telchines are frequently represented in the service of gods,<sup>33</sup> as well as being guilty of hubris and punished accordingly, as referred to above. Surely, from this survey, the Telchines appear to have nothing in common with, let alone any connection with, Acontius.

And yet, Acontius is indeed related to the Telchines; in fact, Acontius’ Telchinian descent is a mark of ring-composition in the episode in Callimachus’ *Aetia*: at the outset of the episode, Acontius is referred to as a descendant of Euxantius, son of Dexithea (fr. 67.7), who in turn is reported as one of the survivors of Zeus’ punishment towards the end of the episode (fr. 75.67). Now, this link between the Telchines and Acontius may be regarded as broken, or at least significantly weakened, by the gods’ salvage of Dexithea and her mother Macelo, which indeed may have offered the survivors a fresh start.<sup>34</sup> But while the gods have set an example of what may happen to those who are guilty of hubris for the descendants of those who survived, the possibility of committing such offences is still a reality for these persons,<sup>35</sup> as Pindar’s depiction of Dexithea’s son Euxantius makes clear:

... λόγο[ν ἄν]ακτος Εὐξαν[τίου]  
 ἐπαίνεσα [Κρητ]ῶν μαιομένων ὃς ἀνα[ίνετο  
 αὐταρχεῖν, πολίων δ’ ἑκατὸν πεδέχει[ν  
 μέρος ἔβδομον Πασιφ[ά]ας <σὺν> υἱ-  
 οῖ]σι· τέρας δ’ ἐὼν εἶ-  
 πέν σφι· “τρέω τοι πόλεμον  
 Διὸς Ἐννοσίδαν τε βαρ[ύ]κτυπον.  
 χθόνα τοί ποτε καὶ στρατὸν ἄθρόον  
 πέμψαν κεραυνῶ τριόδοντί τε

<sup>29</sup> And jewellers, making *inter alia* the necklace of Harmonia (see Stat. *Theb.* 2.265–7), and even images of the gods (Diod. Sic. 5.55.2).

<sup>30</sup> Callim. *Aet.* fr. 75.64 (see above), and Suda T 293.

<sup>31</sup> Ov. *Met.* 7.365.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Strabo 14.2.7; Tzetzes, *Chil.* 7.15.

<sup>33</sup> They are in charge of the upbringing of Poseidon (Diod. Sic. 5.55.1) or of Zeus (Strabo 10.3.19). They were also recorded as worshippers of gods, such as Hera (Diod. Sic. 5.55.2) and Athena (Paus. 9.19.1).

<sup>34</sup> In the manner of Deucalion and Pyrrha, and Philemon and Baucis, who were also spared.

<sup>35</sup> It is not even certain who survived; for example, in Ovid’s *Ibis*, Macelo too is struck down by the punishment of Zeus (*Ib.* 475), though Dexithea still survives (*Ib.* 469–70).

ἐς τὸν βαθὺν Τάρταρον ἐμὰν μα-  
τέρα λιπόντες καὶ ὅλον οἶκον εὐεργεταί·

(*Isthm.* 2.35–45)

I approve the words of lord Euxantius, who refused to rule over the Cretans, although they were eager, and to share a seventh part of one hundred cities with the sons of Pasiphaë. But he told them his own omen: ‘Truly I fear war with Zeus and I fear the loud-rumbling Earthshaker. With their thunderbolt and trident they once sent the land and all the people into deep Tartarus, sparing my mother and the entire well-fenced house.’

Thus, there is still the possibility that the descendants of the Telchines, such as Euxantius and his future relative Acontius, may perpetuate the vices of their breed and offend the gods.

In what follows, I argue that there are three elements in Cydippe’s letter which, taken together, exploit this possibility and conjure up the shadow of Acontius the Telchine. These elements are 1) poison/sorcery, which the Telchines reportedly employed, 2) metal, which is the material of Telchinian art, and 3) hubris in the form of lack of fear of the gods, which was precisely the vice for which the gods punished the Telchines with (near-)extinction.

First, Cydippe refers to the notion that she may have been poisoned or that she is the victim of sorcery: *facta veneficiis pars putat ista tuis* (*Her.* 21.52, ‘some think that this is the working of your [sc. Acontius’] sorcery/ poison’). The term *veneficium* neatly refers to both sorcery and poison, which the Telchines are known to employ.<sup>36</sup> And the way in which Cydippe describes her body may certainly be consistent with having been poisoned, or even exposed to the evil eye.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, given that in some accounts the Telchines actually poisoned plants,<sup>38</sup> the role of the apple becomes conspicuous and suspicious. Could the apple have been poisoned? Was that how Acontius administered his *veneficium* to Cydippe? And even if Acontius did not poison the apple Cydippe picked up in the temple of Artemis (after all, there is no indication that the nurse who picked the apple up first got ill, nor that Cydippe took a bite of it),<sup>39</sup> then Ovid’s Acontius<sup>40</sup> is physically close enough as they write their

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<sup>36</sup> *OLD*, s.v. 1, ‘The use of magical arts, sorcery.’ 2, ‘The act of poisoning.’ 2b, ‘a poisonous substance, poison.’

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *languor* (21.13), *fessa* (21.14), *pallida* (21.16), *gemo* (21.36), *torrentur febribus artus* (21.169), *quam* (sc. Cydippe) *ferus indigna tabe perire sinis* (21.60), *languida membra* (21.156), *miserabile corpus* (21.213), *macie* (21.215), *color est sine sanguine* (21.215).

<sup>38</sup> E.g. Strabo 14.2.7.

<sup>39</sup> As kindly pointed out by Stephen Heyworth in private communication.

<sup>40</sup> This is an element not found in the other sources, and may be considered as Ovid’s invention.

letters to be able to continue to administer poison to Cydippe in other ways, since he is actually outside her house: ‘Yet, so that I am not unaware of what you do, I often go to and fro at your doorstep, anxious and in secret’ (*Her.* 20.129–30, *ne tamen ignorem quid agas, ad limina crebro/ anxius huc illuc dissimulanter eo*). Who knows for how long he has been around. It is worth noting that, although *dissimulanter* may be rendered as ‘in secret’, it may also suggest ‘in the concealment of one’s real purpose’,<sup>41</sup> which, as already suggested, may be to continue to cast spells on or poison Cydippe and thus scare her off of marrying Acontius’ rival and induce her to accept marrying Acontius himself.

Secondly, Cydippe associates her body with various kinds of metalwork, most notably by using arresting and unique imagery,<sup>42</sup> as she describes her complexion thus: *argenti color est inter convivia talis,/ quod tactum gelidae frigore pallet aquae* (*Her.* 21.219–20, ‘such is the colour of silver at the banquet table, pale with the chill touch of icy water’). While the image is evoking the festive setting of a *convivia*, the point is the particular colour that emerges from water condensing on silverware, which, when it is the colour of someone’s complexion, is singularly unhealthy. Since a crucial element in this image is silver, it may be regarded as a sinister counterpart to Acontius’ comparison of Cydippe’s feet to those of Thetis (*Her.* 20.60), which were proverbially like silver. Certainly, the goddess is not unhealthy, but it is arguably the implicit and positive comparison that Acontius makes between Cydippe and silver through the evocation of Thetis that Cydippe appears to counter through her own explicit and negative comparison between her own hue and the colour of silverware. Moreover, such silverware may be said to evoke the kind of artisan’s objects that are useful, made of metal and not as precious as finer art – that is, of the kind that the Telchines produced. Also relevant is Cydippe’s ironic self-characterisation as *ingenii magna tropaea tui* (*Her.* 21.214, ‘the great trophies of your [sc. Acontius’] artistic talent’). Clearly, in this context *tropaea* has a metaphorical significance, like that of ‘trophy’ in modern English. Yet, as *tropaea* originally means ‘armour taken from an enemy and hung on a stake’,<sup>43</sup> it may also, alongside *ingenium*, which may translate as ‘artistic talent’, evoke metallurgic craftsmanship. Therefore, one common denominator of these arresting and allusive images is metal, which is the material of the metallurgic artists, the Telchines, forefathers of Acontius.

Finally, fear, especially of the gods, is an element not only of Cydippe’s, but also of Acontius’ letter, which becomes particularly conspicuous when one considers the gravest of

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<sup>41</sup> *OLD*, s.v.

<sup>42</sup> ‘No parallel for this extra-ordinary image is forthcoming.’ Kenney (1996, 243).

<sup>43</sup> *OLD* s.v. 1.

the Telchines' vices, namely hubris, the single offence that Callimachus stresses in relation to the Telchines in the Acontius and Cydippe episode (*Aet.* fr. 75.64–9). Hubris in this context is explicitly understood as a lack of fear of the gods (cf. esp. fr. 75.65–6, μακάρων τ' οὐκ ἀλέγοντα θεῶν/ ἦλεὰ Δημόνακτα). Upon closer inspection, not only does Ovid's Acontius clearly lack fear of the gods, he also appears to try to entangle Cydippe in the same offence, telling her to stop fearing even when he claims that she is already deceiving the gods (see below). However, Cydippe resists Acontius' admonition that she should be fearless and his claim that she disregards the gods till the end: a resistance which, paradoxically, may be her motive in accepting marriage to Acontius.

While the gods, particularly Diana, are prominent in the letter of Acontius, his irreverence of the divinities also seeps out of his text. Thus, in what almost amounts to a paradox, Acontius claims that *exitus in dis est, sed capiere tamen* (20.44, 'The issue rests with the gods, but you will be taken nonetheless'). While Acontius thus reveals his own lack of respect for the gods, his hubris, one might say, he also bids Cydippe to lay aside her fear from the very start of his letter: *pone metum* (20.1, 'Lay aside your fears!'), and then again, *siste metum, virgo!* (20.181, 'Stay your fears, maiden!'). At the same time, Acontius suggests that Cydippe's own actions do not comply with fear of the gods and therefore merit punishment, thus implying that she too is guilty of hubris:

admonita es modo voce mea cum casibus istis,  
                   quos, quotiens temptas fallere, ferre soles.  
 his quoque vitatis in partu nempe rogabis,  
                   ut tibi luciferas adferat illa manus.  
 audiet et repetens quae sunt audita requiret  
                   iste tibi de quo coniuge partus eat.  
 promittes votum: scit te promittere falso;  
                   iurabis: scit te fallere posse deos!  
   (*Her.* 20.189–96)

You have but now been admonished not only by word of mine, but as well by those mishaps of health you are wont to suffer as oft as you try to evade your promise. Even if you escape these ills, in childbirth will you dare pray for aid from her light-bringing hands [of Diana/Lucina]. She will hear these words – and then, recalling what she has heard, will ask of you from what husband come those pangs. You will promise a

votive gift – she knows your promises are false; you will make oath – she knows you can deceive the gods!

Acontius' threat is particularly grave, for two reasons, the first being the non-closural quality of the Heroidean form, which infuses the prospect with realism, as Cydippe cannot possibly know what will eventually happen from her present point of view; next, the threat recalls the actual outcome of Nicander's story of Hermochares and Ctesylla,<sup>44</sup> which Ovid knew (cf. *Met.* 7.369–70) and which ancient sources explicitly compare with that of Acontius and Cydippe (Ant. Lib. *Met.* 1.1–2): here the female protagonist actually dies in childbirth at the will of the gods.<sup>45</sup> While thus insinuating that Cydippe lacks fear of the gods, i.e. Diana, Acontius' threat is also a reminder of how stories similar to that of Acontius and Cydippe may also end unhappily.

Cydippe, by contrast, stresses both her fear and obedience in the face of divine will throughout her letter. Thus, she starts by informing Acontius that she is terrified: *pertimui* (21.1), and continues in the same vein: *vereor* (21.12), *timor* (21.17), *incerta* (21.31), *timeo* (21.47; 153), *vae miserae* (21.169). However, once it becomes clear that the divine will, as expressed by Apollo, is that she must marry Acontius, she immediately accepts it: *numen ipsa sequor deorum* (21.239, 'I myself follow the will of the gods') and then chastises herself for having had the nerve to write back to Acontius, despite being a god-fearing virgin: *plus hoc quoque virgine factum, / non timuit tecum quod mea charta loqui* (*Her.* 21.143–4, 'even this, that my letter has not feared to speak with you, is more than a virgin should do'). And while this acceptance may on the surface seem to coincide with a conventionally happy ending, the final couplet of Cydippe's letter also allows for a different interpretation of its conclusion.

### 3. *cupio ... tecum*: Marriage

The tale of Acontius and Cydippe is supposed to end in marriage. Any reader familiar with the story as told by Callimachus expects to find signs of this outcome in the Heroidean letters. To such readers it may be hard to grasp what Cydippe actually says in the final couplet, which

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<sup>44</sup> Nicander fr. 49–50, Gow and Scholfield (1997, 207).

<sup>45</sup> 'This tragedy is arguably aggravated by the divine intervention that is reported at two important junctures in Antoninus Liberalis' Nicandrian paraphrase. For while there is initially no mention of any god in Antoninus Liberalis' summary, as Hermochares conceives of and executes his plan involving the apple, Ctesylla reads the oath aloud and throws the apple away, blushes ... and is "badly upset" (*χαλεπῶς ἤνεγκεν*, "se mit en colère"), ... in the later phase of the story, Ctesylla falls in love *κατὰ θεῖον* "according to a divine decree" and dies in childbirth *κατὰ δαίμονα* "in accordance with the god's wishes" (*Met.* 1.4). Ctesylla thus appears to love and die at the whims of an unpredictable, superior and merciless power ...' Thorsen (2019, 139).

*prima facie* signals her voluntary and positively motivated consent to marry Acontius, thus offering ‘narrative relief’ by fulfilling the reader’s expectations.

However, an important prerequisite for such relief on the part of any reader is to neglect all the elements in the letters that have been scrutinised in this chapter and which make it highly unlikely that Cydippe should suddenly desire to be with Acontius. The most obvious of these elements is the difference between the personalities of the two. In addition to the way in which love and pathology are treated differently in the two letters, as discussed above, the differences are particularly conspicuous in the correspondents’ approach to physical appearances versus inner qualities and the idea of compulsion as contrasted with consent.

To begin with appearances: Acontius is obsessed with them; Cydippe’s beauty is the cause of his passion (*Her.* 21.53–64); Acontius thinks of Cydippe in terms of beauty even when she is almost dead from disease and chastises her for ruining her good looks by stubbornly rejecting him – and, as a consequence, remaining ill: *parce, precor, teneros corrumpere febribus artus:/ servetur facies ista fruenda mihi* (*Her.* 20.117–18, ‘Cease, I entreat, to spoil your tender limbs with fever; preserve that face of yours for me to enjoy’). She, on the other hand, laments her good looks and wishes that she were less appealing, so that she might never have been desired by Acontius:

ergo te propter totiens incerta salutis  
commentis poenas doque dedique tuis;  
haec nobis formae te laudatore superbae  
contingit merces, et placuisse nocet.  
si tibi deformis, quod mallet, visa fuisset,  
culpatum nulla corpus egeret ope;  
nunc laudata gemo, nunc me certamine vestro  
perditis, et proprio vulneror ipsa bono.  
(*Her.* 21.31–8)

So, then, it is on your account that I am so many times uncertain of health, and it is for your lying tricks that I am and have been punished; this is the reward that falls to my beauty, proud in your praise; I suffer for having pleased. If I had seemed ugly to you – and would I had! – you would have thought ill of my body, and it would need no



medical care;<sup>46</sup> but I met with praise, and now I groan; now you two [the fiancé and Acontius] with your strife destroy me, and I am wounded by my own excellence/property.

Cydippe is beautiful, and although this beauty may take haughty pride in praise, a notion conveyed by the negative description of her *formae superbae* and the ironic *merces*, this really holds no value for her now, as is expressed through the paradoxical *proprio vulneror ipsa bono* (see above); in fact, she wishes that Acontius could see how her beauty has deteriorated in her state of illness, so that he would cease to desire her and regret that he made her promise to marry him (*Her.* 21.213–22).

Moreover, Acontius openly boasts of his plot, deceit and ambush – and contradicts himself on the subject of how blameworthy he is for tricking her into swearing to marry him. A key word in relation to this inconsistency on Acontius' part is *crimen*. Thus, Acontius first claims that asking her to wed him is not a crime (*non crimina*, 20.8) and wonders how writing a letter can be a criminal offence compared to employing weapons in order to capture a girl (*Her.* 20.38). However, when he insists on being awarded with his desired prize, he calls his way of proceeding precisely *tanto crimine* (*Her.* 20.68, 'such a great crime/charge/reproach'). This claim appears to be a slip of the tongue, which undercuts Acontius' final self-characterisation as someone distinguished by *sine crimine mores* (20.225, 'irreproachable behaviour'). Cydippe's response to Acontius' boasting of his manipulative strategies is twofold. Firstly, she scorns him for having chosen such an easy target by tricking an innocent virgin: *improbe, quid gaudes aut quae tibi gloria parta est/ quidve vir elusa virgine laudis habet* (*Her.* 21.115–16, 'Shameless man, why do you rejoice? Or what glory have you gained? Or what praise have you won, being a man, from tricking a girl?'). Her second strategy is to lecture Acontius on the difference between the spirit and the letter of the law (21.129–44), especially through the axiom *quod iurat, mens est* (*Her.* 21.135, 'that which swears is the mind').<sup>47</sup> This is a striking allusion to Euripides' *Hippolytus* (612), aligning Cydippe with the eponymous hero of the tragedy. The association is further sustained through Cydippe's repeated appeals to the favourite goddess of Hippolytus, Diana, to protect another virgin, i.e. herself (21.7–12; 173–82), and through Acontius' association with Phaedra, with

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<sup>46</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Heyworth for refining the English translation at this point.

<sup>47</sup> See Kenney (1969), (1970b), (1979) and Ziogas (2016).

his ominous imperative *perlege* (*Her.* 20.3) echoing that of Hippolytus' stepmother in her letter (*Her.* 4.3).<sup>48</sup>

Despite Cydippe's learned allusions to Euripides' *Hippolytus* and her legalistic reasoning, Ovid's Acontius implies that she is ignorant. Thus, he inserts colloquial elements like *si sapias* (20.174 'if you were smart') and *ignoras tua iura* (20.79, 'you do not comprehend your rights'), a claim which seems particularly outrageous considering Cydippe's subsequent learned lecture on the difference between the letter and the spirit of the law. While Acontius assumes Cydippe is uneducated, she laments her learnedness, because her literacy allowed her to read the oath aloud to the illiterate nurse who initially picked up Acontius' apple (21.103–4): *nil ego peccavi, nisi quod periuria legi/ inque parum fausto carmine docta fui* (21.181–2, 'I did nothing wrong, except that I read a false oath and showed myself to be literate with an unlucky verse'). What Acontius sees little of in Cydippe, namely her education, she finds excessive.

Acontius further reveals his systematic manipulation of Cydippe through another contradiction, in addition to that relating to the blameworthiness of his deceitful approach: his willingness to use violence if Cydippe continues to resist. Initially, Acontius brags about his bloodless conquest, when, by contrast, *per gladios alii placitas rapuere*<sup>49</sup> *puellas* (*Her.* 20.37, 'with swords other men have captured/raped pleasing girls'). Yet, a little later in his letter, Acontius proves to be not so different from *alii* after all, as he menacingly claims that *si non proficient artes, veniemus ad arma,/ inque tui cupido rapta ferere sinu* (*Her.* 20.47–8, 'If trickery does not succeed, I shall resort to arms, and you, captured/raped, will be borne away in an embrace that lusts for you'). The use of the simple future, as if Acontius were stating a future fact, the application of *rapta* and *ferere* to Cydippe in combination with the carnally lustful embrace of Acontius, and the *arma*, which can be motivated only by Cydippe's resistance, explicitly proposes sexual violence and rape. In response to such threats, Cydippe points out the inappropriateness of Acontius' sense of triumph, as she does not carry weapons herself, unlike many heroines, such as Penthesilea and Hippolyte (21.117–20). Moreover, Cydippe lectures Acontius on how to approach someone according to the art of love, simultaneously and subtly undercutting Acontius' claim to have a special bond with the god of love:

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<sup>48</sup> By associating Cydippe with Hippolytus, Ovid anticipates a similar connection to the one made by Rynearson (2009) 346–7 between Euripides' play and Callimachus' episode of Acontius and Cydippe.

<sup>49</sup> *OLD*, s.v. 4: 'to carry off (and violate), ravish'. As argued below, the parentheses are hardly necessary in the case of *Heroides* 20.

at fuerat melius, si te puer iste tenebat,  
                   quem tu nescioquas dicis habere faces,  
 more bonis solito spem non corrumpere fraude:  
                   exoranda tibi, non capienda fui!  
 cur, me cum peteres, ea non profitenda putabas  
                   propter quae nobis ipse petendus eras?  
 cogere cur potius quam persuadere volebas,  
                   si poteram audita condicione capi?  
   (*Her.* 21.125–32)

Yet it would have been better for you – if that boy really held you captive who you say has torches of some sort – to do as good men usually do, and not cheat your hope by dealing falsely; you should have won me by persuasion, not by stealing me! Why, when you sought my hand, did you not think it worthwhile declaring those things that made your own hand worthy of my seeking? Why did you wish to compel me rather than persuade, if I could be won by listening to your suit?

The passage amounts to a miniature *Ars amatoria* from Cydippe’s point of view, echoing precepts of Ovid’s love manual, such as *proximus huic labor est placitam exorare puellam* (*Ars* 1.37, ‘your next task is to win the girl you fancy’).<sup>50</sup>

Finally, Cydippe proceeds to connect the illegitimacy of Acontius’ alleged right to marry her with the lack of legal consent, as she states:

quae iurat, mens est; sed nil iuravimus illa;  
                   illa fidem dictis addere sola potest.  
 consilium prudensque animi sententia iurat,  
                   et nisi iudicii vincula nulla valent.  
 si tibi coniugium volui promittere nostrum,  
                   exige polliciti debita iura tori;  
 sed si nil dedimus praeter sine pectore vocem,  
                   verba suis frustra viribus orba tenes.

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<sup>50</sup> Cydippe’s mini-*Ars amatoria* is only one among several elements that associate her with the poet Ovid. See Thorsen (2019, *passim*).

non ego iuravi: legi iurantia verba;  
vir mihi non isto more legendus eras.  
(*Her.* 21.135–45)

It is the mind that swears, and I have taken no oath with that; it alone can lend good faith to words. It is counsel and the prudent reasoning of the soul that swear, and, except the bonds of the judgment, none avail. If I have willed to pledge my hand to you, exact the due rights of the promised marriage-bed; but if I have given you naught but my voice, without my heart, you possess in vain but words without a force of their own. I took no oath – I read words that formed an oath; that was no way for you to be chosen to husband by me.

Thus, while Acontius stresses appearances, Cydippe focuses on inner qualities, and while Acontius shows his disdain for consent through his attitude to tricks and rape, Cydippe champions the importance of consent throughout her letter.

Given the differences in attitudes and thoughts between Acontius and Cydippe, there is one question that remains more pressing than any other: how can someone like Cydippe, as far as we may know her from her letter, address the positively consensual words *cupio ... tecum*<sup>51</sup> to someone like Acontius, as far as we may know him from his letter? For the conclusion of Cydippe's letter, as it has been handed down to us, does indeed include the words *cupio* ('I wish/desire') and *tecum* ('with you'). This is puzzling not only considering how Cydippe emerges as a god-fearing virgin not too interested in men, but also, and more importantly, considering their incompatible personalities. However, the closing couplet also includes several other problems, whose disentanglement may help us find an answer.

The couplet belongs to a chunk of *Heroides* 21 that has been transmitted in incunabula printed in the 1470s and 1480s, and the major *variae lectiones* are: *cupio mihi iam contingere* ( $\pi$ ), *cupio me iam contingere* (L) and *cupio me iam coniungere* (*editio veneta*).  $\pi$  is the so-called Parma edition by Corallus from 1477; L has the final part of *Heroides* 21.9–248 added in handwriting dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>52</sup> and the 'Venetian edition', according to Dörrie, is

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<sup>51</sup> '*tecum* also seems to have the slight suggestion that Cydippe wants to be with Acontius', Thompson (1989, 331).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Diltthey (1863, 133–6); Palmer (1898 = Palmer and Kennedy 2005, *ad loc.*).

from 1480.<sup>53</sup> Since Dörrie's *Heroides* edition (1971),  $\pi$  has usually been assumed to be the basis for the later variations.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, the possibility that the *lectiones* of L or even the 'Venetian edition' may represent an earlier stage of the transmission cannot be completely ruled out.<sup>55</sup> This caveat is all the more relevant considering the fact that the pre-Dörrie editions of Palmer (originally published in 1898 and reprinted in 2005) and that of Showerman (originally published in 1913 in the Loeb series and continuously reprinted since)<sup>56</sup> are widely used today. Consequently, it is also important to look into the reasons why Palmer rejected L's *me iam contingere tecum*:

247. *nisi quod cupio me iam contingere* L, quod paullo fortius est quam Cydippam deceat. Innuere non aperte dicere, se iam matrimonium Acontii optare personae virginis magis conveniebat.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, Palmer regarded *contingere*, in the concrete sense 'to physically touch', as too erotically invested for a virgin like Cydippe. Instead, Palmer prefers the variant *coniungere* of the 'Venetian edition', which is a physically less intense and, according to Palmer, more acceptable way of expressing the same prospect of union with Acontius. It should be noted that such a sentence construction leaves *tecum* highly problematic, not to say impossible, but Palmer refrains from discussing that issue.<sup>58</sup>

'I find [Palmer's] note not altogether easy to interpret [...]', Kenney observes in an article published prior to his 1996 edition of the double *Heroides*, and explains: '*contingere* is said to be "*paullo fortius ... quam Cydippam deceat*," which makes it quite evident that Palmer did not understand it.'<sup>59</sup> Kenney, who in his reading of the couplet retains *mihi*

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<sup>53</sup> Dörrie (1971, *ad loc.*)

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Dörrie (1971, 4, 12), Kenney (1996) and Heyworth (2016).

<sup>55</sup> As White (2006, 198, n. 19) observes concerning precisely this couplet: 'The text *quid nisi quod cupio me iam coniungere tecum* is "handschriftlich bezeugt" (to use Dörrie's words. cf. *Nachr. Akad. Wiss. Gött. Philol.-Hist. Kl.* [1960], 3789, as is evident from the negative *apparatus criticus* of Sedlmayer's edition (Wien 1886). Since the manuscript tradition of the *Heroides* is "completely contaminated" (so Kenney, *Gnomon* [1961], p. 480), owing to the "transmissione orizzontale" which is not taken into consideration by Dörrie (he is a follower of the Lachmannian theory of "transmissione verticale"). The upshot of all this is that the wording indicated above is more likely to belong to the tradition and to be therefore genuine, instead of being an invention by one "Drucker" (to use Dörrie's words) which miraculously spread into all the *recentiores*.'

<sup>56</sup> Showerman's edition was revised by G. P. Goold and reissued in 1977, but the original dates as far back as to 1913.

<sup>57</sup> '247. *nisi quod cupio me iam contingere* L, *contingere* is somewhat stronger than what would befit Cydippe ... To suggest, rather than openly say, that she desires to immediately get married to Acontius would be more appropriate for a virgin's character.' Palmer and Kennedy (2005, vol. 1, 157).

<sup>58</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Harrison for interesting discussions of this problem.

<sup>59</sup> Kenney (1970a, 184).

alongside *contingere*,<sup>60</sup> as he clearly regards  $\pi$  as the authoritative edition of the incunabula mentioned above, seems to disregard Palmer's point about the accusative-with-infinitive construction, which would render *contingere* in its most basic meaning, i.e. 'to touch physically' (notwithstanding the problem of *tecum*, which neither Palmer nor Kenney discusses). More importantly, Kenney acknowledges quite correctly that any desire on Cydippe's part to touch or marry Acontius would be quite incompatible with her personality as portrayed in her letter:

... [Cydippe's] eagerness to be married to Acontius, [is] an emotion which, however plausible in isolation, is totally out of keeping with the picture of his heroine that Ovid has been at some pains to build up throughout the poem.<sup>61</sup>

Instead, Kenney assumes that Cydippe accepts marriage to Acontius not out of love, but out of her wish to get well: that is, for the prospect of health, rather than sickness. The word *contingere* is then to be understood as a part of an idiomatic expression, which denotes 'to fall to someone's lot'.<sup>62</sup>

quid, nisi, quod cupio mihi iam contingere tecum,  
 restat, ut ascribat littera nostra vale?  
 (Her. 21.247–8)

Nothing is left except for my letter to add [the usual wish for] good health, which I desire will now be mine<sup>63</sup> along with [my marriage to] you.<sup>64</sup>

Kenney also points out that the *contingere* of Cydippe's closing couplet is echoed in Acontius' letter, where he writes *iuncta salus nostra est: miserere meique tuique;/ quid dubitas unam ferre duobus opem?/ quod si contigerit ...* (Her. 20.233–5, 'Your health is joined with mine – have compassion on me and on yourself; why hesitate to aid us both at once? If this happens ...'). However, considering how ill-disposed Cydippe generally is

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<sup>60</sup> Kenney (1970a).

<sup>61</sup> Kenney (1970a, 184).

<sup>62</sup> *OLD* s.v. 8.

<sup>63</sup> Or, more literally here: 'fall to my lot'.

<sup>64</sup> Kenney's translation (1970a, 185). The brackets are the author's and reveal how difficult the lines are. In private communication Stephen Heyworth points out that 'Kenney misunderstands, I think: "which I want to come to me as well as to you" is the sense'.

towards all of Acontius' lines of reasoning, she is much more likely to regard this claim that Acontius, who in fact is in good health as they exchange letters, shares the same *salus* as she, who is on the verge of death from disease, as a provocation rather than a genuine prospect of salvation.

Indeed, the only other occurrence in the two Heroidean letters of the verb *contingo* may be of better help in making sense of Cydippe's closing remarks. In a passage quoted above (*Her.* 21.31–4), which Kenney suggests is best understood as 'a single heavily ironical statement',<sup>65</sup> we find the verb in *haec nobis formae ... contingit merces*. Moreover, concerning this phrase, Thompson observes 'Cydippe's use of a positive word [i.e. *contingit*] to describe her illness is ironic – the verb is normally used of good things happening (cf. 20.237, see above)'.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the transmitted text of π, which is fairly well established as the authoritative source, makes it clear that Cydippe does not want Acontius as much as she wants her good health. Moreover, the use of irony in Cydippe's letter, not least in the case of the only other occurrence of the verb *contingo*, makes it possible to catch a glimpse not of Cydippe's desire for good health, but for vengeance; for if she is deadly ill and Acontius and she get together, then maybe she will infect him, so that he suffers too.<sup>67</sup> Notably, in both Callimachus and Aristaenetos, Cydippe is cured *before* she marries Acontius and *after* she has revealed to her parents what has happened (*Aet.* 75.40). However, in *Heroides* 21, which necessarily must be written *before* her wedding to Acontius, Cydippe still has *invalidos artus* (*Her.* 21.245) and *manus aegra* (*Her.* 21.246) even *after* she has told her mother about the oath (21.241–2); thus, the possibility of her affecting others with her disease becomes more pressing. From this perspective, Cydippe's closing *vale* would not only be ironic, but downright threatening.

## Conclusion

The pathology of love is a major theme in Ovid's *Heroides* 20–1. This chapter argues that Ovid's Acontius is not so much obsessed by love as simply obsessive, and that Cydippe suffers not so much from lovesickness as from bodily sickness. Furthermore, their different personalities, as these emerge through their Heroidean letters, strongly suggest that a union between the two is bound to be unhealthy. Indeed, from an external perspective, Ovid's

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<sup>65</sup> Kenney (1996, 220).

<sup>66</sup> Thompson, (1989, 201).

<sup>67</sup> To this one may add that the verb *contingo* can mean not simply 'to touch', but also 'to affect with disease'; cf. *OLD*, s.v. 6.

Acontius and Cydippe may very well end up as founders of a noble family and, as such, qualify as ‘happy’. Yet, on a personal level, their union seems likely to become an unhappy rape-marriage in which the husband-*dominus* regards his wife as his property, as Acontius does in the Heroidean letters. There are two features in particular that Ovid exploits in order to activate these two parallel layers of happiness and unhappiness in the Acontius and Cydippe story: the evocation of Acontius’ Telchinian descent, which is already embedded in Callimachus, and, most importantly, Cydippe’s perspective, which may too be regarded as embedded *in nuce* in Callimachus,<sup>68</sup> but is only brought to full flower in the *Heroides*, where she pens an entire letter that is even a couple of lines longer than that of Acontius. It may feel counterintuitive to follow the interpretation presented in this chapter, as it means simultaneously setting aside the narrative of Acontius and Cydippe as we know it from Callimachus. Nevertheless, if the ideals of Callimacheanism are marked by surprise, subtleties, innovation and sophistication, then the turning of a well-known story upside down in this fashion is entirely in keeping with such ideals. From this perspective, it also appears fair to conclude that what Cydippe wants (*cupio*) is not to be with Acontius for love of him, but to get her good health back – or perhaps, on a more speculative note, to get together (*tecum*) only in order to get even.

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<sup>68</sup> ‘In the very last lines of the episode, Callimachus refers to the prose historiographer Xenomedes, and explains that this is the source “from which the child’s story moved swiftly on to our Calliope” (ἐνθεν ὁ παιδὸς/ μῦθος ἐς ἡμετέραν ἔδραμε Καλλιόπην, fr. 75.76–7). The precise sense is ambiguous, as ὁ παιδὸς μῦθος may be rendered as “the child’s story,” “the girl’s story” or “the boy’s story.” What is more, ὁ παιδὸς μῦθος neatly translates as either a genitive of the subject or of the object. Thus, it may just as well be “a story about her” as “about him.” Tellingly, translations differ ... Despite the fact that Cydippe’s perspective remains eclipsed by that of Acontius in the *Aetia*, the striking inclusiveness of the enigmatic summary that Callimachus gives us in the words ὁ παιδὸς μῦθος provides a final opportunity to consider Cydippe just as important as Acontius, which is precisely the opportunity that is realized in Ovid’s *Heroides* 20–1.’ Thorsen, (2019, 136–7).



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