Dido, the Metapoetic Queen: From Vergil to Ovid

Ovid's *Heroides* engages strikingly with the earlier mythological tradition by putting female characters in the role of letter writers, an exercise which beyond the collection's other interests provides a clever vehicle for metapoetic reflection. *Heroides* 7 (from Dido to Aeneas) contains metapoetic references expressing Ovid's poetic struggle to thrive so closely following Vergil's success and domination, particularly with his *Aeneid* (Desmond 1993, 57). This paper starts from the established metapoetic principles of poetic memory and the imitation of memory (Conte 1986), as even Ovid's self-aware Dido notes that she is *altera* ("another," *Her*. 7.17) telling the Dido-Aeneas story *iterum* ("again," *Her*. 7.18). It then draws out the metapoetic language in *Heroides* 7 by examining intertextual references, particularly those to *Aeneid* 4, and metapoetic imagery connected to memory and writing. Finally, the paper attempts to illuminate further connections in Ovid's word play that reemerge in the famous *carmen et error* passage of his later *Tristia* (207-10), where the poet's careful word choice expresses his true feelings about his exile.

While Ovid shows some connection to the earlier epic Dido by placing a hostile god (*adverso* [...] *deo*, *Her*. 7.4) in her story, the beginning of the work marks itself as *leve* ("light," *Her*. 7.6), indicating a movement away from 'heavier' epic. Ovid then plays with a Vergilian grammatical innovation when he uses the anaphoric *certus es* twice (*Her*. 7.7 and 9). Further, much like connections to tree bark (*liber*) allow for metapoetic discussions of books (*liber*) to occur in Vergil's *Eclogues* (Henkel 2009), there may be a connection between the *ceratae* [...] *taedae* ("funereal candles," *Her*. 7.23) and wax tablets (*cera*) used for writing. By placing Dido

in the position of writer – for she herself has mistakenly identified the torch – Ovid demonstrates that Dido is a stand-in for himself.

Finally, working from an observation of Farrell (1998) that Dido's writing may be an act of suicide, this paper coopts James' (1995) study of *condere* in the *Aeneid*, in which she traces the word's evolution from foundational (*conderet*, "he founds," *Aen*. 1.5) to murderous (*condidit*, "he stabs," *Aen*. 12.750), to propose that Ovid purposefully chooses the verb *concidit* at *Her*. 7.196, since its polysemous nature (*OLD* 386) offers up both antonyms and synonyms to *condere*, as the form *concidit* could come from either of two verbs before scanning to find the length of the first i. By connecting Dido's actions to Aeneas' when he kills Turnus, Ovid draws strong parallels between the works. Further, by reconsidering the gender switching that commonly occurs in Roman elegy (Drinkwater 2013), we can read Dido as Ovid, and it would not be a stretch to read Aeneas for Augustus. When Ovid invokes *Heroides* 7 in the *carmen et error* passage of the *Tristia*, therefore, he is speaking more deeply than appears on the surface as he expresses his sense of victimhood in relation to Augustus.

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