

## Cydippe *Defixa*: A Magical Reading of *Heroides* 21

In *Her.* 21, Ovid's Cydippe responds to Acontius, admonishing him for tricking her with the inscribed apple and for the suffering she has endured since. However, in a surprising twist at the end of the poem, she seems to undergo a change of heart and writes that she will marry him willingly (240). I will argue that throughout *Her.* 21 Ovid uses ambiguously magical language to imply that Acontius has gotten Cydippe's agreement through the use of an erotic charm. However, Ovid never explicitly states that Acontius has used magic because Cydippe, the narrator, does not realize that she is under an enchantment.

Previous scholarship has struggled to explain Cydippe's change of heart at the end of the poem. Both Edward Kenney (1970) and Paul Murgatroyd *et al.* (2017) argue that she actually enjoys the way Acontius is pursuing her. Kenney reads her as "powerfully attracted" to the violence of Acontius' approach (1970: 403), while Murgatroyd *et al.* interpret her complaints about Acontius' trickery and the illnesses she has suffered because of him as playful flirtation (2017: 247). As neither of these explanations provides evidence from the rest of the poem, I find neither persuasive. Furthermore, Alessandro Barchiesi (1993), Patricia Rosenmeyer (1996), and Erika Nesholm (2005) note that Acontius' apple acts as a binding spell on Cydippe, but their discussions are brief and tend to focus on *Her.* 20. None of these scholars examines what the effects of erotic magic mean for Cydippe's ability to freely make decisions. I therefore intend to treat the magical aspects of *Her.* 21 more fully and to reevaluate Cydippe's decision to marry Acontius in light of them.

First, I will discuss the inscribed apple's similarity to apple spells, erotic charms that involved throwing an apple at a woman, and to two kinds of erotic binding spells: those that inspired desire in the victim and those that separated the victim from other lovers. Next, I will

examine Ovid's use of ambiguously magical vocabulary in the poem. Words like *veneficium*, *carmen*, *ars*, and *noceo*, which appear in this poem describing what Acontius has done to Cydippe, are typical of descriptions of magic in Ovid. The most pointed of these words appears in Cydippe's description of herself reading the apple. Ovid writes (113): *luminaque in gremio veluti defixa tenebam*. Translators of this line generally construe *defixa* as modifying *lumina* and meaning "fixed," so that the line is translated: "I kept my eyes on my lap as if they were fixed there." However, Kenney notes that *defigere* in this sense is not usually qualified by words like *veluti* (1996: 230). I argue that Ovid qualifies *defixa* in this unusual way to draw attention to the double meaning of the word here. *Defigere* can mean not only "to fix," but also "to bewitch" (*OLD* s.v. *defigo* 6) and regularly appears on Latin curse tablets. Ovid was familiar with the magical sense of *defigere*, as he uses it at *Am.* 3.7.29. In *Her.* 21, *defixa* can therefore be read in this sense modifying Cydippe, so that the line is translated: "I kept my eyes on my lap as if I had been bewitched." Finally, I will examine other language in the poem suggestive of magic. Cydippe stresses Acontius' ability to hurt her from afar (208-210), recalling discussions of magic in the *Argonautica* (4.1675) and *Her.* 6 (91-92). She also compares her pale complexion to the apple and to a silver jug of cold water, which brings to mind the use of persuasive analogy and comparisons of the victim to cold metal found on many curse tablets. Ovid thus suggests throughout the poem that Acontius has placed Cydippe under a spell, without allowing Cydippe as the narrator to realize that she has been enchanted. An examination of the language of *Her.* 21 therefore reveals a new explanation for Cydippe's change of heart: Acontius has influenced her will using erotic magic.

#### Bibliography

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