



Study Questions

Heroides 1

Question 1: Homer's Penelope was often seen in Greek and Latin literature as an example of wifely virtue. To what extent do you think this is true of Ovid's Penelope as well?

Question 2: To what extent can we read Penelope's letter as the heroine's own claim to literary fame?

Heroides 7

Question 1: "In the *Heroides* Ovid was not afraid to put his Dido in competition with Virgil's, and to my mind in that competition the honours are even." (A. G. Lee). Do you agree with this statement?

Question 2: "Let us be quick to admit that this letter is a failure in its own right and would be so judged whether the *Aeneid* existed or not" (H. Jacobson). How would you respond to Jacobson?

Question 3: "Ovid's Dido is a better rhetorician than she is a love poet." To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Question 4: How much do you sympathise with Dido's feelings of betrayal in *Heroides 7*? Does your opinion change if you read the letter alongside Virgil's *Aeneid 4*?

General Questions

Question 1: What is the importance of Ovid's metrical choice (the elegiac distich) for our appreciation and understanding of the collection?



Question 2: In what ways can we read *Heroides* 1, 3 and 7 as elegiac “rewritings” of the greatest epic poems of the Classical canon?

Question 3: According to Quintilian, “Ovid was a poet who was 'too in love with his own talent’ (*Ovidius ... nimium amator ingenii sui*, Inst. 10.1.88). Based on your reading of the *Heroides*, would you agree with Quintilian?

Question 4: Ovid’s *Heroides* have often been criticised for their repetitive nature. Do you think this is a fair criticism or can we read this repetitiveness as an intentional authorial choice?

Question 5: Is it important to distinguish between Ovid and heroine as author?

Question 6: To what extent are the *Heroides* feminine readings of the Classical tradition?

Suggestions for further explorations

Task 1: Read Euripides’ *Medea* and Ovid’s *Heroides* 12. Compare and contrast the two authors’ treatment of these heroines.

Full translations of the texts are available on the Perseus Digital Library: [Euripides’ *Medea*](#) and [Ovid’s *Heroides* 12](#).

Task 2: Read some of Ovid’s double *Heroides* (collections of letters in which both lovers write to one another). Create your own version of the double letters by writing Ulysses’ response to Penelope and Aeneas’ response to Dido. For the latter, you may also find it useful to read Aeneas’ speech to Dido in [Aeneid 6.450-476](#).

- Pair 1: [Paris to Helen](#) (*Heroides* 16) and [Helen to Paris](#) (*Heroides* 17)
- Pair 2: [Leander to Hero](#) (*Heroides* 18) and [Hero to Leander](#) (*Heroides* 19)
- Pair 3: [Acontius to Cydippe](#) (*Heroides* 20) and [Cydippe to Acontius](#) (*Heroides* 21)