

Lydia and the Hebrus: Horace, *Odes* 1. 25

Odes 1. 25 has been interpreted as a conventional paraclausithyron (e.g., Henderson 1973, 51-60) coupled with the stereotype of the *moecha senescans* (Arkins 1983, 161-65) that focuses on Lydia's future as a wretched old woman. The only real controversy has been about the final stanza, where youths dedicate dried garlands to the river Hebrus, the *sodalis* of winter, an action that most see as a rejection of old age. All of the manuscripts read *Hebro*. The Aldine edition of 1509, however, printed *Euro*. In this reading, the youths in line 17 give dried leaves to the East Wind, rather than to the Hebrus. Bentley (1869), who accepted *Euro*, forcefully argued that the presence of the Hebrus made no sense. How, he asked, could youths in Rome be understood to undertake a journey to Thrace in order to dedicate dried leaves to the Hebrus?

Later editors remained more or less evenly divided between *Hebro* and *Euro*. Since 1912, however, with the exception of Lenchantin-Bo, all editors and commentators have accepted *Euro*. Tarrant (2016, 10) summarizes the current consensus, arguing that *Hebro* must be an error that arose from a confusion between the letters *b* and *u*, which had similar pronunciations. A scribe who may have read aloud to himself as he wrote could easily have heard himself say *Ebro* instead of *Euro* resulting in the transmitted *Hebro*. The same explanation is advanced by Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) and by Quinn (1980). Despite its now universal acceptance, I believe this conjecture results in an incoherent interpretation of the ode that fails to recognize an essential aspect of Horace's portrayal of Lydia. The Hebrus is neither a scribal error nor an absurd geographical reference; it is an allusion to Theocritus and Vergil and to their presentation of the Hebrus as part of a poetic landscape of despair that comes from the loss of love.

Those who defend *Hebro* have argued that it is the *sodalis* of winter simply because the Hebrus was traditionally associated with cold. This is not the case. In Greek poetry, the Hebrus is

variously depicted as the most beautiful of rivers, inviting to maidens who bathe in its waters (Alcaeus *fr.* 45), graced with flowering banks (Bacchylides 16. 5 Snell-Maehler), populated by full-throated swans (Aristophanes, *Birds*, 774), and shining of silver (Euripides *Heracles* 387). Theocritus is the first to associate the Hebrus with cold and winter (*Idyll* 7. 111-12), a passage in which Pan is punished for not uniting Aratus with his lover. Theocritus clearly influenced Vergil, who invokes the Hebrus and winter in his portrayal of the love-sick Gallus (*Ecl.* 10. 64-66) and later in his account of the death of Orpheus, whose frigid voice calls for Eurydice as his head is taken away by the Hebrus (*G.* 4. 523-27).

When Horace calls the Hebrus the companion of winter, he is looking at Vergil and through him to Theocritus. The Hebrus still represents the loss of love, but Horace turns it from an image of despair into one of resignation that tempers the violence of Lydia's emotions, allowing her to see the inevitability of loss that is figured in the dedication made to the Hebrus in the final lines.

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