VIRGO TO VIRAGO: MEDEA IN THE SILVER AGE

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ABSTRACT

The infamous mythological figure of Medea appears in the extant texts of three Silver Age Latin authors: Ovid (principally in the epic *Metamorphoses* and elegiac epistles *Heroides*, but also minor references in his other elegiac poetry), Seneca (the tragedy *Medea*), and Valerius Flaccus (the epic *Argonautica*). Although each author approaches the character differently, similarities can be found in their treatments. Through a detailed character study of Medea in these texts we are able to discern that, as well as being a character full of ambiguities, she is always portrayed with some measure of sympathy. This varies according to context, both of genre and of the particular stage of her myth being depicted: a large span of Medea's life and actions is covered in these accounts, from innocent girl through to formidable sorceress. This sympathy occurs despite Medea being a notorious witch and murderess, whose wicked actions were an irresistible draw for the writers. This is especially remarkable since, in these works, she is a product of the Silver Age, and therefore these portrayals satisfy the gruesome and macabre taste of the period, for which Medea the sorceress was an especially suitable topic. This sympathetic view can, in part, be explained by the apparent admiration which the authors felt for her, although the favour of the age for rhetorical argument also contributes to this. Earlier predecessors also had important influences on these works: notably Euripides, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Virgil. There are elements of both victim and villain in these accounts, a typical ambiguous tension in her character, but Medea is foremost a remarkable figure deserving the attention she receives. Her fascination and appeal cannot be denied, since she emerges predominant in each account, eclipsing her counterpart hero Jason: therefore she should, perhaps, be considered the true hero of these texts.

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INTRODUCTION

The figure of Medea emerged as the topic for this thesis out of an originally wider survey of female figures in Silver Age Latin literature. Although the broad selection of material I first surveyed presented an ample choice of interesting female characters, I soon abandoned these in favour of the particular attraction of this mythological character, realising that the complexities of Medea's nature offered a wealth of material for a complete thesis. Initially researching the heroine in Valerius Flaccus' epic *Argonautica*, I there recognised the potential in this figure and went on to examine Seneca's eponymous heroine in his tragedy *Medea*, and the various representations of her in Ovid, from his epic *Metamorphoses* and epistolary *Heroides*, to the brief references to her in his love and exile poetry, as well as his Roman calendar.

This attraction to the subject of Medea bears witness to the enduring fascination that her character has elicited from audiences and readers from the Classical period down to today:[2] her myth always appears to have had contemporary resonances in societies throughout the ages,[3] a fact which has surely accounted for her lasting interest. It is foremost the tensions within her character, the ambiguity caused by the many apparent contradictions, and the mighty actions to which these lead her, which contribute to Medea's complexity and, therefore, appeal. The ambiguities arise since the legend of Medea does not merely describe a single adventure, but spans a long period of her life: therefore we have a variety of events covered and, also, different aspects of the heroine's character.[4] Furthermore, the history of the figure appears to have evolved over time.[5] Medea plays several roles during her life:

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[1] The idea for this title came from a comment in Arcellaschi (1996) p.188.

[2] Braund (2002) p.182 acknowledges the ongoing fascination with Medea; Harris (2001) p.266 comments that she was "constantly on the educated male mind", and that philosophers and orators returned to her obsessively. There are many issues raised in this ancient myth which remain relevant now, a quality which Griffiths (2006) pp.3-4, 117 has acknowledged is unique to this figure: for example, marital infidelity, revenge attacks, female equality, racial tensions, and immigration. In close parallels, we often hear news reports of parents killing their children over a broken marriage, or ex-lovers' revenge attacks. McDonald (1997) pp.301-2, 304 comments that Euripides predicted the modern horrors and glory of the oppressed turned oppressor in his Medea.

[3] One example is found in Richardson (2003), which notes the reminiscences of Medea's troubles with that of abandoned women in Brough's contemporary Victorian England.

[4] Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) p.6, notes that this contributes to Medea's complexity, a quality which importantly distinguishes her from most other mythological characters.

[5] For a very useful summary of the history of Medea's character, her origins, sources, and appearances in ancient art and literature, and throughout the ages, Griffiths (2006) is an invaluable and accessible survey; for a history of the emergence of Medea, designated the greatest witch of the classical tradition, see Ogden (2008) pp.27-42. See also nn.8-9 below.

beginning as the young foreign princess who acts as a helper-maiden to the hero Jason, betraying her father and family in the process, she advances to become the barbarian wife of Jason, murderess, and sorceress, employing her magic for both good and evil, before finally emerging as a goddess. There are clear divisions in the heroine's personality, and her character develops significantly: therefore, she is a three-dimensional character, offering a great deal of scope for literary treatment.[6] This diversity of character makes the theory that Medea was originally two separate figures seem a possibility:[7] I believe this should be kept in mind throughout any study of Medea, where some consideration must always be given to her ambiguity.

Medea's powerful magic, and the ends to which she uses it, make her a most formidable and notorious figure, and therefore add significantly to her interesting character. However, she is perhaps best known for a horrific deed which does not involve her powers: the murder of her two sons in revenge for their father's faithless abandonment of her. This act mostly overshadows the rest of her mythological life. In turn, the magnitude of her actions, indeed, often appears to overshadow and outdo the heroic deeds of her husband. The extraordinary and abhorrent actions of Medea thus appear to be responsible for much of the interest in her character: there has always been an eagerness to examine her psychology, and what lies behind such behaviour, especially given her contradictory personality and the extreme nature of her acts. She evokes complicated reactions from us: although we know we should be repulsed by her because of these deeds, we cannot help but feel pity for the injustice she suffers at Jason's hands, and admiration for her brave resolve in seeing her cruel revenge through to its bitter end.[8] When we witness her get away with it, we are, in some measure, pleased for her and glad to see another potential tragedy, her death and punishment, averted.[9]

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[6] She also has many aspects which can be compared with features of other mythological heroines: Jouan (1986) p.1 notes correspondences with Electra, Clytemnestra, Ariadne and Deianeira.

[7] For a summary of this theory, and a discussion of the many different strands of the Medea myth, see Griffiths (2006) pp.9-12, 30-3. Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) pp.5-8, discusses Medea's complexity and the reconciliation of her different aspects, noting that such a dichotomy within one figure is unusual.

[8] Segal (1996) p.20, in discussing Euripides' *Medea*, comments that the heroine is fascinating because of the murder of her own children, and the sympathy that we are nevertheless able to feel for her. It has been suggested that Euripides was the first to credit Medea with filicide, which illustrates her evolving history: see McDonald (1997) pp.299-300 and Griffiths (2006) pp.19, 81. Griffiths, p.47, suggests that this is the most familiar version because it is closest to the essence of the myth: however, it surely owes its fame to the sensational and horrific nature of the crime.

[9] Interesting here, and useful for illustrating her ambiguous nature, is the theory that Medea had a role as a divine protectress of children, as founder of a cult to Hera: this possibly derived from a tradition where Medea accidentally killed her children when attempting to make them immortal; in another

The problem with such a woman as Medea, as she was portrayed by male authors,[10] is that she was feared by men and, or because, her actions were definitely neither committed in the interest of the men in her life, nor male society in general.[11] Since her myth is a relatively full one, covering a considerable portion of her life, Medea represents many different roles: daughter, sister, niece, wife, mother, princess, helper-maiden, priestess, divinity, and sorceress. However, she does not play out her familial and social roles as she "should", according to ancient male definitions of ideals,[12] when she eventually takes up other roles: family traitor, witch, murderer, fratricide, and infanticide. She is an active and truly powerful figure, not the passive female type that was to be admired and emulated in the Classical period.[13] Medea was thus seen as having transgressed male-female boundaries: she had a power that most men did not have, and she used this for her own sake, not that of the home, husband and family, thus posing a significant threat to male-dominated society and social order. Indeed, her behaviour opposed all of these important social groups. She committed crimes against her homeland, family, father, children and husband. Furthermore, she certainly was not submissive and deferential, ideals of womanhood according to men in antiquity:[14] her very behaviour acted against everything that was considered good and feminine or, at least, she was portrayed as thus behaving.[15] Furthermore she was a barbarian:[16] not only was she a woman who crossed over into the realms of the male, but she crossed geographical boundaries, moving from her home, the foreign Colchis, to come to Greece, and

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version the Corinthians were responsible for the children's deaths. See Graf (1997) pp.34-5 and Johnston (1997) pp.44-70; also Griffiths (2006) pp.16, 19.

[10] Finley (2002) p.148 comments that the vital piece missing from literary depictions of women is the woman's own voice/point of view; similarly, Wyke (2002) p.208 notes that "our principal evidence for the lives of ancient women is still on the level of representations, not realities".

[11] Wyke (2002) p.210 comments that female sexuality is only depicted in a positive light when it socially benefits the patriarchy. Pomeroy (1994) pp.x, 97 acknowledges the misogyny that taints many of these accounts.

[12] On female categories, see Archer *et al.* (1994) p.xviii. Dixon (2001) p.17 notes that Roman literature concerning women is all a variation on the theme of ideal womanhood.

[13] Pomeroy (1994) p.109, commenting on Euripides' Medea, notes that she refuses to be passive.

[14] Pomeroy (1994) p.98 remarks that womanly behaviour was characterised by submissiveness and modesty: two traits which we can certainly say that Medea was not familiar with in her adult life. She was instead more masculine, a classification which Pomeroy recognises was bestowed on any woman behaving outside the accepted norm.

[15] Since these portrayals are drawn exclusively by male authors, they cannot represent a balanced, realistic view of women's lives in antiquity, but male constructs of them, although they may reflect ideas men of the classical world held about the opposite sex: Archer *et al.* (1994) pp.xvii, xix comment that woman was always thus an illusion. However, their theory that women are merely definitional tools next to men does not seem to fit Medea; although their view that some women are represented as an "enigma to be feared and controlled" does especially apply to Medea.

[16] For the interesting theory that she was originally a Greek and Euripides invented her barbarian status, see Hall (1989) p.35.

threaten this land of civilisation by committing awful atrocities.[17] Medea was the transgressive "other",[18] as current theories label her and, as such, was to be feared and loathed: she was outside male control and so was impossible to handle.[19] Medea would not simply accept injustices against herself: she was not the type of woman to slip away quietly into the shadows,[20] and so she continues to exert her influence, even now. Men in classical antiquity were doubtless afraid that the ordinary women that they knew somehow had the potential to behave so outrageously:[21] it was from here that such a female portrayal must ultimately have derived and increased in reputation. However, real women of ancient society were not the exceptional characters of Greek myth, and should not be judged by the standards of an extraordinary figure like Medea.[22]

These aspects explain the fascination Medea has always held and, therefore, the attraction of researching Medea as a thesis topic. There should also be a brief discussion of the period of literature chosen. Having been long overshadowed by the preceding Golden Age, the Silver Age of Latin literature has only more recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. As the name of the period suggests, the Silver Age has generally been held as a period of decline in literary standards.[23] This immediately suggests, therefore, that some justification and defence of the period would be valuable.

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[17] Griffiths (2006) pp.57, 59-63 discusses Medea's liminality in terms of ethnicity and gender, noting that she functions on boundaries, representing fears about human limitations. She observes, p.60, that Colchis' physical distance and alien nature, on the edge of the known ancient world, made it suitable as Medea's place of origin.

[18] This has become a way of categorising ancient women who did not "conform": see, for example, Hall (1989) pp.201-2; Archer *et al.* (1994) pp.xvii-xviii; Zeitlin (2002) pp.102-38. Sawyer (1996) p.118 summarises the essence of such views: "womanhood became the 'other' in order to confirm the normative and primary concept of manhood". This is useful but should not be carried too far: Medea is certainly an 'other' since she is represented as a social outsider, but this is both as a woman *and* foreigner; furthermore, we should beware interpreting Medea purely as a character validating maleness, since she is undoubtedly a woman who foremost stands for herself, emerging triumphantly over the males around her.

[19] Griffiths (2006) pp.46-7 summarises the male fears about such a woman, and witch. She also notes, in discussing Medea's role as witch, p.60, that fear of the unknown can lead to demonization.

[20] Silencing Medea and the power of her language is perceived as a theme in some of the literature: see Griffiths (2006) pp.43-4, 64 on Medea's power of language, and employment of deceit, through both incantations and rhetoric.

[21] For similar comments, see Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) p.10, and Griffiths (2006) p.63.

[22] For a useful summary of the hazards of attempting to derive historical fact from mythology, see Dowden (1997), especially pp.44-6, 48-9, 56. He discusses how far we can discern historical attitudes from mythological and non-historical literature, where extremes are characteristic; it certainly seems likely that reality, through common attitudes, must in some measure be reflected in literary accounts. Griffiths (2006) pp.13-14 remarks that the Greeks would have had a belief, and fear, in Medea as a real figure.

[23] For a detailed study of the Silver Age style, conception and writers, Williams (1978), especially pp.292-3, is a particularly valuable authority, although his premise that the era was one of literary decline is perhaps not wholly accurate: see n.24 below.

During my initial wider study of Silver Age women, I found much that would perhaps better deserve the label "different" than "in decline".[24] Furthermore, it emerged that the chosen period and topic complemented each other well. Not only is there no substantial extant account of Medea in earlier Roman literature, although they did once exist,[25] but the figure of Medea seemed to provide Silver Age writers with an especially suitable subject matter: indeed, perhaps this explains why the accounts of this era survived, while the earlier Roman material handling the heroine did not.

The Silver Age is the period of Latin literature beginning at the end of the Augustan era, early in the first century AD, and continuing for approximately 150 years. Since Ovid started writing in the time of Augustus, and died only a few years after the first emperor, he is not always held to be a Silver Age author: however, his style of writing is very indicative of the era and I believe that he should, indeed, be credited as the originator of it. As already noted, Silver Age literature has traditionally been considered a decline from the Golden Age of Augustan writing. It is characterised by its striving for novelty and effect, a reaction which presumably arose, in part, from the authors' desires to outdo the previous age in some measure,[26] but also from the influence of rhetoric, which was arguably even more prevalent in this period than in the Augustan era. This age of rhetoric led the authors to choose topics in which they could suitably demonstrate their training, through argument and defence of a character's position: therefore a figure such as Medea, who committed many wicked deeds, presented the perfect opportunity, since the extreme nature of her actions meant that defence of her provided a considerable challenge. This desire for sensationalism, combined with rhetorical training, also led to descriptions of excess: topics are treated at length and exhaustively so that every imaginable angle is explored through repetition and amplification; virtuoso set-pieces become prevalent;[27] the language is full of clever conceits and is famed for its sententiousness; behaviour of characters is carried to

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[24] Some have recognised that the Silver Age has been unfairly assessed. Mayer (1999) explains that we should not judge ancient literature by our own standards, but should be aware of the views which antiquity held: he observes, p.147, that the label "Silver", suggesting depreciation, was not bestowed on the period by the Romans, who valued much of the literature of the era. See also Conte (1994) pp.405-6, who emphasises the period's differences rather than deficiencies.

[25] Griffiths (2006) p.21 notes the popularity of the Medea theme in Rome. Boyle (2006) pp.71-8 discusses Ennius' Republican tragedy about Medea. Varro Attacinus is also known to have produced a free translation of Apollonius' *Argonautica* during the Republic. Fantham (1996) p.157 also notes that a Medea tragedy by Lucan, Seneca's nephew, once existed: this attests to the interest in the character, and Fantham questions if writing a *Medea* became a requirement of education.

[26] Williams (1978) pp.3-4, 149 identifies the Roman writers' sense of inferiority, next to their Greek predecessors, as a factor in the decline of the literature.

[27] As it is described by Conte (1994) pp.405-6. Williams (1978) p.213 notes that subject matter became secondary to the treatment of the material.

extremes; and heightened emotions are popular features of character portrayal. Again, Medea fits well here, since being ruled by her emotions and exhibiting outrageous behaviour makes her particularly apt for extreme descriptions and imagery.[28] Furthermore, the literature of the period displayed an especial taste for the macabre, cruel and gruesome:[29] again this would be a partial result of the age's desire to outdo anything previously, but also was surely a sign of the especially bloody and turbulent times of the early Roman Empire.[30] This period saw the deaths of several emperors, as the result of murderous plots, unlike the natural and peaceful death of Augustus in old age;[31] furthermore, this was the age of the amphitheatre, when horrific bloody spectacles became popular sport for the people, even more so than in previous times.[32] Therefore the nature of Medea, as a witch, as well as the bloody acts she commits, provided a most suitable subject matter for the Silver Age audience's tastes.

Hence we reach the topic of the Silver Age Medea. The approach I have adopted for this thesis is foremost that of a character study, through analysis of the texts.[33] My choice of authors and works has been determined by the wish to have a complete overview of the character in the Silver Age: Ovid, Seneca and Valerius Flaccus wrote the only extensive accounts of Medea to have survived from the period. It should be made clear that they were writing at different times during the era, and in different genres, in order to realise the varying contexts in which they deal with the figure of Medea:[34] this will,

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[28] Stafford (1998) pp.46-7 relevantly notes that extremes of human behaviour often found mythical expression in female form.

[29] Williams (1978) pp.188-90, 254-6 traces this back to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, viewing it as quite opposite to Virgil's style of understatement and sympathy.

[30] Williams (1978) p.4 relates the change in literary style to the social and political climate of the age; he notes, pp.148, 152, that the use of mythology was a frequent "escape route" for imperial writers, since the topics were relatively safe for treatment.

[31] Although there was an improbable rumour that he was murdered by his wife, so that her son Tiberius could claim his place as Emperor: Tacitus *Annals* 1.5.

[32] Griffiths (2006) p.21 comments on Seneca's response to the increasingly blood-thirsty tastes of the Roman public. Ogden (2008) pp.75-6 suggests that the individuality of the Roman witch derives from the influence of the arena.

[33] Although I have read much material on gender studies during my research, my approach has necessarily rendered gender politics marginal to the thesis. Although this material has often proved useful and informative, I have remained focused on my original aim. Furthermore, it should be noted that I agree with the view of Nikolaidis (1997) pp.27-8, that we should exercise caution when transposing ideas from such theories back onto a period in which they did not exist; Dickie (2001) p.19 makes a similar general observation. For a useful summary of feminist approaches to Medea, see Griffiths (2006) pp.65-8; Zajko (2008) summarises feminist attitudes towards women and myth.

[34] Dixon (2001) is invaluable for drawing attention to the matter of genre determining how an author treats his subject: see especially pp.IX, XIV, 16-25, where she notes that, according to the type of literature, certain aspects will be emphasised or excluded, projecting an image related to that genre, so that we cannot gain an accurate and realistic impression of Roman women from ancient texts. This caution should always be kept in mind when discussing female character portrayal in classical literature.

in part, determine how Medea is portrayed in each work. Therefore I shall devote a chapter to each of the authors' treatments of Medea, in chronological order of their lives, and look in detail at their individual approaches. Furthermore, these writers deal with different periods of the life of the heroine, and so their accounts cannot be directly compared in all aspects, so that separate consideration of their works will prove more valuable for discerning the characterisation of each Medea. This thesis will explore these portrayals of the heroine, whose mythical life was always overshadowed by her most notorious actions. I aim to discover if these writers merely followed contemporary convention and were prejudiced by the dark aspects of her character, drawing Medea purely in the guise of an evil witch whose wicked deeds completely dominate her tale, or whether it was possible for them to evoke any note of admiration or sympathy for this mighty female character, especially in the light of the particular tastes of the period. I intend to examine which of Medea's characteristics the authors emphasise, and what they were thereby attempting to convey, considering how far this accords with the traits of the Silver Age. Simultaneously, throughout, I shall look at how the Roman writers compare with, and differ from, both one another, and their extant Greek and Roman predecessors. In conclusion I shall look at the significance of any comparisons which can be drawn between these Silver Age portrayals of Medea.

CHAPTER 1: OVID'S MEDEA

The first Silver Age poet to write about Medea was Ovid: he wrote on the cusp of the Golden and Silver Age of Roman literature,[35] during the reign of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. Augustus exiled Ovid for the mysterious *carmen et error*,[36] and the poet died only a few years after him, early during the reign of Tiberius. Ovid differed from the other Augustan poets, such as Virgil and Horace, since he had not experienced the civil strife of the late Republic which they had lived through. As a probable consequence of this less troubled background, Ovid seems to have a correspondingly different outlook and, therefore, is the first author to display Silver Age attributes and, as such, plays an important part in the creation and development of the literature and style of the period.[37] Being a product of a relatively easier and much more settled time meant his concerns tended not to be with serious matters, which gave his poetry a different tone, often making it more light-hearted and frivolous.[38] Furthermore, Ovid was innovative in his approach to writing, a further indication of a new style of poetry: of the three authors I am considering in this thesis, Ovid is the only one to produce works which do not have known close original models. The late Augustan produced works in a variety of genres from tragedy to epic and elegy, favouring the latter especially,[39] and indeed had a prolific output of material, covering numerous subjects. Particularly relevant here is that, throughout his writing, Ovid displayed a prevailing interest in women and a remarkable insight into their psychology,[40] making him comparable with the Greek tragedian Euripides: some have interpreted this as an indication that he had early feminist tendencies, while others have taken it as the very opposite.[41]

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[35] Tarrant (2002b) p.19 neatly sums up Ovid's place between the Golden and Silver Age. Hardie (2002c) p.45 considers that Ovid himself would have held the later writers as rivals, rather than products of a more decadent age.

[36] As Ovid himself tells us in his exile poetry: *Tristia* 2.207. The *carmen* is believed to be Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, a handbook for lovers, whose content apparently contradicted Augustus' moral legislation. The *error* is uncertain: it seems that Ovid witnessed something, possibly involving members of the imperial family.

[37] Williams (1978) pp.3-4, 52-3 speaks of the general change in style as a decline, in which Ovid's method of escapism influenced later writers. He attributes this change, pp.304-5, to a need for novelty and immediate impact, which he believes Ovid created by making poetry an art form for public recitation.

[38] Conte (1994) pp.342-3 neatly summarises this.

[39] Hill (2008) p.1.

[40] Wilkinson (1955) pp.203-5. Mack (1988) pp.3-4 briefly summarises Ovid's interest in, and insight into, women: her book provides a useful summary of Ovid and his works in general.

[41] Sharrock (2002a) pp.95-107 explores gender issues in Ovid. In relation to the *Heroides*, Lindheim (2003) pp.179-80 considers that Ovid uses "structures of genuine feminine desire". Anti-feminist interpretations often arise in relation to the rape narratives in the *Metamorphoses*: for example, Richlin (1992c) pp.158-79 interprets the rape scenes as beautifying the women through their fear in flight, rather than showing sympathy; also Marder (1992) p.155, discussing Philomela, claims that there are no "real women" in the epic.

There are two extant works in which Ovid deals extensively with the character of Medea: both of these appear to be original, since they do not closely follow a previous version, but are inspired by a variety of earlier literature, and are handled in Ovid's typically innovative manner. Medea is the focus of the first half of book seven of Ovid's epic, *Metamorphoses*, which was one of his later poems; and she twice features in one of his earliest works, the *Heroides*, a set of imaginary letters from heroines to their lovers: the twelfth elegiac letter is written by Medea to Jason,[42] and the sixth is from Hypsipyle to Jason. The latter, despite being an epistle from another heroine, exhibits an unprecedented preoccupation with Medea, which underscores Ovid's own particular fascination with the heroine:[43] this focus on Medea rather than Hypsipyle is an apparent reflection of his own interest in the character. His literary output contained much material concerning Medea: as well as the two extensive works I shall consider here in detail, Ovid mentions her in both his amatory and exilic works, and I shall also survey these lines before concluding this chapter. Furthermore, there was also a tragedy, which is the only play that has been ascribed to Ovid. Unfortunately, only two lines of this survive, and it is known to us thanks to Quintilian:[44] since it is a lost work, we obviously cannot examine it here, but its existence should be noted because it displays that Ovid had an overwhelming interest in Medea, whom he frequently revisited in his poetry, and it seems significant that this is the subject that he chose for his only known tragedy.[45]

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[42] The authenticity of this letter has been questioned, principally because Ovid did not include it in allusion to some of these epistles at *Amores* 2.18.19-26: this inconclusive list does not prove its authorship: Hinds (1990) pp.30-7. Therefore, I here assume that Ovid did write it: his overriding preoccupation with Medea makes it probable that he penned *Heroides* 12, and it was likely to have been written before *Heroides* 6, its companion piece: see n.216 below. Regardless of authorship, it can be considered with the rest of the collection, since it was composed in the same style, as Knox himself concedes, (1986) pp.222-3. On the issues surrounding this, see Knox against Ovidian authenticity and the corresponding Hinds (1990), which most convincingly counters Knox's argument; see also Heinze (1991-1993), who sets out evidence against Knox's conclusion.

[43] Wilkinson (1955) p.206.

[44] *Institutio Oratorio* 10.1.98 and 3.8.5; also Tacitus *Dialogus* 12. See Nikolaidis (1985) on the lost tragedy: however, Nikolaidis believes that the play must have lacked merit, but Ovid's *Medea*, which cannot contribute here, surely would have been a beneficial work for the study of Medea, especially because of Ovid's keen interest in women and their psychology; Nikolaidis is correct, however, that, from the evidence of his extant work, Ovid does not seem suited for such serious and lofty subject matter in that format (p.385).

[45] It seems probable that this tragedy would have covered the same events as that of Euripides' *Medea*, her banishment from Corinth and the murder of her sons, since Ovid has not dealt with these in any other extant text: see Currie (1981) p.2704 and Boyle (2006) pp.167-8.

METAMORPHOSES 7

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was the Roman author's attempt at the more serious genre of epic. However, unlike the lofty subjects of his predecessors' epics, Ovid created a unique collection of well-known Greek myths,[46] loosely linking the many tales together through the theme of metamorphosis:[47] this subject appears more suited to his style since, even when the subject matter appears more serious, he often retains his frivolous and light-hearted tone.[48] The links between tales can often be very tenuous, but Ovid wove a complete work which ran from the creation down to the deification of Julius Caesar, the adoptive father of Augustus. This epic provided a framework in which Ovid could put his rhetorical training[49] and many literary talents to use, in the narration of the myths of gods and heroes through the ages: these talents include his psychological studies of human emotions and, in particular, those of women; his handling of a wide variety of situations and topics, including the tragic; the use of wit and irony; and overblown portrayals of frequent violent or gruesome scenes.[50] The brief, ever-changing nature and the variety of tales make the *Metamorphoses* a very readable and entertaining piece and, combined with the variety of subject matter, this has made it very influential throughout the ages.[51]

Although it is one of Ovid's later works, I begin with the account of Medea given in *Metamorphoses* 7, because this gives an overview of her mythological incarnation from her earliest days through to the events of her later life,[52] while the *Heroides* only provides a snapshot of one moment in her adult life.

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[46] Williams (1978) p.3 records Greek myth as one of Ovid's safe modes of escapism. Boyle (2008) p.358 summarises the *Metamorphoses* as a mythographic epic, listing several sources which Ovid, "Rome's greatest mythographer" (p.379), rewrites.

[47] Hill (2008) pp.2-3 briefly considers possible predecessors for this type of poetry, a collection of stories linked by one theme, including Callimachus' *Aetia*. Fantham (2004) pp.120-1, 126-7, 130-1 notes the versatile Callimachus as a prominent Hellenistic influence; see also Wilkinson (1955) pp.144-6.

[48] Fantham (2004) pp.119-32 discusses influential works for the *Metamorphoses*. She notes that there are elements of different genres within Ovid's "epic", elegy being especially prominent, p.125.

[49] This would have been part of his traditional education for a political career: Hill (2008) p.1 notes that his work clearly demonstrates evidence of *suasoriae* exercises: this is especially evident in the *Heroides*.

[50] Williams (1978) pp.188-90, 254-6 attributes the origin of exploitation of themes of suffering, cruelty and violence to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, viewing the apparent pleasure in the horror as quite opposite to Virgil's style of understatement and sympathy.

[51] For a summary of its influence, see Innes (1955) pp.18-24.

[52] Newlands (1997) p.178 notes that, in this overview, Ovid differs from his predecessors' accounts of Medea, and his own previous versions. She remarks that Ovid's choice of events is not predictable, since he omits more infamous episodes (for example, the murder of her sons) and expands on more minor ones (for example, the rejuvenation scene). Wise (1982) p.16, in similarly recognising the

By the very nature of this epic, a series of tales about mythical transformations of some kind, Ovid only had a certain amount of space which he could devote to Medea: nevertheless, half of one book is a relatively large amount, emphasising his prevailing interest in the character. However, with only 400 lines being dedicated to several momentous events, spanning the whole mythical life of this woman, it is predetermined that this can only be a brief summary of notable episodes in her life. Therefore there must be a significant difference in balance and focus from the other major accounts of the Silver Age Medea, since they deal with specific shorter periods of her life, in detail.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, after a few opening lines concerning Jason's arrival in Colchis (1-8), a Medea is thrust upon the scene who has already fallen in love with the hero.[53] Ovid has headed straight for the crux of the matter, without any explanation of, or reason for, the development of these feelings, thereby throwing his version of the character into instant turmoil. His Medea opens in the middle of a characteristic Ovidian dilemma, as she struggles between passion and reason:[54]

> concipit interea validos Aeetias ignes
> et luctata diu, postquam ratione furorem[55]
> vincere non poterat, 'frustra, Medea, repugnas;
> nescioquis deus obstat' ait 'mirumque nisi hoc est,
> aut aliquid certe simile huic, quod amare vocatur'. [7.9-13][56]

The passion is here metaphorically described as a strong fire, which is an image commonly employed to describe love's power,[57] and which appears frequently in relation to Medea's feelings. This concept

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suppression of some parts of the myth, relates the expansion of other parts to the language of metamorphosis, particularly through Medea's incantations.

[53] Fantham (2004) p.74 recognises Medea as the first in a series of women in love in the *Metamorphoses*, noting that love is the focus in the central section, books 6-11.

[54] Anderson (1963) p.14 numbers Medea among several Ovidian heroines, in the *Metamorphoses*, struggling with the power of love, or showing their passion fighting reason. Hill (2008) p.194, commenting that Ovid has taken Medea's conflict between love and duty from Apollonius, notes that the poet concentrates on moments of high emotion. Fantham (2004) pp.75-6 considers it a particularly Euripidean aspect. Boyle (2008) pp.365-6 cites this monologue as evidence of Ovid creating a *pinacoteca* of the human mind, noting the moral dimension to the poet's preoccupation with human psychology.

[55] Griffiths (2006) p.94 identifies *furor* as a driving force at key moments in the text.

[56] The Latin text used throughout is Tarrant (2004).

[57] Hill (2008) p.195 cites Apollonius 3.285ff. and Virgil *Aeneid* 4.2 as relevant examples of its use elsewhere.

of passion versus reason was a frequent theme in classical literature.[58] This internal battle was considered to be futile in females, since their natural weakness, according to the misogynistic male stance commonly found in the classical world, determined that they would be overcome by emotion. This struggle gave Ovid the opportunity to use his rhetorical training in an elaborate set speech.[59] The decision Medea must make is also a moral one between passivity and action: if she chooses Jason then she must act, and this is not the expected appropriate behaviour for a daughter, without her father's permission.[60]

The effect of immediately immersing Medea in anguish and despair has two results for the character. Firstly, the instant torture of Medea in Ovid's text gives the Latin poet the opportunity to explore the female psychology, as he often appears to enjoy doing; furthermore, he particularly seems to have relished the implications of such a complicated character as Medea, and it seems that he could not wait to look at the internal workings of this legendary sorceress as a young girl, in order to consider if she had always had a wicked nature. Secondly, although Ovid does indeed report that this love has come about after a long struggle, the readers have not witnessed any real attempt by Medea to resist these emotions and, therefore, have no sense of this: by the time that we meet her in the *Metamorphoses* it is too late and all that is left for her is to wage an internal battle between reason and emotion. However, it should also be remembered that the brief episodic nature of the *Metamorphoses* did not permit the author to explain the background to such situations: there was principally only space for the events. Therefore the gods' instigation of, and interference in, the love between Medea and Jason, is not explained in the *Metamorphoses*, as it is in Apollonius' Hellenistic epic and later in

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[58] Seneca especially subscribed to this philosophical idea, as can be seen in his tragedies: see Chapter 2, pp.94, 112-13, 138, 159. Hill (2008) p.195 notes Apollonius 3.439-70 and 744-801, and Virgil *Aeneid* 4.1-89, as examples of the struggle between duty and passion. Griffiths (2006) pp.68-9 suggests that Medea's story can be used philosophically to explore problems of mental conflict within an individual, citing Euripides' version of the reason versus passion battle.

[59] Barsby (1991) p.37.

[60] Graf (1997) pp.23-5 identifies this early part of Medea's tale as a "Tarpeia type": that is a triangle consisting of a daughter torn between her father, often the king of a city, and a foreign enemy. It is notable that Ovid opens book 7 with Medea's "Tarpeia" tale and then book 8 with Scylla's parallel version: see Crabbe (1981) p.2304; Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.112 draws parallels between Medea, Scylla and Ariadne. See also the parallels that Newlands traces, (1997) pp.196-200: she seeks to show that themes from the Medea tale which are not dealt with here, have been transposed elsewhere (see n.132, below); here the theme is betrayal of the father for a foreign love. Fantham (2004) p.75 also considers Medea's foreshadowing of the unlawful passions of Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha.

Medea's crimes against her father are not simply obtaining the Golden Fleece for Jason and killing her brother, but choosing her own husband: Clark explains, (1996) pp.44, 46, that a Roman father's consent was necessary and he should arrange his daughter's marriage. Visser (1986) pp.153-4 notes the impiety and danger for the Tarpeia type in choosing the conjugal over the natal family.

Valerius Flaccus' Latin version.[61] Nevertheless, the gods are briefly implicated by Ovid's Medea, when she makes the brief comment to herself on the futility of resisting the unknown god (11-12).[62] This is a mere hint that this love has been imposed from elsewhere, and that Medea is not to blame for her actions: Ovid does not elaborate on the cruel interference of the goddesses Juno and Venus. Their absence is especially notable since, elsewhere in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid prominently displays the goddesses' vindictiveness and interference, especially Juno's, in the lives of mortals.[63]

Thus the girl seems to realise the futility of resisting, intuitively sensing that this has been divinely inspired. Furthermore, she displays a level of understanding that the feeling that she is experiencing is that of love. This awareness indicates that Ovid's Medea is not a totally naive young girl. Clearly she has not experienced this before, and is merely assuming that this is the feeling of love, but nonetheless she has enough knowledge to realise this. In Valerius' account, we shall find a Medea who is completely confused by the emotions she feels, and so the Ovidian Medea strikes the reader as more mature and intelligent.[64] This Medea's knowledge reveals itself further during her soliloquy, which recalls the speeches of Apollonius' Medea in his *Argonautica*, combined with the moralising aspects to be found in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[65] Ovid has portrayed his heroine as addressing herself for sixty lines (11-71) and the length of this speech increases the impression of her distress.[66] However, although a youthful uncertainty pervades the emotional soliloquy, rather than appearing completely unsure, Ovid's Medea seems to know the answers to her questions already. The process that she is going through appears rather to be one of rationally working out the best course, while reproaching herself for not following it:

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[61] Feeney (1993) p.239 considers whether Ovid has removed the divine intervention of Apollonius here, or whether the reader is expected to supplement it.
[62] Newlands (1997) p.182 perceives helplessness as the theme of the soliloquy. Relevant here is Boyle's view, (2008) pp.366-7, that Ovid presents the paradigmatic human status as that of victim.
[63] Nagle (1984) explores the *ira* of the goddesses. Newlands (1997) pp.184-5 attributes the absence of the gods to Ovid's wish to portray Medea as more human.
[64] See Chapter 3, p.184.
[65] Otis (1966) pp.59-60. Wise (1982) p.16 notes that the soliloquy alludes to Alexandrian poetry and, in its psychological aspects, *Heroides* 12.
[66] Larmour (1990) p.132, n.4 views this as "barely tragic": however, there are tragic elements, although Ovid has made it "parodistic", as so often.

excute virgineo conceptas pectore flammas,

si potes, infelix. si possem, sanior essem.

sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido,

mens aliud[67] suadet; video meliora proboque,

deteriora sequor...[68] [7.17-21]

Nevertheless, this maturity and intuition does not detract from the innocence of Medea: we can see from this passage that, while not elaborating upon the cruel involvement of the gods, Ovid is making it clear that Medea is not to be held responsible for the love she is experiencing, since she is the victim of some power beyond her control. It should also be noted that there is a considerable emphasis on her youth at this early stage, where she is referred to as a maiden twice within five lines (*virgineo*, 17; *virgo*, 21). Furthermore, the pathos for Medea is increased since she has a firm sense of right and wrong: as she herself states, she knows the better course but pursues the worse one.[69] This can be considered as evidence of a particularly Roman sense of morals in the young heroine, and can be attributed to the influence of Virgil's portrayal of Dido.[70] We should also note a reminiscence of Dido here, in Medea's self-address using the characteristic epithet, *infelix*, so often applied to the Virgilian heroine. This allusion is supported by the following lines, in which Medea's description of herself provides a further reminder of Dido:

...quid in hospite regia virgo

ureris et thalamos alieni concipis orbis? [7.21-2]

Any comparison with the legendary queen of Carthage, a royal heroine who similarly held the vain hope of a happy marriage to her visiting foreign hero, but whose divinely inspired love was doomed

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[67] Hershkowitz (2004) pp.165-6 discusses the mental metamorphosis in this passage, with particular reference to *mens aliud* suggesting a different mind, as linked to her madness (erotic *furor*).

[68] Newlands (1997) pp.182-3 has recognised an echo of Euripides' *Medea* (1078-9) in the words *video...sequor*, but transferred to very different circumstances: in Euripides she is about to murder her children and here she is about to aid Jason. Hill (2008) p.196 has also recognised the echo and change of context from "contemplation of infanticide to contemplation of immoral love"; he credits the line as possibly being Ovid's most famous. As well as an echo of *Medea* 1021-80, Wilkinson (1955) pp.205-6 has discerned that 7.20-1 is a reproduction of the Euripidean Phaedra's words (*Hippolytus* 380). Griffiths (2006) pp.94-5 detects black humour in this line.

[69] Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.105 views 7.19-21 as suggesting women's libido and inability to do the right thing.

[70] It is this moral and Roman sense which makes Ovid's Medea Virgilian, according to Otis (1966) pp.60-2.

from the start, can be considered to have tragic implications. Therefore this does not bode well for the decisions which Medea is making about her future. However, Virgil's Dido was portrayed as a woman whose emotions overcame her reason and duty; Medea, on the other hand, is younger and more naive, and is depicted as putting up greater resistance to her feelings for a foreign man who eventually emerges as faithless.

Despite the increased awareness this Medea displays, Ovid has nevertheless portrayed his heroine sympathetically, as she struggles with her emotions. Throughout the progression of this sixty line soliloquy, the reader witnesses Medea vacillating in her dilemma: Ovid explores her mind by creating this imaginary monologue, in which she is tempted to leave her home because of her love for Jason, all the while fully realising that the unfortunate outcome of this would be the betrayal of her family.[71] Her erratic thoughts sway this way and that, as she wants to leave with Jason at one moment, and at the next attempts to become cold towards this stranger. For example, in an ironic foreshadowing of the future, Medea bitterly refers to Jason as *ingratus* (43), when she imagines having helped him perform these tasks only for him to leave Colchis to marry another woman; then she quickly reverses her poor opinion of him, as she goes on to consider his appearance to be *gratia* (44), in a clever play on words recalling the epithet with which she had endowed him in the previous line. Jason's ungrateful nature is a common theme throughout Ovid, particularly through the eyes of Medea.[72]

Irony of this nature pervades the speech, as Medea makes unknowing references to her future life. The reader cannot miss this foreshadowing in which Medea gets it very wrong, making unknowing allusions to her own future. Ovid is telling the tale from hindsight: he is fully aware of the outcome of this well-known myth. This has the effect of increasing pity for the girl since it makes her seem more naive and innocent: she does not know what seems blindingly obvious to the author and his audience. For example, she displays a severe lack of judgement when, attempting to convince herself that going with Jason is the right course, she tells herself that she will be gratefully received by the Greeks (*perque Pelasgas / servatrix urbes matrum celebrabere turba*, 49-50): similarly her words above,

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[71] Salzman-Mitchell (2005) pp.104-8, labelling Medea the "paradigm of exile", comments that travelling like an epic hero turns a woman into a monster, and sees Medea's early doubts as the beginning of gender destabilisation; she views the conflict as one between proper femininity and deviancy, the latter being displayed in her mobility. Purkiss (2000) p.33 summarises Medea's struggle as one of sexual awakening versus family loyalty.

[72] Especially in the *Heroides*: see below, nn.157 and 165.

referring to marriage in a strange world (22), contain an allusion to her future as an unwelcome outsider in a foreign land. She also believes that she will be blessed to have Jason as a husband:

> ...quo coniuge felix
>
> et dis cara ferar et vertice sidera tangam. [7.60-1]

The audience knows, of course, that this turns out to be a most disastrous marriage. Nevertheless, Medea displays a willingness to believe that her union with Jason will be a happy one: this underscores her naivety where her love for the hero is concerned. She has fallen for him and, as is befitting her age, is behaving like a love-sick teenager, who is gullibly wrapped up in her dreams of their ideal future together, when she scarcely knows him and has nothing on which to base this fantasy. Her girlish love for Jason is displayed in her soliloquy, which centres mainly on her thoughts of him.[73] She exhibits admirable qualities in this speech, with her overwhelming concern for Jason's safety in the tasks her father has set him, and the tender fondness shown towards the Greek hero. Thus she is far removed from the formidable sorceress she later becomes; and there is no sign of the barbarian or alien side to her character, other than her own comments that the Greek land has more to offer than her own,[74] and that her land is barbarous (*est mea barbara tellus*, 53). Here she is nothing more than a harmless, and rather endearing, young girl.

However, one criticism that can be levelled at her character is that this love has made her rather selfish: while her thoughts centre on Jason, she spares little consideration for her family and her father, regarding him as *pater saevus* (53) and deciding her relatives are worth little to her anyway. Although she does waver between going with Jason or staying behind, evidently with an admirably clear sense of right and wrong, Ovid does not state that filial duty has a great part in this decision. In this she comes across as rather cold and unfeeling.[75] Nevertheless, the Ovidian Medea does have a sense of shame which prevails for a time: at the conclusion of her soliloquy, in a surprisingly decisive manner which makes her again seem more mature than in other versions, she chooses the right

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[73] Wise (1982) pp.17-18 remarks how Ovid describes Medea's mental processes throughout the soliloquy, as she projects different possible outcomes for the future: these are creative fantasies, based on a purely imaginary relationship with Jason. Newlands (1997) p.182 notes this as the chief way that Medea's love for Jason is conveyed, and that the emotions threaten to overwhelm her.

[74] She hints that the Greek lands are more civilised than her own, saying that she will not be leaving greatness, but pursuing it in a better place: *non magna relinquam / magna sequar* (55-6).

[75] This differs from Valerius' later account, where the girl has an overwhelming Roman sense of duty and *pietas* towards Aeetes: see Chapter 3, especially pp.191-2, 196, 199-200, 211-12.

course.[76] As if suddenly coming to her senses, she is fully aware of the shameful implications of eloping with Jason, and chastises herself for considering it, again recalling the Virgilian Dido, when she fooled herself into believing her union with Aeneas was a lawful marriage:[77]

> 'coniugiumne putas speciosaque nomina culpae
> imponis, Medea, tuae? quin aspice quantum
> adgrediare nefas et, dum licet, effuge crimen!'
> dixit, et ante oculos Rectum Pietasque Pudorque
> constiterant et victa dabat iam terga Cupido. [7.69-73][78]

This is the only time that Ovid's Medea truly attempts to resist her feelings: in this version it seems a deed already done, and there seems to be no hope of altering her mythological history, other than at this point. Here she exhibits a strong resolution and her decisive nature almost does conquer the gods conspiring against her. Furthermore, the Roman concepts of shame and duty become prominent. However, this lasts only as long as she does not see Jason: as soon as Medea catches sight of the hero, she is inflamed with passion once more. Ovid uses the familiar imagery of wind increasing the flames of love to convey her emotions on seeing him:

> utque solet ventis alimenta adsumere quaeque
> parva sub inducta latuit scintilla favilla
> crescere et in veteres agitata resurgere vires,
> sic iam lenis amor, iam quem languere putares,
> ut vidit iuvenem, specie praesentis inarsit. [7.79-83]

In this simile Ovid effectively captures the idea of a love nourished by the sight of the beloved, employing the apt imagery of a fire, dying until winds reawaken the blaze. The author is insightful in outlining the feelings of a girl in the first flush of love. He describes Medea physically, as well as

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[76] However, Newlands (1997) p.182 finds no resolution here between *ratio* and *furor*.
[77] Otis (1966) p.61 and Hill (2008) p.197 have recorded the correspondence between *Met.*69-70 and *Aeneid* 4.172: *coniugium vocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.* Hill notices the important difference that this is Medea's moral judgement of herself, whereas Virgil judges Dido: again we should interpret this as showing Medea's heightened moral nature. Otis also observes how the speech contains the recurring theme of marriage, *coniugium*. Tarrant (2002b) p.26, also detects echoes of Dido here.
[78] Otis (1966) pp.61-2, 172-3, 216 interprets the soliloquy, and especially this image of Right, Duty and Modesty, as a parody of the struggle between *amor* and *pudor* found in Apollonius and Virgil. Griffiths (2006) p.95 cites these lines as evidence of the importance of sight in this account.

emotionally, affected by the meeting with Jason: she blushes (*erubuere genae totoque recanduit ore*, 78); becomes transfixed on his face (*in vultu...lumina fixa tenet*, 86-7);[79] believes him to be superhuman (*nec se mortalia demens / ora videre putat*, 87-8); and finally streams with tears when he asks for her help (*lacrimis profusis*, 91). Furthermore, we see her described by the poet as *demens*, displaying that this love has affected her mind. This behaviour illustrates her youth and inexperience in matters of the heart. However, as she addresses Jason, Ovid's Medea is surprisingly forthright, acknowledging that she is fully aware of the implications of her actions and demanding that he gives what he promises in return:

> 'quid faciam video, nec me ignorantia veri
> decipiet, sed amor. servabere munere nostro;
> servatus promissa dato!'... [7.92-4]

Here, Medea knowingly declares that it is love which deceives her, and her brief commanding tone when addressing Jason underscores a more mature character now. Indeed, this does not seem to be the same girl who, in awe of Jason, burst into tears only a moment before: in these lines we witness a marked change from passive to active in Medea. This is further emphasised when contrasted with Jason's behaviour here, which is explicitly depicted as submissive, as he requests her help: *auxilium submissa voce rogavit* (90). Medea's use of the word *promissa* also picks up an important theme to be found throughout the texts narrating her myth. Earlier in the epic she had decided that she would give the hero her help once she had received a pledge of faith from him (46-7); once Jason swears an oath that he will marry the heroine,[80] witnessed by the gods (94-7), he begins a chain of events which leads to Medea's eventual tragic murder of their sons in Corinth because of his faithlessness. Therefore, we repeatedly meet the theme of what Medea is owed because of the sacrifices she makes for him and what he has promised her, and also frequently find the terms *ingratus* and *meritum*.

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[79] Salzman-Mitchell (2005) pp.106-7 discusses Medea's act of looking at her beloved, noting that, although the scene is paused for description, it does not focus on Jason's image but on Medea's fixation; she interprets this as evidence that a woman's gaze does not objectify a male in the same way that a man's gaze can control a woman. She notes that the light of Medea's eyes (*lumina*) is transformed into the metaphoric flame of fire.

[80] Although not in this text, presumably because of its brevity, this is usually accompanied by the crucial promise of loyalty. The oath appears in *Heroides* 12.85-6 (p.43, below); *Ars Amatoria* 2.381-2 (p.70, below); Seneca *Medea* 7-8 (Chapter 2, p.90); Valerius *Argonautica* 7.501ff., 8.422ff. (Chapter 3, pp.203, 214). The premise of Mossman (2009) is that, by breaking his oaths sworn with the gods as witnesses, Jason has called down terrible punishment on himself, and so is responsible for the future tragic events: although she is discussing Euripides' *Medea*, this is equally relevant for the Latin accounts considered here.

It should be noted, at this point, that Ovid's focus is completely on Medea: she is the one who speaks, while Jason's words and actions are cursorily reported. Medea is the author's real interest here.[81] Having Jason as a secondary figure in this way adds to the coldness, as well as the inactiveness, of his character: for example, Ovid's brief narrative that Jason swore the oath requested and then took the herbs from Medea (94-9), without any direct input from the hero in the text, makes it appear that he was only doing the necessary minimum in order to gain what he wanted.[82] The most we learn of Jason's emotions is that he is happy (*laetus*, 99), but the reason for this is that he has now gained what he desires: the magic herbs and the instructions for their use. It should also be added that Medea's magic abilities, as well as her direct actions, are kept to a minimum at this point, and she remains a very human young girl:[83] we are very briefly told that she gave Jason her *cantatas herbas* (98) and instructed him in their use. Other than this, there is no indication of sorcery: the only hint is in the atmospheric setting, which is a shady and secluded grove (*nemus umbrosum secretaque silva*, 75) containing the altars of Hecate, who had associations with sorcery and the underworld, and for whom Medea was a priestess.[84]

Ovid spends the next section (100-148) narrating Jason's fulfilment of the tasks set by Aeetes. During this part of the text the emphasis is, for once, more on Jason than Medea: as the hero successfully takes up the challenges, the deeds principally appear to be his own achievement. However, there is the occasional mention of the magic potions which assist him, to remind us that this is not actually his

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[81] Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.234 notes that focus is placed on the human Medea, and her uncontrolled and improper passion, a principal theme of the text, rather than on Jason and his adventures. Newlands (1997) p.185 observes that the one-sidedness of the relationship is enhanced by being reported solely from Medea's point of view.

[82] Segal (2002) p.12 remarks that Jason's apparent exploitation of Medea highlights her innocence. Furthermore, n.25, p.32, he notes the difference between this hero's silence until prompted, and Apollonius' hero's spontaneous oath and promise of marriage (3.985-2, 1120-30), viewing it as evidence that Ovid keeps the focus on the innocent Medea.

[83] Newlands (1997) pp.183-4 has recognised this and, furthermore, that there is no mention of Medea's magic in her preceding soliloquy, which increases the sympathetic, human, portrayal: her opinion of the young Medea, pp.181-6, is especially convincing; see also Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.236, who notes that the magic aspect here is de-emphasised.

[84] Segal (2002) p.12 notes that Hecate is here invoked in connection with love, rather than magic, thereby emphasising Medea's innocence; Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.235 observes Ovid's emphasis of her human side. On Medea's associations with Hecate, see Griffiths (2006) pp.54-5; for more on the background and history of Hecate, see Rabinowitz (1998), who traces her gradual degeneration from a fertility goddess to an infernal deity associated with the most vile witches; Luck (1986) p.5 attributes depictions of Medea as an evil witch to her possible history as an Earth goddess, deriving from fear and lack of understanding of old religions, and magic.

doing: in an aside, we are told that *tantum medicamina possunt* (116) and that the seeds were *valido praetincta veneno* (123).[85]

After having briefly and dutifully devoted some narrative to Jason's deeds, Ovid soon returns to his preferred topic, when we are again given Medea's point of view on these events. We learn that she, like the Greeks, fears for Jason's safety and once more she becomes physically affected by her emotions: *palluit et subito sine sanguine frigida sedit* (136). Now, for the first time, we are told that she performs magic: *carmen / auxiliare canit secretasque advocat artes* (137-8). Nevertheless, here she remains the tender young girl: Ovid does not elaborate on her sorcery, and Medea has only resorted to it in her panic for Jason, a reason underscoring her good nature.[86] Furthermore, she once more displays her sense of shame as she holds back from embracing the victorious hero. Using the epithet *barbara*, and thereby reminding us of her barbarian background, the author interjects to address his heroine sympathetically:

> tu quoque victorem complecti, barbara, velles;
> obstitit incepto pudor. at complexa fuisses,
> sed te ne faceres tenuit reverentia famae. [7.144-6]

Her concern for her reputation displays that essentially she is a good girl: she chooses instead to rejoice silently, so that she should not appear shameful to her family and countrymen. That Ovid's Medea has this consideration,[87] and is restrained by it, seems a Roman concept: it is not mere bashfulness or embarrassment which prevents her publicly embracing Jason, but rather an awareness of the proper decorum she should display.

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[85] Wise (1982) pp.18-19 notes the superfluous nature of the terrifying image of the bulls since Jason, Medea, and the reader know that the magic herbs will protect the hero: she considers this to be Ovid displaying his poetic virtuosity. Zissos (2008) p.xxiii, n.67 believes this scene deflates Jason's heroism, when he is comically reduced to stroking the bulls' dewlaps. Kenney (2002) p.80, discussing this passage, comments that Medea is the figure in whom Ovid and the audience are really interested.

[86] Newlands (1997) pp.185-6 notes that the magic remains in the background here. Wise (1982) pp.19-20 adds that Medea acts here since she lacks confidence in her abilities; however, surely her action is motivated by her extreme feelings for Jason; Segal (2002) pp.12-13 perceives both a lover's anxiety and inexperience as an enchantress, reinforcing her innocence, in this behaviour.

[87] This is interpreted as a sign of the calculating nature of Medea by von Albrecht (1999) p.149: he appears to read too much of the future deeds into the current character. Peek (2001) p.133 cites this passage as an example of black humour: he considers the "high comic contrast" of her concern for this minor action, in comparison with her later acts of murder.

As the text moves to the episode of the dragon guarding the fleece, Medea scarcely features: as with the tasks set by Aeetes, this seems essentially Jason's achievement. In Valerius' and Apollonius' texts, Medea has a proactive and vital part to play in putting the dragon to sleep so that Jason can take the fleece:[88] here, however, Jason uses Medea's magic herbs and spells to perform this himself, keeping Medea relatively passive. This has two possible consequences: it can make Jason appear more heroic because he is less passive, but it can also help to exonerate Medea because she has less direct involvement in the betrayal of her family and home. Medea certainly does not appear as an evil or maleficent character in the text up to this point: for the time that she has been in her homeland, the Ovidian Medea has essentially been an innocent girl with a mature and Roman sense of right and wrong, who always attempts to follow the former course. Therefore, it is quite possible that Ovid has excluded her involvement from the dragon episode for the latter reason of making her less guilty of committing crimes against her family. This seems more probable when we read further on and realise that Ovid has omitted altogether the murder of Absyrtus, Medea's brother, and so has also passed over the girl's part in this atrocious crime.[89] However, Ovid does underscore that Jason has ultimately triumphed only through Medea's assistance, when he designates her as the author of his achievements:

> muneris auctorem secum, spolia altera, portans
> victor Iolciacos tetigit cum coniuge portus. [7.157-8]

Nonetheless, it is clear that Ovid is portraying Medea as passive: she is depicted as being carried off by Jason as his wife (*coniuge*, 158) and another of his Colchian prizes.[90] Ovid successfully undercuts Jason's heroism, making it clear that he would not have been able to complete his tasks successfully without her help, simultaneously depicting Medea as innocent and diminishing her responsibility for these offences against her country and family. Furthermore, in now regarding her as his wife, Jason has given Medea an official position and justifiable reason for abandoning her family.

The end of events in Colchis also marks a shift in Medea's character, which Ovid portrays in progressing stages in his epic. In her homeland she remained an innocent girl, whose magical abilities

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[88] See Chapter 3, pp.203-6, 209.
[89] Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.237, n.21 and Segal (2002) p.13 believe that this detail is suppressed to keep the character's innocence prominent.
[90] Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.237 interprets these lines as evidence of Jason's "materialistic evaluation of Medea's worth" and, therefore, her unreciprocated love. The theme of Medea as prize carried off by Jason is especially prominent in Valerius' account: see Chapter 3, especially nn.653, 672, 735.

were kept in the background: in the first section, Ovid rarely portrays Medea as directly performing her magic, since she often directs Jason in the use of her herbs and spells and, when she does take it up, it is for good rather than evil purposes. Once she has moved to Greece and become Jason's wife, Ovid depicts the rather quick transformation, or metamorphosis, of his heroine from girl into formidable sorceress.

Medea has become a woman, which is marked by her now being Jason's wife: we saw above that Ovid refers to her as Jason's *coniuge* (158) and now Jason addresses her using this title to flatter her:

> ... "o cui debere salutem
> confiteor, coniunx, quamquam mihi cuncta dedisti
> excessitque fidem meritorum summa tuorum..." [7.164-6]

These charming words from Jason are designed to compliment Medea so that she will again help him gain what he seeks: the rejuvenation of his father.[91] These lines contain the admission from the hero that he owes everything to Medea for her services, *meritorum*, a word picking up the theme of what is deserved, both by Medea for her assistance and, correspondingly, Jason for his falseness: here he displays his false gratefulness for these services, as well as his calculating behaviour.[92] Medea now seems the equal of Jason, whom she likewise names her *coniunx* (172), as she abruptly chides him for asking such a crime (*scelus*, 172) of her: she no longer appears to be the young girl in awe of the hero. Nevertheless, moved by his piety (*mota pietate*, 169), she does fall for his charm and agree to help him in this feat.[93] She furthermore exhibits characteristics of the young Medea we met earlier, when Jason's request causes her to remember her own father left behind: *dissimilemque animum subiit Aeeta relictus* (170). Ovid does not elaborate on her feelings but, judging from the text up to this point, we imagine that she feels a sense of regret, loss and guilt.

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[91] Segal (2002) p.13 observes that Jason is again the initiator, emphasised by his direct speech. Rosner-Siegel (1982) pp.237-8 interestingly views this as underscoring Jason's lack of feelings for Medea, since it proves that he is capable of affection, while reminding the reader of Medea's improper love and abandoned filial duty.

[92] Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.238 detects Jason's assessment of Medea's value here: see above, n.90.

[93] Newlands (1997) pp.186-7 discerns little emotion expressed for Jason, whom Medea has only recently obsessively loved, marking the change in her character from girl to sorceress. Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.238, who considers Medea to be motivated by love for Jason, seems more accurate.

At this point, as Medea moves from a relatively passive character to a decisive and active one, Jason's part in the text is over.[94] This is all given from Medea's point of view, and it is very clear that this is where Ovid's emphasis is: we briefly learn of Jason's tasks, as seen through the girl's eyes, but Ovid is essentially outlining the life of Medea. Furthermore, Jason does not appear elsewhere in the epic: this is the "Jason and Medea" section, yet the focus is principally on the heroine.[95] This character appears to have seized the scene, since the author's interest is in her and an exploration of her psychology. Jason is merely a subsidiary character whom it is necessary to mention since he is a large factor in Medea's life, but he is by no means the only other character there: he is merely one in a series of people affecting Medea or affected by her. The Colchian princess, or sorceress, is the true heroine of the tale: this is every bit her own story. Having crossed the boundaries of female acceptability, by having become completely independent of any male authority, she decides upon her actions and swiftly carries them out without any deliberation.

The rejuvenation of Jason's father, which Medea considers to be of great daring (*ingentibus ausis*, 178), provides Ovid with the opportunity for which he seems to have been waiting: he now elaborately describes Medea as a most formidable sorceress and relishes detailing her attributes in a typically Silver Age manner, thus providing an example of what makes this late Augustan author a forerunner of the literary period. Ovid fully launches into portraying Medea's magical powers: he spends over one hundred lines depicting Medea's preparations for rejuvenating Aeson.[96]

Firstly, Ovid creates a suitably eerie atmosphere for his sorceress, using characteristic imagery for a supernatural setting:

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[94] Newlands (1997) p.179, n.2, and p.188, observes Jason's absence from the second half of the tale, viewing Medea as an "autonomous figure of supernatural powers"; indeed, Jason seems relatively insignificant in the first half too. Newlands interprets his absence as Ovid downplaying Medea's role as mother, wife and anything other than witch (pp.191-2), but we should not forget the first stage of Medea's portrayal, as a young girl.

[95] Fantham (2004) pp.89-90. Segal (2002) p.14 discusses how this differs from Apollonius' version (3.1191-1218), where Medea hesitantly instructs Jason in how to perform the sacrifices. Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.240 notes Medea's rejection of Jason during her ritual, considering it a symbolic abandonment of their relationship and, therefore, her human side, since her passion is now devoted to her magic.

[96] Segal (2002) p.13 labels this "Ovid's great showpiece of magic" although, pp.14-15, he acknowledges that the horror is restrained, especially in comparison with Lucan's later depiction of the fearsome Erictho, in epic *Bellum Civile* 6.507ff. Similarly, Ogden (2001) pp.xxx, 201, 204, 206-7 detects traces of necromancy in this "elaborate sequence", and considers the rejuvenation to be a source for Erictho and depictions of necromancy; he discusses the legendary Medea's possible connections with necromancy in general, pp.141-2.

tres aberant noctes ut cornua tota coirent

efficerentque orbem. postquam plenissima fulsit

et solida terras spectavit imagine luna… [7.179-81]

To begin her magical rites, Medea has to wait for the time when the moon shines in a specific way. In ancient literature, such supernatural rituals usually take place in the middle of the night, when everything is still and silent, adding to the mystical atmosphere: *mediae per muta silentia noctis* (184).[97] The number three frequently has magical associations, as we can see in this passage, as well as further on, where Medea actually begins her rituals doing everything three times over (*ter...ter...ternisque...*, 189-90). As Medea herself proceeds into such a night setting, to perform her strange and magical rites, she is dressed in suitably wild attire:

egreditur tectis[98] vestes induta recinctas,

nuda pedem, nudos umeris infusa capillos… [7.182-3]

This dishevelled and disorderly appearance reflects the idea that Medea and her powers are unrestrained and untamed and, furthermore, beyond civilised behaviour. The imagery of Medea as a fierce beast is supplemented by the triple howls she emits (*ternis ululatibus*, 190). Frequently in classical literature we meet the idea that a woman in the throes of deep emotions is wild and beyond (male) control. The feral Medea here is not suffering deep emotions, but she is portrayed as beyond control because of her immense powers, which are outside mortal and, in particular, male boundaries and understanding. Furthermore, later on as she performs her magic on Aeson, she is characteristically compared with a bacchant: *passis Medea capillis / bacchantum ritu flagrantes circuit aras* (257-8).[99] Again she is described as having her hair flowing loosely, which symbolises the lack of order and restraint: this notion of wildness and being beyond civilised boundaries was applied to Medea particularly by the men who feared her capabilities, since they transcended their own, and hence the

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[97] Parry (1964) p.269 remarks on the suitable landscape setting for Medea's (violent) black magic. Wise (1982) p.23 and n.7 discusses the location as the kind which "typifies the place of magical activity", before imaginatively suggesting that such an isolated and dark place metaphorically represents the depths of the mind, thereby equating imagination and magic. See also Ogden (2001) pp.166-7 on the night time setting.

[98] Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.107 notes this as Medea's first of several movements outside the house, after having made the unwomanly move from her homeland across the sea; see also n.71 above.

[99] For Bacchic comparisons, see Seneca *Medea* 382ff., 806ff., 849 (Chapter 2, pp.111-12, 133, 136); Valerius Flaccus 6.755ff., 8.446ff. (Chapter 3, pp.183, 214-15). Ogden (2001) p.189 cites Medea's unbound state as an example of witches avoiding bindings.

mythological character became such a mysterious and frightening figure in the hands of the male authors.[100]

As Medea's preparatory rituals continue, she addresses the Night, Hecate and other gods of nature to request their aid. In this speech, Ovid's heroine declares the extent of her powers, which includes the traditional images of a witch being able to reverse nature:

> quorum ope, cum volui, ripis mirantibus amnes
> in fontes rediere suos, concussaque sisto,
> stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello
> nubilaque induco, ventos abigoque vocoque,
> vipereas rumpo verbis et carmine fauces,
> vivaque saxa sua convulsaque robora terra
> et silvas moveo iubeoque tremescere montes
> et mugire solum manesque exire sepulcris.[101] [7.199-206][102]

This passage covers almost every aspect of nature, and this kind of exhaustive list is a trait of the Silver Age, where elaboration, particularly in details of horror, is the fashion rather than subtle understatement.[103] Medea goes on to address the moon directly (*te quoque, Luna, traho*, 207), to explain that she also has the power to draw her down, an ability which is particularly typical of witches;[104] and she tells us that she also has power over the sun, her own grandfather: ultimately,

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[100] Fantham *et al.* (1994) pp.383-4 believe that male fantasies are reflected in such portraits of witches, deriving from that which they do not understand. Janowitz (2001) Chapter 6 looks at magic and gender: she explains, p.89, that Medea's antisocial and destructive behaviour made her a feared figure.

[101] Ogden (2001) p.141 cites this line as evidence of Medea's necromantic skills, observing that the most popular witch in Greek and Latin literature does not have a surviving detailed necromancy scene.

[102] Wise (1982) pp.20-1 discusses the ritualistic, formulaic and symbolic aspects of this passage, displaying Medea's ability to perform metamorphosis: this is considered as linking language and poetry to magic and metamorphosis, and thereby Ovid can be seen as bolstering his own abilities. Segal (2002) p.27 cites these lines as evidence of Medea's aggressive control over nature; Rabinowitz (1998) pp.101-2 quotes this passage as proof that witches assault the earth with which they once identified.

[103] Williams (1978) p.256, discussing the horror of the Philomela episode in the *Metamorphoses*, notes the pleasure Ovid takes in providing every detail, contrasting Virgil's understated approach. Indeed, p.215, he credits Ovid as being inventor of the catalogue, so popular for extensive treatment of topics during this age.

[104] Hill (1973) p.23 cites *Metamorphoses* 7.207-9 and *Heroides* 6.85-6 (see p.58 below), in his interesting discussion of the "Thessalian trick", which he sets out to prove is the ability to draw the moon down to earth, and not merely a reference to an eclipse of the moon. Rabinowitz (1998) pp.109-

Ovid's heroine is able to control anything and, if nature is subject to this one person's control, the implication is that she can do anything, as Jason earlier mentioned he believed possible: *quid enim non carmina possunt?* (167) Having this impressive list reported in the first person by the sorceress means that she is directly associated with her deeds. However, here Ovid has thrown himself into creating a truly immortal and formidable figure, who is far from human and the young girl that he first introduced to us. Indeed, in her address to these mighty deities she speaks to them as a powerful equal, and it is especially striking to hear her tell the gods that they *will* give her what she demands (*et dabitis*, 217).[105]

In a cumulative effect, Ovid continues to paint a picture of a strange and mighty woman. Firstly Medea boards her serpent-drawn chariot: that she should have these exotic creatures pull her chariot indicates that she is alien to normal civilised society and, when she strokes the necks of these fearsome beasts as if they are pets, it only serves to underscore this further (*frenataque colla draconum / permulsit manibusque*, 220-1).[106] Secondly, Ovid reports, in another catalogue,[107] the many different places to which she travels, far and wide, to gather weird and wonderful herbs, flying in her chariot in an image reminiscent of the present-day concept of a witch on a broomstick (222ff.): this catalogue must surely have provided inspiration for Seneca's similar list.[108] Medea then performs some further strange rites, where she carefully follows precise rituals in preparation for the magic rejuvenation of Aeson (238-61). These rites include purification (*lustrat*, 261), spell-chanting and prayers (*verba*, 248; *precibusque et murmure longo*, 251; *carmine*, 253), the performance of rituals three times over, the number endowed with magical associations (*terque...ter...ter*, 261), and a grisly and bloody sacrifice:

11, n.13 discusses this skill, *kathairesis*, summarising it (p.101) as the culmination of witches' powers; he suggests that, by the Silver Age, this ability illustrates witches' superiority to the gods, since Hecate, their patron goddess, was equated with the moon (p.102).

[105] In contrast, Wise (1982) pp.22-3 believes that Ovid has undermined Medea's abilities by making her rely on the gods: this could then be seen as a method for distancing Medea from her magic.

[106] Relevant here is Salzman-Mitchell's observation, (2005) p.33, that serpents are a phallic symbol often associated with terrifying women, as an "icon of gender instability".

[107] Hill (2008) p.201 comments that "Ovid cannot resist this list".

[108] See Chapter 2, n.485. Salzman-Mitchell (2005) pp.107-8 discusses Medea's controlling gaze over nature as she selects powerful herbs, comparing her to her grandfather, the Sun, looking down from the skies.

sacra facit cultrosque in guttura velleris atri

conicit et patulas perfundit sanguine fossas. [7.244-5][109]

Finally, Medea is ready to create her potion. Here, Ovid has inserted a catalogue of hideous ingredients, which emphasises his heroine's witch-like behaviour:

et strigis infames ipsis cum carnibus alas

inque virum soliti vultus mutare ferinos

ambigui prosecta lupi; nec defuit illis

squamea Cinyphii tenuis membrana chelydri

vivacisque iecur cervi, quibus insuper addit

ora caputque novem cornicis saecula passae. [7.269-74]

In this climactic passage, Ovid appears to have delved into his deepest imagination in order to create this picture of the contents of Medea's magic preparations.[110] Here she places her exotic and strange herbs into a cauldron and adds to them some horrific ingredients, including the gruesome body parts of strange and fearsome creatures.[111] This is very reminiscent of the concept today of a witch with her "wing of bat, tail of newt, eye of toad" type recipe: Medea even boils it up and it froths (*cavo spumas eiecit aeno*, 282). Such Ovidian passages, since they are the earliest in the Silver Age style, must be in part the origins of current imagery of witches. The Roman poet is embellishing and elaborating on his Medea as a true witch, and this fondness for the macabre illustrates his Silver Age tendencies. His text is highly exaggerated and carries the imagery as far as it can, employing every element of sorcery that he can think of and embellishing it.[112] Finally after all this horror, Medea appears as the barbarian

[109] Hill (2008) pp.201-2 notes that the actions Medea carries out bear a resemblance to Odysseus' ritual to summon the dead in Homer's *Odyssey* 11.

[110] Hill (2008) p.202 remarks that Ovid enjoys this "wonderful list".

[111] Ogden (2001) pp.214-16 discusses the use of various body parts in necromantic scenes and, p.204, notes the importance of herbs in both Medea's and Erictho's acts of rejuvenation/reanimation. Interestingly, Ogden (2008) pp.34-5 observes that many of the (drug-based) magical techniques, performed by witches, are extensions of traditional female skills: for example, when Medea mixes and heats her ingredients in the cauldron, she is effectively cooking. Rabinowitz (1998) pp.95-9 discusses the central role of herbs throughout the witch tradition.

[112] Newlands (1997) p.187 rightly observes that this hyperbole adds humour to the portrayal.

woman again, *barbara* (276): this epithet now seems more fitting[113] since, in this section, Ovid has portrayed a woman of extreme behaviour, and certainly beyond the normal and civilised kind.

However, despite the high pitch of this passage, Ovid does not stop here: the reader now witnesses the magic put into action. After first testing her potion's rejuvenation powers on an old dried stick, she applies it to Aeson himself. This in itself is a kind act by Medea: in effect she is performing white magic, since it is for good rather than evil. However, in order to carry out her sorcery, Medea must first perform a bloody deed:

> quae simul ac vidit, stricto Medea recludit
> ense senis iugulum veteremque exire cruorem
> passa replet sucis... [7.285-7]

Although we have already witnessed Medea's bloody actions during the preparatory rites, there she was performing a sacrifice on an animal. Here this act seems far more horrific because she is slitting the throat and draining the blood of a human being: if a reader happened upon only the lines quoted above, they could easily be misled into thinking that Aeson was Medea's victim rather than recipient of her help, particularly since he is old, weak and vulnerable. However, although behaving like an evil sorceress, Medea's actions here have a happy outcome, with the successful rejuvenation of Jason's father, which is yet another feat she has performed on her husband's behalf.[114] In order to emphasise the wondrous abilities of Medea's powers, Ovid informs us that even the god Bacchus was so

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[113] However, Larmour (1990) pp.133-4 notes that, in the *contaminatio* episode containing Tereus, Philomela and Procne (see below n.132), although Tereus is portrayed as a barbaric foreigner, the two Greek sisters are depicted in a similar light. Larmour traces the parallels between Tereus' behaviour and that of Philomela and Procne, concluding that there is not such a Greek/barbarian division, and that this, ironically, is also the case for Medea's homeland and new land. Perhaps this could be pressed further since the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* is not portrayed as especially barbaric: possibly Ovid is suggesting that Greek women are equally bad, if not worse than Medea in terms of barbarity.

[114] This act can be viewed, symbolically, as the wife bringing benefits and new life to the conjugal household: Visser (1986) p.156.

impressed with these *miracula*, that he requested some of the potion for his nurses (294-6).[115] Furthermore, it should be noted that this is the longest section.[116]

It is worth noting that after the Aeson episode, coinciding with her increasing development into a sorceress, and in order to emphasise her barbarian origins and nature, as well as possibly to dehumanise her further in her wicked acts, Medea is generally referred to as "the Colchian" (*Colchis*).[117] She is also given the suitably cold titles of "the Phasian" (*Phasias*, 298), "the sorceress" (*venefica*, 316) and the fitting descriptive of "the deceitful daughter of Aeetes" (*fallax Aeetias*, 326). We can discern no trace of the particularly Roman aspects she displayed in the first section, as a young girl, and so it is unsurprising that Ovid now depicts her as a barbarian.

Surprisingly, the Ovidian Medea is capable of excelling herself even further still. While the rejuvenation of Aeson was an act of goodwill, her next use of magic, tricking the daughters of Pelias into murdering their own father, is malicious and cruel, suitably reflecting the epithet *fallax*.[118] This deed is performed for Jason, as her questionable actions usually are, but this is not made explicit in the text: the reader knows, from the legend,[119] that Medea is taking revenge on Pelias for the cruel manner in which he had earlier treated Jason, but the hero does not intervene in the text and request this from Medea, since now he has been completely dropped from the poem. Therefore, Ovid is portraying this act as Medea's responsibility alone.[120]

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[115] Therefore it is not strictly correct that female practitioners of magic, in Greek and Roman representations, have no redeemable features, as Janowitz (2001) p.88 suggests. However, her comment, p.89, that these women are isolated figures who threaten family members and society, certainly applies to Medea. Segal (2002) p.15 interprets Bacchus' request as a moment of light relief.

[116] 7.163-293: Fantham (2004) p.107 remarks that it is the central and longest episode of the Medea section.

[117] At 296, 301, 331 and 348. She is only once more referred to by name, as Aegeus' wife at 406. See Newlands (1997) p.189.

[118] Frécaut (1989) p.68 condemns the scene as "tragique, horrible et révoltante" and Medea as "rusée, hypocrite, cruelle" and a sorceress in the worst sense of the word.

[119] However, Cicero notes that a version exists where Pelias was successfully rejuvenated: *quo quidem me proficiscentem haud sane quis facile retraxerit nec tamquam Peliam recoxerit* (*Cato Maior de Senectute* 83).

[120] Newlands (1997) p.188. Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.241 describes Medea as taking "the wicked initiative", derived from a love of her own power. Segal (2002) pp.15-16 detects a hint of Jason's initiative, although he acknowledges that the hero fades into the background behind Medea's deceit. Frécault (1989) p.71, n.16, records Boillat's comments that Medea also has more profound psychological reasons for this deed: as an impious daughter, she wishes to make the Peliades like herself, or worse.

Medea becomes thoroughly evil in this section: she now employs deception and manipulation, illustrating that her mind has turned bad: there is no sign of the Medea we first met, who was ever concerned with following the right course, since this Medea seems to have lost all trace of her conscience. The extreme change in her personality is further underscored in this event, since the young Medea had originally displayed a filial duty, and betrayed her father and family against her own better judgement. Here Medea cleverly uses the filial duty and affection of Pelias' naive daughters in order to manipulate them into unwittingly committing their father's murder.[121] Pretence and deception pervade this portion of the text as Ovid emphasises his heroine's calculated falseness throughout, bestowing her with titles such as *callida Colchis* (300-1) and *fallax Aeetias* (326), and by making the section replete with the language of deception and trickery: *doli, falsum*, 297; *adsimulat*, 298; *mendacis*, 301; *ficta*, 308.[122] There is no doubt that this Medea is mature and intelligent, as well as deceitful and treacherous. From the very outset, Medea is working deviously: she arrives at the home of Pelias as a pretended suppliant, fabricating a hatred of Jason,[123] and easily winning the girls sympathy by assuming a false role of friendship.

Medea continues to play on the good nature and naivety of Pelias' daughters: this seems especially malicious since she herself was once manipulated in such a cruel way by the gods[124] and, having been the earlier victim of such manipulation, she should realise the harsh results and effects of it. Firstly she boasts of the successful rejuvenation of Aeson (302ff.), knowing that this will make the girls wish the same for their own father. As they eagerly seize the bait, offering to pay a "price without limit" (*pretium sine fine*, 306), Medea slyly teases them further in order to make them all the more eager: firstly she pretends to hesitate, creating tension and suspense for the girls, and secondly, with a "false earnestness" (*ficta gravitate*, 308), she performs her rejuvenation spell on an aged ram in order to

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[121] Visser (1986) p.156 remarks on Medea's black sense of humour in this episode of her myth, and observes her repeated involvement in girls' destruction of their fathers: herself and Aeetes, the Peliades and Pelias, Creusa and Creon. Similarly, Hanson (1965) considers how Medea repeatedly, and successfully, uses the children of her enemies against them, including her own sons against Jason.

[122] Larmour (1990) p.134 sees a connection between Medea's false and manipulative words here and those of Tereus, Philomela and Procne in the parallel *contaminatio* episode: see below, n.132. Newlands (1997) pp.188-9 believes that this section focuses on the gullibility of the girls rather than Medea's despicable behaviour: however, any focus on their naivety purely aims to underscore Medea's developing evil streak.

[123] Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.242 interestingly suggests that it is Medea who abandons Jason in this text, as there is no blame assigned to his marriage to Creusa; she notes that this pretended estrangement becomes a reality as the witch pursues her magic and wicked deeds.

[124] Although not explicitly in this text: see above, pp.12-13.

prove her ability. After this, the gullible girls are said to be astounded (*obstipuere*, 322), ironically now that Medea has proved to be trustworthy (*promissaque postquam / exhibuere fidem*, 322-3). Unsurprisingly, they are even more eager for Medea's help to rejuvenate their father: *tum vero impensius instant* (323). Medea has completely drawn these girls in with her deceitful trickery.[125]

Finally Medea reaches the height of her evil in this text. Having firstly manipulated the girls into desperately desiring their father's rejuvenation, by making it seem possible, Medea now directly involves the girls in carrying out her wicked deed and cruelly tricks them into committing Pelias' murder by their own hands. Once more Medea uses their innocence and their filial affection against both them and their father: in a rousing, yet duplicitous and ironic speech which outdoes all of her previous cruelty, Medea commands the girls, in a reproachful tone, that the more they love their father, the more fiercely they should strike him with the sword:

> ... "quid nunc dubitatis inertes?
> stringite" ait "gladios veteremque haurite cruorem,
> ut repleam vacuas iuvenali sanguine venas.
> in manibus vestris vita est aetasque parentis;
> si pietas ulla est nec spes agitatis inanes,
> officium praestate patri telisque senectam
> exigite et saniem coniecto emittite ferro." [7.332-8]

Continuing in their naivety, with an honest goodness that contrasts with, and underscores, Medea's cruel and deceitful nature, the girls take heed of the sorceress and eagerly slash at their father, believing that this will help him. Ovid makes ironic comment by juxtaposing the concepts of the girls' piety in impiety, and lack of sin in crime:[126]

> his ut quaeque pia est hortatibus impia prima est
> et, ne sit scelerata, facit scelus... [7.339-40]

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[125] Wise (1982) pp.24-5 comments that Medea convinces the girls through narrative art alone, aptly labelling it "vicious literalism". It is observed that this rejuvenation is the reverse of Aeson's, since there magic spells and herbs rejuvenate, while here the language and powerless herbs destroy. Griffiths (2006) p.64 generally discusses Medea's power to control through her voice, whether incantations or rhetoric; see also n.135 below.

[126] Hill (2008) p.204 remarks that Ovid enjoys such conceits. Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.241 and Segal (2002) p.17 observe Medea's perversion of *pietas* here. Frécault (1989) especially focuses on these lines, in his discussion of the episode: he concludes, p.74, that this is the key and moral of the story.

After wreaking such destruction, Medea commits one last cruel deed before leaving as quickly as she arrived. The weak and bloodied victim of Medea's murderous plot, described as flowing with blood (*cruore fluens*, 343) and half-mangled (*semilacer*, 344), makes a feeble attempt to stretch out to his daughters to plead with them: Ovid has not presented Pelias as a tyrant here, but merely a weak victim, in order to worsen our impression of Medea's treacherous act. However, as he is about to address his daughters, the maleficent Medea shows no fear or hesitation in intervening to silence him and finish off the bloody job:[127] *guttura Colchis / abstulit et calidis laniatum mersit in undis* (348-9). She then flies off on her serpent-drawn chariot, apparently escaping any retribution (350ff.).[128]

Ovid has turned his heroine into a cunning and wicked figure now, which he highlights through the emphasis of her victims' pitiable innocence: rather than having Medea murder the cruel Pelias directly, the poet chooses to emphasise a manner of revenge which, while releasing Medea from the act of murder, makes her guilty of a far more evil crime. Unnecessarily involving the daughters has no justification whatsoever, unlike the revenge on Pelias himself, and seems only to serve the satisfaction of the veritable nasty streak which appears to have developed in the witch of Colchis. This is really a malicious act of the mind and Ovid shows Medea at her very worst here: surprisingly, not when she is using her magic, but when she is behaving deceitfully and duplicitously by coldly calculating a murder, and using cruel treachery on the most innocent of victims.[129] This appears far worse than working black magic and it is significant that Medea's vile mind is the source of the harmfulness, not her magic. Ovid has developed her character into one of pure evil here.

Following a digression of fifty lines, where Ovid takes Medea's flight over distant lands as an opportunity to narrate another geographical catalogue, including allusions to other episodes of metamorphoses,[130] Ovid relates a final brief episode of Medea's life in his *Metamorphoses*:

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[127] Segal (2002) pp.16-17 compares the more bloody and gory nature of the Pelias "rejuvenation" scene, with that of Aeson.

[128] Newlands (1997) pp.189-90 notes this as marking Medea's metamorphosis without her changing physical form: she has changed from mortal to divine. She interestingly observes, p.191, that Medea has also changed from a girl afraid of travelling from home to a "fearless adventurer".

[129] Hanson (1965) p.57 views this act as one of several where magic is secondary, and Medea ultimately resorts to using children against their fathers in order to conquer her enemies: see n.251, below.

[130] Presumably these catalogues are why some have considered the Medea section to be a mere chance to indulge in a geographical excursus, as Griffiths (2006) p.95 has noted. The overwhelming force and impression of the Medea story does not allow this to be a valid summary.

unsurprisingly, she leaves the text on a bad note. Unexpectedly to any reader familiar with the Medea legend, Ovid cursorily glosses over the notorious and terrible revenge Medea wreaked in Corinth with the most brief summary of only four lines:[131]

> sed postquam Colchis arsit nova nupta venenis
> flagrantemque domum regis mare vidit utrumque,
> sanguine natorum perfunditur impius ensis
> ultaque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma. [7.394-7]

This may seem a lost opportunity for Ovid, since these awful events provide a wealth of material, especially for portraying the darker, vengeful, side of Medea, and the extreme measures to which she was willing to resort for the sake of vengeance and pride. However, it is likely that Ovid had treated this elsewhere in his lost tragedy *Medea*, since these tragic events, at the end of Medea and Jason's marriage, in Corinth, were the topic of Euripides' fifth century BC Greek play and Seneca's mid-first century AD Latin version of the same name.[132]

The final act of Medea in Ovid's epic is one of pure evil without apparent reason. While the murder of Pelias had the motivation of revenge, at least, the attempted murder of her stepson, Theseus, seems without purpose: certainly Ovid offers no explanation for this in this brief summary of this section of the Medea legend.[133] It seems that the final metamorphosis of Medea was into the wicked stepmother

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[131] Lateiner (2006) p. 201, n.16, labels Medea "the archetypal black widow mother": however, there is nothing in the text here to support this comment, except this briefest of hints.

[132] Other possible reasons for the omission are that it was too well-worn a theme or did not offer enough opportunity for metamorphosis: Larmour (1990) p.132. He interestingly proposes, pp.132-4, that, in such cases, Ovid employs *contaminatio*, and that these overlooked and familiar themes are transposed onto episodes elsewhere in the epic: the child murder theme can be found instead in the preceding Tereus, Philomela and Procne episode in book six, thereby linking the two episodes; see also Otis (1966) pp.62, 213-16.

Following Larmour, Newlands (1997) pp.180-1, 192-207 views other tales which surround Medea's as resolving traditional themes missing from her narrative: she considers Scylla and Minos, Procris and Cephalus (also briefly noticed by Otis (1966) p.175), and Boreas and Orythia as addressing issues of filial duty, marriage and betrayal, which she believes Ovid has omitted from the Medea section, collecting them under the title "marriage group". Lateiner (2006) p.192 compares Ovid's Procne and Althaea to the Attic tragic Medea and Clytemnestra; on Seneca's use of Procne and Althaea in his *Medea*, see Chapter 2, pp.131-2, 137, 143-6. Lateiner, pp.194-5, discusses Procne's role as a mother in the *Metamorphoses*.

I believe that another possible reason for transposing these themes onto other myths is that Ovid was overwhelmingly interested in Medea, but had to be selective in his presentation of her in the episodic *Metamorphoses*, therefore placing some of her themes elsewhere in other guises.

[133] Crabbe (1981) p.2303 notes Medea's small role here; nevertheless there is significance in her behaviour. Newlands (1997) pp.179-80 terms Medea a "one-dimensional figure of evil", who thereby

role.[134] It is she who is now behaving as an ungrateful spouse, as Jason had been when married to her, for we are told that Aegeus took her in, in what Ovid terms as his only condemnable act: *excipit hanc Aegeus, facto damnandus in uno* (402). Medea uses one of her strange herbs to make a poison for Theseus, which Ovid explicitly states is intended for his destruction (*huius in exitium miscet Medea*, 406). However, the sorceress is foiled in her murderous plot, and escapes through use of her magic: *effugit illa necem nebulis per carmina motis* (424).[135] This is the last we hear of her in this text.

In a little over 400 lines, Ovid has portrayed a very clear and gradual progression of Medea's development from an innocent young girl into a totally unrecognisable evil witch yet, because in each of the four stages there is only a slight change, this does not appear completely incongruous.[136] Ovid's heroine began as an innocent and naive young girl, who had a conscience and was very concerned with behaving honourably. She knowingly took the wrong path, choosing to follow her heart and the hero, which also meant betraying her family, although she had valiantly attempted to resist this: at this point she first uses her magic, although she is far removed from it, giving Jason the herbs and instructing him in their use for his tasks. Once she has become Jason's wife, she is much more assertive and she now becomes a witch in the true sense, performing strange and weird rites, using gruesome ingredients, and carrying out horrific acts: however, at this stage, it is done for a good purpose. Her next deed is one of evil, carried out for Jason's benefit on his enemy, but making other innocent people victims coincidentally: for this task, Medea employs deceit and manipulation, thereby displaying that she has become a truly evil character. Finally, as if knowing no limits, she attempts a murderous deed using her magic, with no apparent justification.

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does not raise any moral questions; she comments, pp.190-1, that there is no motivation for her malice towards Theseus; however, Hanson (1965) p.61 offers an explanatory version of the tale, where Theseus is a rival to Medea and Aegeus' son Medos.

[134] As Fantham (2004) p.92 categorises her. Keith (1991) explores the use of the term *ingens* in relation to the theme of family murder here.

[135] Griffiths (2006) p.94 discerns a motif of language throughout the Medea section of the *Metamorphoses*, which she notes returns in this line, where Medea's fate is left unstated: Medea uses her language to disappear and escape.

[136] Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.234 perceives only three stages, since she considers the Theseus episode a minor extension. Newlands (1997) pp.191-2 concludes that Medea is free from moral obligations once she is no longer "young Medea" and that this, and the emotions associated with it, are instead explored in surrounding *Metamorphoses* tales. Although an undoubtedly two-sided character, Medea cannot be considered completely incongruous, as Newlands believes (pp.207-8), if we trace her development as Ovid has portrayed it through several episodes. It is probable that Ovid was not covering these themes since they were too well-worn and did not need explaining to his learned audience, as Larmour (1990) believes: see above n.132. Furthermore, Medea does not completely elude human judgement: for example, Ovid passes the judgement on the Aegeus tale that taking Medea in was his only condemnable act.

As Medea departs from the pages of the *Metamorphoses*, she has undergone a drastic change from the girl we first met, and now has become unrecognisable as that young and innocent Medea. As befits the main theme of his epic, Ovid has chosen episodes which clearly show the stages of this metamorphosis, the final result of which is quite shocking when we consider how the character had begun at the beginning of book seven.[137] The early Silver Age poet has certainly portrayed a figure with two sharply distinct sides to her:[138] he has depicted her in her most extreme aspects, from sweet and innocent heroine to the evil maleficent sorceress performing evil and murderous deeds, with all the paraphernalia familiarly associated with a present-day black witch.[139] In the latter stages there is no sympathy with this character, and the poet does not, and indeed cannot, attempt to defend her. Yet Ovid has still reconciled these aspects to a certain extent, since he has traced the development gradually.[140]

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[137] The metamorphoses here are psychological, rather than physical: Rosner-Siegel (1982) argues that, in the tale of Medea, Ovid mixes the theme of psychological metamorphosis with that of improper love, leading to the deterioration of the main character.

[138] Hardie (2002a) p.254 recognises Medea's "split identity": he discusses how Medea puts on her Euripidean murderous role, in relation to Hypsipyle's doing the same in *Heroides* 6. Newlands (1997) p.180 believes that Ovid was purposely addressing issues of Medea's incongruousness by juxtaposing her two sides: indeed, this is the sort of rhetorical challenge that Ovid would have relished.

[139] Segal (2002) pp.11-12 traces Medea's degeneration in terms of her magic: he views her change from "helpful enchantress to murderous witch" as a method for exploring human, especially female, emotions, which he notes are often associated with magic; he considers other, often dangerous, examples, pp.1-11.

[140] Anderson (1963) p.15, remarks that we see Medea degenerate progressively; he interestingly discerns the metamorphosis in Medea's character as stemming from being deceived by love. Brown (2005) p.29 suggests that Medea is an anti-heroine on the whole: however, although her character degenerates by the end of her appearance in the *Metamorphoses*, she had appeared very sympathetically at first and, until the final section, had had reasons for her less reputable actions; indeed, Brown herself concedes that Medea never quite alienates our sympathy. Interestingly, she suggests that Medea's character is a predecessor of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth.

***HEROIDES* 12 & 6**

Ovid's *Heroides* are *suasoriae*[141] in the form of imagined letters written from women of mythology[142] to their lovers, on the subject of their current separation and the circumstances surrounding this, in an attempt to bridge the gap and overcome the separation.[143] These elegiac epistles,[144] which give a voice to these women, often for the first time,[145] appear to be an innovative genre created by Ovid: a likely inspiration was Propertius' poem 4.3 in the form of a letter from Arethusa to Lycotas.[146] However, Ovid was the first to create a whole genre from this, depicting the heightened emotions of mythological characters during specific moments of their tales, and so he can be credited as the author of the epistolary genre.[147] The reader finds these mythological characters at a particular moment in the middle of their individual myths: we must remember that we, as well as the real author behind the letters, have a greater knowledge than the characters, since we know the inevitable outcome of their love stories from previous existing versions of their tales. Therefore, we are in a superior position to these women, and can recognise the frequent futility of their words: we are able to read much more between the lines, and can detect Ovid's allusions to future events. On account of this, there is an

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[141] Sabot (1981) pp.2590-2610 discusses the aspects of *suasoria* found in the letters. Ovid's rhetorical training prepared him well for this: Hill (2008) p.1.

[142] There are also letters from men to women in the paired *Heroides*: 16 from Paris to Helen, 18 from Leander to Hero, and 20 from Acontius to Cydippe. Sappho is the only non-mythological character to write, in letter 15. Lindheim's premise, (2003) pp.3-4, is that these letters focus completely on male and female, hero and heroine.

[143] See Kennedy's introduction to Palmer (2005) p.XII and Palmer's own introduction, pp.xii-xiii; also Lindheim (2003) pp.19-20, 30-1.

[144] Smith (1994) pp.266-7 neatly summarises that the elegiac and epistolary aspects do not clash in the *Heroides*, but "combine gracefully". Spentzou (2003) pp.19-20 considers these epistles as the natural progression of elegy breaking out of its traditional boundaries; Liveley (2005) pp.59-60 observes that Roman love elegy had been exhausted, so Ovid used myth for a new approach.

[145] Calabrese (1997) pp.5-6 justly terms Ovid "one of the originators of the female voice in Western literature" and Wilkinson (1955) pp.94-5 views Ovid as following in Euripides footsteps in this manner. However, this does not make Ovid a feminist: (see p.8, above). Ovid does entertain the idea of women writing: in *Tristia* 3.7, we learn of his assistance to a young poetess, Perilla.

Spentzou (2003) pp.2-3 perhaps goes too far in saying that, in writing their own versions against the master texts, these women are defying male power; it also seems contradictory to say, pp.26-7, that they are defiant and combative *and* lack assertiveness and emphasise their own passivity and helplessness (which she interprets as a possible sign of the letters being male fantasies). However, it seems correct, and natural to the personal context, that the heroines are far more personalised than their epic counterparts (p.23). See also Mack (1988) pp.18-20, 70-2.

[146] Anderson (1973) pp.67-8 discusses this inspiration. It is generally believed, although uncertain, that Propertius' poem was written first: Knox (2002) p.126.

[147] At *Ars Amatoria* 3.346 Ovid informed his readership that this was a new type of poetry: *ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus*. Sabot (1981) pp.2574-77 discusses whether Ovid invented the genre or merely renewed it, taking into account possible inspirations, or originals, from ancient literature: he concludes that the *Heroides* are unique. Cunningham (1949) makes the unlikely suggestion that the novelty was that these epistles were written for the stage. Jacobson (1974) pp.94-5 attributes the novelty, partly to a new genre incorporating elements of old myths, and partly to Ovid's unique psychological insight.

irony that pervades the epistles, and especially the women's words, as Ovid plays with traditional accounts of the myths.[148] In these letters, as Ovid is exploring the minds and psychology of these women through their own words, he often places the seed of an idea in their head, so that their future actions, according to familiar and well-known versions of the myth, seem to have been conceived while they were supposedly composing these letters. The *Heroides* are an effective form in which the Roman poet was able to expose the inner thoughts of these women in love, often before a famous and momentous event in their lives, and thereby explore female psychology in some depth.[149] Although an accusation of monotony is often levelled at these epistles, they were conceived as an original way of considering these famous myths,[150] offering a unique insight into the female mind in different individual circumstances, while sharing some of the characteristics of the dramatic monologue.[151]

In the *Heroides*, we must remember that the projected author is a different one from that in other poetry by Ovid: while Ovid the poet is the usual persona behind his verse, these epistles are written as

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[148] See Kennedy, in Palmer (2005) pp.XIII-XVI. Anderson (1973) p.64 sees Ovid's aim as "learned allusion and playful anachronism"; he notes that the women are not anti-heroic, but unaware of their "heroic criteria". See also Lindheim (2003) p.7 and Spentzou (2003) p.34. Fulkerson's view, (2005) p.2, that the women are *puellae doctae* misses the ironic point of the unknowing allusions they make.

For the opinion that these legendary heroines of great literature have been irreverently reduced, see Verducci (1985) pp.18-21, 81-5, who suggests that we cannot take them seriously, since they are caricatures and parodies: however, her view (p.229) that they are too human to be dismissed as fools, seems more accurate. Sabot (1981) p.2555 believes that Ovid is impudent for laying bare these mighty characters and their weaknesses; Farrell (1998) pp.322-3 comments that the heroines perhaps expose more of their soul than they wished. However, Anderson (1973) p.67 notes that the letters are the first time that these characters wholly became women: Ovid made them fully rounded by giving them their own voices so that the reader sees both sides of the stories. Fulkerson (2005) p.17 notes that their inability to hold back any details makes them vulnerable, which seems the closest assessment of the tone of the letters.

[149] Thus Wilkinson's view, (1955) p.97, that Ovid, although better than his predecessors, nevertheless lacks psychological subtlety, seems incorrect. Verducci (1985) pp.28-9 comments on the psychological verisimilitude. Sabot (1981) pp.2579-82 discusses the psychology and emotions of the characters. Barsby (1991) pp.14-15 considers that Ovid emphasises one aspect of each heroine's past and thereby endows each with individuality. Vessey (1976) p.91 defends the letters as exercises in delineation of character, *ēthopoeia*; Liveley (2005) pp.64-5 acknowledges the role of *ēthopoeia*, but further defends the letters as more than simply rhetorical exercises.

[150] Barsby (1991) pp.14-15 believes that Ovid probably enjoyed this challenge of giving old myths a new perspective from a narrow scope and viewpoint. Fulkerson (2005) pp.3-4 suggests that this repetition reinforces their hopeless elegiac position. Smith (1994) p.259 summarises the *Heroides* as "the embodiment of the passion of mythical characters in the context of a love letter".

[151] Vessey (1976) pp.92-3 notes that these letters are monologues, but not technically soliloquies, discussing how far the term tragic can be applied to them. In considering that Ovid inherited these tragic monologues from Euripides, Verducci (1985) pp.16-17 notes the tension between the private aspects of the monologue and the public nature of the attempted persuasion; she further discusses their dramatic nature, or lack thereof, p.82.

if in the hand of the individual heroines themselves,[152] voicing their own complaints and lamentations to their lovers, as befits their elegiac nature.[153] Therefore, a view more sympathetic towards the heroine is predetermined by the genre: as Medea tells her story in her own words, we must recognise that she is highly unlikely to condemn herself: therefore her letter to Jason, *Heroides* 12, gives us the opportunity to see matters from her point of view.[154] To a certain extent Ovid has redressed this balance with *Heroides* 6, a letter written by Jason's former lover and, therefore, resentful love-rival of Medea, Hypsipyle. Therefore, I shall also consider this epistle here, as a balancing letter which presents an opposing, more traditional, view of Medea.[155] A question which I here seek to answer is how far Medea lives up to her own literary reputation in the *Heroides*.[156]

Heroides 12, as all of the epistles, is a letter composed at a specific moment: this one is written by Medea to Jason when they are in Corinth, and is instigated by his abandonment of her for Creusa, the king's daughter. It is from the premise of abandoned wife that Medea creates the letter and this is its theme. It provides a snapshot of her feelings about her cruel treatment at the hands of the ungrateful Jason:[157] this abandonment must be a recent event, for it is clear that Medea has not yet taken her horrible revenge, and ideas for this are only very vaguely beginning to be conceived in the course of the letter. Because of the stance of these epistles, Medea appears relatively passive in *Heroides* 12, as she purports to seek a reunion with Jason: these letters have a tone of begging associated with them.

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[152] Lindheim (2003) pp.4, 7-8, 14, 90 explores the issues surrounding authorship, questioning whether it matters if Ovid or the heroine is the purported writer, and considering the gendering of the letters.

[153] Fulkerson (2005) p.2 views the women as similar to male elegists, in their position of abandonment; see Liveley (2005) pp.62-3 on the elegiac role reversal. On the poems' suitable elegiac form see Anderson (1973) pp.65-7: however, the comic aspects he mentions do not seem evident, other than in the irony of the hopeless situations and future allusions; Vessey (1976) pp.107-9 discusses humour in the collection; Verducci (1985) pp.4-5 objects to the irreverence she detects.

[154] Isbell's warning, (1990) p.104, that it is hazardous to read this as an attempt by Ovid to show Medea more favourably, seems flawed: it is most unlikely that Medea would set out to condemn herself. Verducci (1985) pp.16-17 notes that we cannot necessarily accept the heroines' words as the truth. Lindheim (2003) pp.4, 8 believes that Ovid empowers these women to recreate their narratives from a subjective point of view; Spentzou's premise (2003) is that the heroines present their own versions of their tales. Liveley (2005) p.60 notes that Ovid challenges popular conceptions of myths.

[155] Jacobson (1974) pp.354-6 believes that Ovid provided the different letters handling the same myths in order to show that there is no definitive version: they are always subject to individual perspectives. This is particularly underscored by the contrary ways in which Hypsipyle and Medea view Medea.

[156] Fulkerson (2005) p.42 recognises that Medea's various literary reincarnations after Euripides often explore the question of whether she was always the kind of woman capable of killing her children, or whether her circumstances made her that way. This explains the two sides to Medea, and why authors often try to reconcile the young girl with the son-murdering witch. She observes, p.51, that her two sides are successfully reconciled in *Heroides* 12.

[157] Jason's *ingratus* nature is a prominent theme of Medea's and Hypsipyle's letters: see Bloch (2000); Bessone (1995) also discusses the use of the term (see n.165 below). Thus Cunningham (1949) p.104 is incorrect in his view that there is no attempt to present the character of the addressee of the epistles.

However, we should remember that this is a single moment and, by the end of the letter, Medea once more seems resolved for action, as is far more characteristic of the heroine.

Medea understandably displays a range of emotions, which seem a natural reaction for a woman in this humiliating situation of rejection for a younger woman: through the course of her words we see a woman who is hurt, angry, upset, insecure, resentful and foremost suffering. Ovid has here successfully captured the feelings of a woman scorned in such a way, and this letter provides a psychological study of the inner workings of her tormented mind at this difficult time.[158] Ovid puts Medea's emotions on display from the very beginning of the letter: *Heroides* 12 has an unusual opening since Medea appears to begin her letter mid-sentence and mid-complaint:[159]

> At tibi Colchorum – memini – regina vacavi,
>
> ars mea cum peteres ut tibi ferret opem! [12.1-2][160]

This abrupt beginning, with the conjunction *at*, gives the appearance that Medea has long been mulling matters over, and has suddenly begun writing her words in the middle of an angry rant in her mind.[161] It is almost as if she has already been running through the imaginary arguments she intends to put forward to Jason: this displays her high emotional state, and seems the natural behaviour for someone who has been hurt and rejected by a loved one. Another possibility for her premise in this abrupt opening is that Medea believes that Jason will not listen to her justified complaints, nor her

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[158] Jacobson (1974) pp.6 remarks that Ovid does not read his character's mind, he becomes it. He interestingly discusses the psychology of the poems in detail, pp.371-6.

[159] Knox's view, (1986) pp.209-210, that this opening is proof that the epistle is not Ovidian, seems flawed: he argues that the introduction does not identify the author, yet Medea states that she is the queen of Colchis, a description which no reader could fail to reconcile with the purported writer; he also claims that the abrupt opening, and threatening ending (see below, pp.54-5) resemble a tragic monologue rather than a letter, yet the dramatic monologue's influence on the *Heroides* collection is recognised: see above, n.151. Furthermore, Hypsipyle's parallel letter also opens in this abrupt manner: see Jacobson (1974) p.97 and Fulkerson (2005) p.47. Hinds (1990) pp.34-43 agrees with Knox that this is a more dramatic letter, but uses this as evidence for his argument that Ovid is the author, since Medea is "the tragic heroine *par excellence*" (p.39) and will go on to perform in Ovid's own tragedy. Lending credence to the tragic aspects, Lindheim (2003) p.4 considers the possibility that the heroines in these epistles are merely playing out a series of performances.

[160] The Latin text used throughout is Dörrie (1971). He also includes an extra couplet, which is placed before these lines: usually this initial couplet is ignored, and I have chosen to follow the general consensus on this, so that my line numbers are always slightly different from those of Dörrie. Knox (1986) pp.209-10 also disregards these extra lines, although they possibly solve the problem, which he perceives of the unique opening (see n.159 above), in identifying Medea by name:

> *Exul inops contempta novo Medea marito*
> *dicit, an a regnis tempora nulla vacant?*

[161] Isbell (1990) p.105 considers this as the likely explanation for the abrupt opening; Jacobson (1974) p.114 detects nastiness and arrogance here.

claim to be his rightful wife: therefore she begins defensively. Furthermore, in the words *at regina*, there is an echo of the opening of *Aeneid* 4, Virgil's book concerning the similarly doomed tragic love of Dido for Aeneas.[162]

Medea immediately launches into an attack on Jason for his ungratefulness, a prominent theme of the letter, bitterly and ironically noting that she still remembers helping him, thus implying that he has conveniently forgotten this. In case this bitterness should not expose the depth of her pain, Medea, wishing that she was dead (3-4), explicitly declares to Jason that her life is a punishment: *quidquid ab illo / produxi vitae tempore, poena fuit* (5-6). Medea is very direct and does not hesitate to express her feelings: this can possibly be taken as an indication of her lack of restraint which has made her a detested and feared figure, because it is the root of her most horrific actions, the worst of which is soon to happen: the murder of her sons. However, to read this meaning into the poem is reading between the lines, simply because we know Medea's legend: without that prior knowledge, we would be unlikely to judge Medea's outspoken anger as evidence of her unrestrained nature, and this surely should not be considered as Medea living up to her reputation, since it is bias swaying our judgement.

When we read on we see that, at this point, Medea's complaints are justified and reasonable: she does not appear to have lost control or to be dangerous, but deserves our pity as she regrets ever having had the misfortune to meet Jason. She looks back sorrowfully in hindsight on the events that led Jason to her and sets a series of rhetorical questions, expressing her regret and asking why this had to happen (7-12).[163] What makes this worse for Medea is that this is not simply rejection for another woman: Medea has done much for Jason and given up her whole previous existence for him, which makes his betrayal all the more cruel. This is why she tends to dwell on the past:[164] Jason owes her for her help and, out of duty, should not just cast her aside for another. She finds his treachery difficult to accept, knowing that he would have perished without her assistance in Colchis, as she scathingly reminds him:

> quantum perfidiae tecum, scelerate, perisset!
> dempta forent capiti quam mala multa meo! [12.19-20]

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[162] Jacobson (1974) p.14.
[163] Verducci (1985) pp.72-3 terms this an act of futility, noting that Medea nevertheless pursues this for pleasure.
[164] Verducci (1985) pp.71-2 has observed that no other letter is so dominated by past events.

Here Medea is clearly holding Jason responsible for her less reputable actions, and this introduces two more prominent themes to be found throughout this letter: crime and culpability. Her emotions have now brimmed over into anger: her scornful observation that, if Jason had died, she would not have suffered as much, is underscored by the harsh "s" and "t" alliteration in the first line, suggesting that she almost hisses in seething rage at the ungrateful man. The reader gets the sense that berating Jason, and thus venting her anger, is cathartic for Medea: indeed, she says as much when she claims that rebuking the ungrateful one (*ingrato*, 21) brings her pleasure (*voluptas*, 21), and that this is the only joy she can now derive from him: *haec de te gaudia sola feram* (22).[165] Her insults are forthcoming as she continues to recall the past resentfully, blaming the "unfaithful one" (*perfide*, 37) for her downfall:

illa fuit mentis prima ruina meae.
et vidi et perii![166] nec notis ignibus arsi,
ardet ut ad magnos pinea taeda deos.
et formosus eras et me mea fata trahebant:
abstulerant oculi lumina nostra tui. [12.32-6][167]

This Medea's ability to see, now, much more clearly what happened to her in the past, when she met Jason, displays that she is presented by the author as a mature woman. Using a simile containing traditional imagery to liken her increasing love to a fire burning wood, she acknowledges that this was no ordinary love and seems to implicate the influence of the gods.[168] It should also be noted that the adjective *taeda*, applied to the pine-wood, can have the meaning of "wedding" as well as "torch", which seems particularly apt in the context of this letter, presenting Medea's failed marriage and

[165] Bessone (1995) focuses on 12.21-2 as a response to Catullus 76.1-6, as well as considering the lines in relation to elements of Euripides' and Seneca's tragedies. She also considers the use of the key-terms, *ingratus* and *meritum*: see especially p.575 n.2. Lindheim (2003) p.127 notes that Medea revels in her power over Jason and "flaunts her usefulness" to him.

[166] Spentzou (2003) pp.88, 195 interprets these lines as a sign of unrequited love, and a warning about the "explosive potential" of the story.

[167] Knox (1986) pp.219-20 cites the quality of 12.31-6, including a borrowing from Virgil's *Eclogues*, in his doubt about the authenticity of the epistle; Hinds (1990) pp.20-7 sets out a detailed counter-argument which demonstrates that Ovid is alluding to Apollonius, Theocritus and Virgil.

[168] Lindheim (2003) p.130 notes the elegiac tone of the imagery in these lines. Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.106, n.87 observes that Medea's passion is envisioned in the same way as at *Metamorphoses* 7.76-88: see p.17 above on the fire imagery.

Jason's new nuptials. Furthermore, the references to burning can also be read as allusions to her future revenge on Jason's new bride, involving fire.[169]

Medea is very much living in the past and much of this letter is devoted to recalling her earliest moments with Jason: it is unclear whether this is for her benefit or to remind Jason of their relationship and his debt to her. The scenes of the past are recounted with great clarity, and this ability to remember them so clearly suggests her fondness for those moments.[170] This gives Ovid the opportunity of briefly recounting the early part of the myth, including the tasks which Aeetes set Jason: of course, this is all from Medea's point of view, and perhaps this was, therefore, the inspiration for Valerius' account of the tasks in the *Argonautica*, where they are very abbreviated and reported through Medea's eyes.[171] For example, as she describes the earth-born warriors rising up, she recalls her fear as she watched Jason face them, although he was aided by her magic, which acts as a reminder that Jason was not the true victor of his quests: *ipsa ego, quae dederam medicamina, pallida sedi* (97). The feelings Medea describes here, of love and fear, which she experienced during their early encounters, seem just as fresh now as she recalls them in the present tense, which betrays her still existing depth of feeling for Jason: *hinc amor, hinc timor est – ipsum timor auget amorem* (61). Indeed, as she remembers events from her youth, she too apparently becomes more like the young elegiac heroine of the first section of *Metamorphoses* 7, and perhaps is Ovid's own inspiration to expand on this image of Medea. The reader must feel pity for the girl who spent her nights in tears and anguish (*acta est per lacrimas nox mihi*, 58), distressed by images of the beasts Jason must face. As she continues to narrate her memories, she appears to soften towards the hero and the insults decrease, as the hurt gives way once more to the feelings of love she still harbours for the hero.[172] Now she more gently chastises Jason, poignantly questioning if he has forgotten the places where they first met, just as he has forgotten her: *noscis an exciderunt mecum loca?* (71).

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[169] Spentzou (2003) pp.87-8 discusses this passage, noting its combination of signs of Medea's excitement at first setting eyes on Jason, with tones of the impending doom to come from the fateful meeting.

[170] Sabot (1981) pp.2629-31 views this as part of the recurring theme of memories in the *Heroides*.

[171] See Chapter 3, pp.204-6.

[172] Although Medea does change her tone towards Jason, Verducci's view, (1985) pp.14-15, that her vacillation represents the signature of the collection seems erroneous: this would be more applicable to the Medea of the *Metamorphoses*, with her dilemma and self-debate: see above, pp.11-17.

Medea's feelings for Jason are reawakened by her cherished memories: she is even able to recall vividly the speech he addressed to her "with an unfaithful mouth" (*infido ore*, 72) and obsessively quotes this at length in her letter (73-88): despite the bitter gibes, it appears that she hangs on his every word now, just as then.[173] By quoting this speech and giving Jason a voice, Medea places much emphasis on him, rather than herself. His words are replete with irony, as he foolishly condemns himself with his infamous false oath,[174] calling on Juno, goddess of marriage, as witness to his empty words:

> "spiritus ante meus tenues vanescat in auras,
> quam thalamo, nisi tu, nupta sit ulla meo." [12.85-6]

However, she employs this method to support her argument that Jason has been false,[175] and has unfairly deceived the heart of this "simple girl" (*animum...movere puellae / simplicis*, 89-90), as she was at the time. She lays emphasis on her youthful innocence back then, referring to herself as *puella* twice within four lines (89 and 92),[176] in order to explain how she was so easily taken in by Jason's deceitful actions, and also to emphasise his cruelty, by contrasting his awareness with her naivety: his underhand tactics include the use of words (*verbis capta puella tuis*, 92); tears (*vidi etiam lacrimas*, 91); and physical imploring (*dextrae dextera iuncta meae*, 90).

Heroides 12 presents Medea's side of the story and helps to increase our sympathy for her: Ovid is taking the opportunity here to show this tragic tale exclusively from Medea's point of view. This is a new way of explaining her actions, and so Medea does not live up to her evil reputation here, since she presents her view of the situation: in this letter she is therefore defying her stereotype. This is also

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[173] Bloch (2000) p.205 observes that Jason uses the same techniques on Medea as he previously did on Hypsipyle, according to their letters.
[174] See n.80 above.
[175] Otis (1938) pp.214-15, n.89 recognises that Medea is dominant in this epistle with Jason only a "mercenary deceiver". Farrell (1998) p.328 notes that a recurring theme throughout this collection is the deceptive words of the male addressees, in contrast with the honest written words of the heroines.
[176] Lindheim (2003) p.125, 130 detects in the letter a divided self-depiction: the naive young girl versus the powerful woman. Although this is found in many portrayals of Medea, it seems to me less evident in this version than elsewhere, since this letter is a moment in her life and does not display any great development of character as, for example in the *Metamorphoses*. Therefore Newlands' view, (1997) p.179, that the inconsistencies have been smoothed over more successfully here than in the *Metamorphoses*, seems irrelevant: in the brief moment of this epistle Medea is a mature woman who only reflects on her younger days, where she foolishly fell in love and, furthermore, she is not yet a witch; Verducci (1985) p.71 sees the two sides as reconciled. Spentzou (2003) pp.78-82 explores the important theme of the heroines' desire to return to their virginal, more ideal, past.

the effect of her continuously recounting the past: by reminding Jason of the tasks set by Aeetes, and her vital assistance in them, Medea again displays that Jason's abandonment of her for another woman is not only cruelly mistreating her, but also ungratefully neglecting the duty and obligation he owes her. She notes how Jason coldly regards her differently, now that she serves him no further purpose:

> illa ego, quae tibi sum nunc denique barbara facta,
> nunc tibi sum pauper, nunc tibi visa nocens. [12.105-6]

She here juxtaposes her current demoted position in Jason's eyes, with her former one of power as his helper and guide: this is also contrasted verbally in the echo of her words above (*ipsa ego, quae...*, 97), describing her assistance in Jason's tasks, with her words here (*illa ego, quae...*) describing her change in Jason's point of view.[177] Her reference to being poor, picks up her bitter comment that his new marriage is a match based on wealth: *dotis opes ubi erant?* (103). Medea also states that Jason considers her to be harmful now (*nocens*), although we do not have any justification for this within the letter: the reader is likely to read an allusion to her future tragic actions into this comment. It seems most harsh that Jason now considers her to be a barbarian, as Medea informs us, because she no longer serves any use to him. Although Medea is traditionally regarded as a barbarian, Ovid portrays her as far from that here: she appears civilised, rational and intelligent, as she presents a justified argument against Jason's mistreatment of her, and she displays no signs of the wild and untamed foreign sorceress that she is elsewhere. Aside from the occasional reference to her powers or potions, mainly in aiding Jason, there is no indication that this Medea is a witch, and so Jason is presented as completely wrong for dismissing her so callously as such.

As we have already seen, this is not a simple case of betrayal for Medea: further worsening the situation of rejection is that, without her help, Jason would almost certainly have failed and died. Furthermore, she finds herself in the difficult situation of being regarded as a barbarian in a foreign land: Medea has given up everything for Jason, including her family, home and innocence, only now

[177] Bloch (2000) p.200 refers to Medea's use of "temporal antithesis to underscore the different light under which Jason now views her".

to be forgotten by her husband, isolated and alone in the world.[178] Quite rightly, she is quick to remind him of all that she has sacrificed for his sake:

> proditus est genitor, regnum patriamque reliqui,
>
> munus in exilio quodlibet esse tuli,
>
> virginitas facta est peregrini praeda latronis,
>
> optima cum cara matre relicta soror. [12.109-12]

This is the first we hear of Medea's imposed exile, which she understandably views as a bitter reward for all that she gave up for Jason. Ovid also picks up the theme of Jason as pirate, and Medea as his prize being carried off,[179] when he has her consider the hero as a brigand who has stolen her virginity, another thing which she clearly regrets having given up for him.[180] We see that, in order to save Jason's life, it was necessary for Medea to give up all that she knew in her own world: therefore he has an even greater obligation to her. After all that she has done for him, she believes, justifiably, that Jason at least ought to be a good husband and protect her, isolated in this strange land and all for his sake. In her deep resentment she holds him responsible for all of her troubles and actions: she even blames him for her brother's murder, and guilt and blame are central to this letter. After a pitiful address to her dead brother (*at non te fugiens sine me, germane, reliqui*, 113), Medea explains that guilt makes it difficult for her to mention this deed:

> quod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere dextra.[181]
>
> sic ego, sed tecum, dilaceranda fui!...
>
> numen ubi est? ubi di? meritas subeamus in alto,
>
> tu fraudis poenas, credulitatis[182] ego. [12.115-16, 19-20]

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[178] Spentzou (2003) p.41 labels her a "paradigm of displacement", and discusses this passage, pp.105-6, noting that the rejection Medea experiences is familiar to most of the heroines of the collection. Verducci (1985) p.29 remarks that the loneliness of the heroines encourages their letter-writing.

[179] See above, p.21. Bolton (2009) p.285 cites this as evidence of the sexual significance of the sea: she notes, pp.273-5, the connection between water and sexuality in her premise that female transgression of predetermined boundaries is a threat to gender, through an attempt to transform the sexual self by abandoning the rightful home: see also n.71 above on the link between female travel and deviancy.

[180] See Spentzou in n.176 above on the heroines' lost youth.

[181] Griffiths (2006) p.93 observes that the contrast between word and deed in 12.115 highlights the paradoxes surrounding Medea. Huskey (2004) pp.278-80 notes that Medea omits Absyrtus' name in an attempt to deflect attention away from the murder, thereby underscoring it as *nefas*: see also n.259 below.

[182] Verducci (1985) pp.68-71 discusses the editorial problems of this word, noting that *crudelitatis* has been considered an unlikely alternative.

The horror of having been a part of her own brother's murder is too much for Medea's conscience to bear: it is not explicitly stated whether Medea actually committed the murder, although it is perhaps implied, and elsewhere Ovid attributes the act to the heroine.[183] Admittedly, she did assist in his death in order to help the Argonauts escape Colchis, and therefore it is yet another crime for Jason's benefit, as she tries to imply: she claims her only fault here was her trustworthiness, while Jason's was treachery.[184] However, even Medea does not seem truly to believe this, since she acknowledges the reality of her guilt in participating in this unspeakable deed:[185] she wishes for the punishment of death which she deserves, with *meritas* once more picking up the theme of what is deserved or owed, and she continues to imagine suitable methods of death for a further six lines. Since she is so uncomfortable with this, and in order not to yield the moral high ground, she attempts to place the responsibility for the murder with Jason:[186] however, it appears that even Medea realises that this is one deed that she cannot claim to be a mere crime of passion.[187]

Medea goes on to incriminate herself further:[188] after having attempted to gloss over her brother's murder and exonerate herself for that crime, she becomes more audacious in mentioning Pelias' daughters. She again attempts to pass over this in silence but, as we have seen, Ovid later narrates this cruel deed in the *Metamorphoses*:[189] it seems here that Ovid ironically could not resist mentioning these unspeakable deeds, and thereby causes his heroine to lose some of her victim status.[190] The reader finds it more difficult to feel sympathy for a criminal who has committed wicked deeds, and it

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[183] In *Tristia* 3.9: see below pp.64-8.
[184] Griffiths (2006) p.93 cites this as evidence of Medea's self-delusion.
[185] Spentzou (2003) pp.96-8 considers Medea to have the "most eloquent expression of authorial conscience", in discussing her acceptance of responsibility. Lindheim (2003) p.127 believes that Medea chooses the version where she kills her brother in order to emphasise her power to Jason: however, the guilt is not an explicit admission that she committed the murder, and may only refer to her assistance in his death.
[186] Fulkerson (2005) pp.30-2 traces the resemblances here and elsewhere with Phyllis' letter (*Heroides* 2). Knox (1986) p.211, n.13 views Medea's wavering between guilt and innocence as an inconsistency which can be explained by the author having used two different portrayals of Medea to create this one: however, this is an unnecessary conclusion, since Medea's feelings swaying back and forth depicts her mind disturbed by the guilt, and other emotions, she feels; furthermore, she often appears as a character with a split personality and wavering mind.
[187] This is possibly an example of what Fulkerson (2005) p.14 describes as the heroines re-writing their literary history to their own detriment: however, on the whole this letter seems to improve Medea's reputation. She considers, p.45, the possibility that Medea incriminated herself here in response to Hypsipyle's accusations in her letter: 6.129, see p.61 below.
[188] Verducci (1985) pp.73-6 notes that this Medea differs from the Euripidean version in that she incriminates herself, as well as Jason.
[189] See above pp.29-32.
[190] It seems that Medea, after all, has to some extent become stereotypical and lived up to her reputation: see Kennedy in the introduction to Palmer, 2005, pp.XV-XVI.

would have been better for Medea not to mention these events at all, so that she could retain the moral high ground, as well as our pity: however, she can be credited with honesty, at least. What makes Medea appear outrageous here is her audacious demand of Jason, and further attempt to hold him responsible for all of her culpable actions, and thereby exculpate herself:[191]

ut culpent alii, tibi me laudare necesse est,
pro quo sum totiens esse coacta nocens. [12.131-2]

This point marks a slight change in characterisation, since Medea has incriminated herself more than she intended, and thus seems to deserve less sympathy from us. It seems that she has been unable to avoid altogether the formidable literary reputation which precedes her: although she does the best she can to gloss over it, it has eventually caught up with her. Even Medea herself is unable to save her own reputation, and she cannot help but be herself to some extent. It should now be considered whether the character in the second half of this letter continues to attempt to defy her reputation, or whether she will now simply descend into her stereotypical self.

At this point (133ff.) there is also a slight shift in theme: Medea has finished revisiting the past, which she has presented as an argument to support her case as Jason's rightful wife, and now she moves to the painful present; simultaneously we witness the heroine gradually become more enraged. She reports Jason's recent dismissal of her, which has understandably outraged her, as her repetitive language and exclamatory interjection emphasise:

ausus es - o iusto desunt sua verba dolori! –
ausus es "Aesonia" dicere "cede domo!" [12.133-4]

In this letter so far, Medea has effectively presented all the reasons that Jason is indebted to her and so should treat her with respect and kindness, making his blunt rejection seem unjust and harsh. Despite her shortcomings, of which she has recently informed us, Ovid once more successfully evokes pity for the woman. Medea explains that she has obediently departed from her husband's home with her

[191] Isbell (1990) p.104, however, does not detect an attempt at denial and mitigation of her crimes. However, he is correct that there is a degree of self-deception here on Medea's part, pp.104-5. Jacobson (1974) pp.111-14 hinges his view, that Medea is evil, on this section of self-incrimination, and particularly her brother's murder: to say that there is "no hope for this dastardly villain" (p.113) is over-stretching the credibility of his argument and, more importantly, what is presented in the text.

children (135-6): this hardly seems the action of a dangerous woman, and displays that at this point she has not become *nocens*. After receiving such callous treatment from her husband, she reports that she then accidentally witnessed his marriage to another woman: the elegiac tone of her previous comment, that she is always followed by her love for Jason (*et, qui me sequitur semper, amore tui*, 136), here adds sympathy and emphasises the cruelty of this discovery. It seems that Medea was not previously informed of Jason's reasons for rejecting her, his plans to marry Creusa, so suddenly discovering the event can only have come to her as an even harsher blow. Picking up the theme of crime and guilt, Medea expresses her disbelief at Jason's actions: *pertimui nec adhuc tantum scelus esse putabam* (141). Ovid has Medea depict the poignant scene, which serves to increase our pity for her, as her younger son excitedly points out his father at the head of the marriage ceremony, which Medea has heard approaching (149ff.).[192] This mention of her children is likely to remind the reader of their murder, which Medea will soon commit, but there is no sign of it at this point: it is again merely our knowledge of her future actions alerting us to this. Medea's literary reputation precedes her, as so often, but she has not caught up with it yet. She tells Jason that this shock had a physical effect on her, causing her to behave like a grieving woman, beating her breasts and tearing her hair and cheeks, and indeed she claims it was more like a funeral for her (*at mihi funerea flebiliora tuba*, 140).[193] It also causes Medea to exhibit possessive tendencies:

> vix me continui, quin sic laniata capillos
>
> clamarem "meus est!" iniceremque manus. [12.157-8][194]

Medea's extreme behaviour does have a reasonable explanation: it can be read as Medea exhibiting the lack of restraint she is famed for, but her pain is understandable, since she does indeed deserve much more from Jason than this cruel dismissal. Therefore this unexpected treachery, and the manner

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[192] Verducci (1985) pp.77-80 considers this scene to be the strongest moment of compassion for Medea, labelling it a "masterpiece of dramatic and pictorial detail". Bolton (2009) pp.286, 289-90 observes that Medea here elects to stay within the confines of the home, as proof of her sexual and marital fidelity; however, she interprets Medea's ultimate failure to preserve her marriage as resulting from her initial transgression of boundaries, by leaving her father's home: see above, n.71.

[193] Verducci (1985) p.79 observes that this wedding procession resembles a funeral cortège for Medea, and that she acts as a mourner. Gessert (2004) p.240 discusses this passage, considering Ovid's use of Medea's funereal aspects throughout, pp.238-40, with her repeated wishes for an earlier death, which would have averted further troubles. Interestingly, Gessert concludes, pp.240, 243, that Medea is presented as an unsettled evil spirit because she did not die as an ideal Roman female figure should, at earlier points in her tale: therefore the climax of events is destined to be destructive.

[194] Smith (1994) pp.263-4 describes these lines as Medea's desperate response to her worst fear. Daube (1966) pp.226-7 discusses Medea's physical assertion of ownership here.

of its discovery, must have deeply affected her, although imagining the mighty woman Medea in this distressed state seems rather incongruous: knowing her mythological history, we imagine her to become angry rather than sorrowful when things do not go according to plan. Indeed, a little further on, she again speaks of Jason as the rightful possession that she has earned, *quem merui* (197): once more this is understandable although, on this occasion, the imperative tone sounds demanding and much more like the Medea that we expect. Also at that later stage of the letter, it can be considered as evidence of the beginning of her decision to take action and seek revenge.

However, for the time being, Medea does appear as a woman passively and mournfully resigned to the loss of her husband to another woman: she acknowledges this as the punishment she deserves for the betrayal of her own family, and particularly for her part in the murder of her brother:

> laese pater, gaude! Colchi gaudete relicti!
> inferias umbrae fratris habete mei!
> deseror amissis regno patriaque domoque
> coniuge, qui nobis omnia solus erat. [12.159-62]

Although Medea earlier attempted to place the blame for all of this at Jason's feet, here we see that she nevertheless has a moral sense, acknowledging her wrongful part in the events at Colchis. This reminds us of the admirable young Medea whom we meet in other texts, full of guilt and with a keen Roman sense of duty to her family. We also see evidence of her youth in those actions, since she naively allowed Jason to become the replacement for all that she gave up:[195] the foolishness of relying on this one man for everything has caught up with Medea, now that he abandons her. These lines underscore why it is so difficult for her to give Jason up willingly.

[195] Clauss (1997) pp.156-7, discussing the comment of Apollonius' Medea, that her nephews have been brothers and companions to her (3.731-2), notes that this recalls Andromache's comment to Hector (*Iliad* 6.429-40) that he is father, mother, brother and husband to her. A closer comparison to Andromache can surely be found in Medea's position at this later stage, when Jason plays every familial role for her.

Medea continues in this passive and defeatist vein, as she notes the irony that she has magic powers that can control many things, but fail to help her.[196] She juxtaposes her capabilities and failings alternately, line by line:

serpentes igitur potui taurosque furentes,
unum non potui perdomuisse virum.
quaeque feros pepuli doctis medicatibus ignes,
non valeo flammas effugere ipsa meas. [12.163-6]

Ovid here addresses an area of Medea's tale that has always required the suspension of our disbelief, asking that we ignore that Medea can control nature and the gods, but not one mere man. However, Ovid does not solve this here, and it remains another of the many ambiguities which surround Medea. The heroine is full of self-pity, and the harsh and ironic reality of her magic is that it is her love-rival who benefits from it most:

quos ego servavi, paelex amplectitur artus
et nostri fructus illa laboris habet. [12.173-4]

This is what really smarts for Medea: the thought of "her" man with another woman. She has been preoccupied throughout with how much Jason owes her, and we wonder whether it is the loss of her lover that troubles her, or whether it is the loss of her rightful possession, as her earlier loving words now seem a distant memory.[197] Certainly in this letter justice is heavily emphasised. When Medea thinks of Creusa, she becomes more angry and descends into insults, labelling her a *paelex*, a term meaning "concubine": by using this derogatory term, Medea reminds us that, in her view at least, Creusa does not hold a legal position as Jason's wife, and so is merely his mistress, and not his rightful spouse.

Throughout her words so far, Medea has repeatedly made bitter comments that Creusa surely cannot be as worthy a wife to Jason as she herself has been. The heroine has been unable to resist making sly references to the source of her troubles by bitterly comparing herself, favourably, with Jason's new

[196] See similar comments in the love poetry: pp.78-9 below.
[197] Lindheim (2003) p.125 believes that Medea "longs to have Jason recognise her as the object of his desire": however, it seems less longing and more concern with what is rightfully hers.

wife.[198] Firstly Medea notes that she was the princess of the land and daughter of a rich man, just as Creusa is here in Corinth, comparing her father's kingdom to that of Creon (25ff.); as she recalls the tasks that Aeetes set Jason, she resentfully comments that Creusa and her dowry must have been far from his mind at that time (53ff. and 103ff.); also, as we have seen,[199] there is a bitter tone of irony as Medea recounts Jason's wish that he cease to exist before taking another woman as his bride (85f.). Medea thereby reveals a preoccupation with the notion that Jason is abandoning her for this woman's dowry: in her reiterated comparisons, she weighs Creusa's wealth unfavourably next to her own and everything else that she has to offer Jason, or indeed has already given him.[200] Finally, near the end of her writings, Medea becomes more direct in her angry desperation to regain her husband, and she explicitly declares what she has been manifestly hinting at all along:

> dos mea tu sospes, dos est mea Graia iuventus.
>
> i nunc, Sisyphias, improbe, confer opes.
>
> quod vivis, quod habes nuptam socerumque potentes,
>
> hoc ipsum, ingratus quod potes esse, meum est. [12.203-6]

As well as again returning to the theme of Jason's ingratitude, noting the ironic situation that he owes his very ability to be ungrateful to her for saving him, she repeats the word for dowry, *dos*, four times in the space of five lines at this point (199-203). The reader senses in this outburst that Medea has been holding back, perhaps hoping that Jason would realise from her hints that he has a mighty obligation to her and her more worthy dowry, but now the excruciating thoughts of Jason and Creusa's marriage have finally tipped her over the edge and she can restrain herself no more, as her relentless anger pours forth.

The mighty Medea is a very proud woman, and the thought of the newlyweds together, laughing about her, is more humiliation than she can tolerate, and she descends to insulting her rival as Jason's "silly wife" (*stultae maritae*, 175). Medea believes that, not only will they mock her appearance and

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[198] Spentzou (2003) pp.170-1 believes that Medea tries to resist bringing Creusa into her version of the story: however, she clearly returns to this source of her pain repeatedly. Lindheim (2003) pp.115-17, 125-6, 130-3 notes how both Medea and Hypsipyle liken and distinguish themselves from their love rival: this is part of their assuming different roles, here that of another woman, in order to manipulate Jason, making themselves more desirable to him by being more like his current lover.

[199] See p.43 above.

[200] For a brief summary of the role of the dowry in Roman families, see Dixon (1992) pp.42-4.

customs (*faciem moresque*, 177), by which the reader will understand her foreign origin, but also, returning to the theme of crime and guilt, that new accusations will be invented for her (*nova crimina*, 177). This painful thought is enough to goad Medea completely out of her passive mood into an active, aggressive one:

> rideat et Tyrio iaceat sublimis in ostro –
>
> flebit et ardores vincet adusta meos.
>
> dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt sucusque veneni,
>
> hostis Medeae nullus inultus erit. [12.179-82]

Medea's words here are very ominous and threatening indeed.[201] Not only does she forthrightly declare that no enemy of hers will go unpunished, but her warning that Creusa will be consumed in a blaze hotter than hers contains implicit suggestions. Creusa, of course, will meet her end in a fire thanks to Medea, and therefore these words are replete with irony. Here Medea merely means the blaze of desire but, once more, because we know the unfortunate outcome of this rival wife at Medea's hands, combined with the very menacing tone that Medea uses here about the punishment of her foes, we cannot help but think of Medea's revenge: it is possible that her plans are beginning to be conceived in her mind, as she utters the words. Medea certainly is exhibiting more of the characteristics typical for her, as we know her from her mythological history.

Therefore, the tone of the next passage is surprising, for Medea makes a striking turnaround at this point. As she again softens, meekly placing herself in the position of Jason's suppliant, she resorts to begging him in an obsequious manner:[202]

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[201] Bloch (2000) p.208 interestingly sees Medea's threats as a possible attempt to bully Jason into being with her. Ominous as these lines are, Lindheim (2003) p.128 puts it too strongly in saying that they conjure up the image of a potent sorceress: although Medea hints at her powers and actions as a magician, this appears to be an example of incorrectly reading future events back onto the current phase of Medea's life, of which she is so often a victim because of her mighty reputation and deeds.

[202] An example of the addressee shaping the writer's letter, as Lindheim (2003) describes it, a theme she returns to frequently: pp.8-10, 23-5, 32, 78-9. She speaks of the hero becoming the central focus and the heroine unable to escape her history: it should, however, be noted that it is Hypsipyle's love rival, rather than her lover, who takes centre-stage, as we shall see. Lindheim's theory also does not apply wholly to *Heroides* 12, since Medea does not make Jason a dominant hero when she (rightly) takes the credit for his earlier feats (as Hypsipyle also notes, see pp.60-1 below); therefore she does not marginalise herself. She notes, p.25, how letters in the ancient world were associated with deceit, particularly when the writer was female, citing Phaedra as the prime example: however, here it is the men who are the deceivers: see also n.175, above.

tam tibi sum supplex, quam tu mihi saepe fuisti,

nec moror ante tuos procubuisse pedes…

redde torum, pro quo tot res insana reliqui!

adde fidem dictis auxiliumque refer! [12.185-6, 193-4]

These wheedling words sound desperate and unsuitable for a woman who, in her last breath, appeared threatening and vengeful, which she herself acknowledges when she declares them to be "inferior" (*minora*, 184) for her. Admittedly she is trying to charm Jason, but this marked change of tone seems incongruous, since it makes Medea sound more weak than powerful. There is more than one possible explanation for this. Firstly, it can be considered that Jason is Medea's weakness: from this letter it appears possible that Medea is willing to put herself in a position of submission for the sake of Jason's love, and this follows on naturally from the great sacrifices she has made for him. Thus a mighty vehemence towards the woman who threatens to supplant her in the affections of the man who has become everything to her seems a quite natural reaction, as does her desperate yet gentle approach towards the man himself: perhaps, therefore, this is evidence of Ovid showing an insight into female psychology, although I do not believe that Medea's love for Jason still exists at this point. Secondly, this can be seen as evidence of Medea's irrational and uncontrolled behaviour, as she becomes more like her stereotypical self: the barbarian princess could here be displaying neurotic tendencies, as her emotions swing rapidly from one extreme to the other. A third option is that Medea is becoming increasingly herself, as we recognise her. However, instead of the unrestrained side emerging, it is the clever and calculating aspect of Medea that here reveals itself: it is possible that Medea is here tricking Jason with false and flattering words, just as he once did to her, in order to carry out her revenge.[203] This act of vengeance could be in the process of being conceived in her mind as she writes, and the bitter thoughts enrage her or, indeed, it is possible that the whole letter is part of her plan for evil treachery and revenge. With the formidable Medea, anything seems possible.

In my opinion, there is probably an element of all three possibilities responsible for Medea's sudden change of tone: the heroine is a complex case and can be read in a variety of ways. Therefore, I do not

[203] In this way Lindheim's theory, (2003) pp.8-10, 82, 89-90 can be applied to Medea, since she is possibly here employing different roles in order to manipulate Jason and ultimately control his desire: see above n.198.

think that Medea is composing this letter with a calculated plan in mind all along, although she is certainly capable of it. Furthermore, if she was manipulating him throughout the epistle, she would not allow herself to become angry with Jason, as she frequently does while chastising him for his cruel betrayal and ingratitude, including reverting to fury again now as she recalls all that she has done for him (199ff.). Further possible evidence that Medea is beginning gradually to formulate the plan for her revenge, as well as the allusion to Creusa's downfall,[204] is the increased focus on Medea's sons in the latter section of the epistle (187ff.). In her passive role as suppliant, Medea appeals to Jason as father of their children[205] which, to the reader, serves as a reminder of the fate that their sons will meet at her hands. Medea is resorting to many persuasive tactics, and she does appear to have right on her side since, of course, Jason is Medea's husband and father of her children: she informs him that they become more like him every day (189f.) and they are cited as yet another reason that Jason has an obligation to her (192, 198). As a further reason that Jason should choose her over his new mistress, Medea is also prompt in reminding him that a stepmother is likely to be cruel to their children:

> si tibi sum vilis, communes respice natos:
>
> saeviet in partus dira noverca meos. [12.187-8]

Not only does she believe that Creusa is a poor wife, but a poor mother, next to her: these are words that are heavily ironic, for the reader knows that it is Medea who will be the source of harm to her sons, killing them as a form of cruel revenge on Jason. Undoubtedly her children would have been better placed with Creusa, the woman whom Medea would have Jason believe was the "wicked stepmother" figure.[206]

Heroides 12 ends on a note of imminent revenge, which is further evidence that this letter is not Medea's tool for coldly manipulating Jason. Her plot for vengeance is clearly still in the process of being formed, as she herself declares in the closing lines:

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[204] See above, p.52.

[205] Sabot (1981) p.2609 notes that this features both here and in Hypsipyle's letter and, p.2622, that children are a general tool of manipulation for the heroines. Medea's tenderness regarding her children is also observed, p.2626.

[206] For a discussion of the role of stepmothers in Roman families, see Dixon (1992) pp.143-4.

quo feret ira sequar. facti fortasse pigebit;

et piget infido consuluisse viro.

viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat.

nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit.[207] [12.209-12]

Medea breaks off almost as suddenly as she began her letter, and again in mid-rant. Far from ending on a note of supplication to Jason, she is menacing and uncertain of her own powers at this time: with foresight, she recognises that this vengeance may be a source of pain to her as well as to him, which of course is an ironic foreshadowing of the murders of her own children. In this heightened state of anger, Medea seems to be becoming less mentally stable: her anger is controlling her. She is not the woman who, cold and calculating, has plotted to kill her own sons for revenge on her unfaithful husband,[208] but an emotional woman who is becoming irrational and unrestrained because of the hurt of betrayal. However, the words that she has written could well have provided her with the inspiration for her murderous deeds, instigating the seeds of the ideas in her head, as she wrote them down. Despite knowing that she will take this horrible revenge, the reader nevertheless feels sympathy for this wronged woman.[209] She has presented the injustice of her predicament with a very convincing and heartfelt argument. We can thus understand why she takes the revenge, although the nature of it will prove to be beyond "civilised" understanding.[210] She appears to be on an inevitable course,[211] just as she was when the gods inspired her with love for Jason: she is beginning to become the stereotypical Medea, almost despite herself.

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[207] Barchiesi (1993) pp.343-5 analyses the tragic aspects evident in Medea's closing lines. He comments that Medea is becoming herself here, as she alludes to her future deeds of tragic proportions. Knox sees the tragic nature as evidence that the epistle is not Ovidian: see above, n.159. Spentzou (2003) pp.186-90 traces the development of Medea's emotions from grief into menacing anger, believing letter-writing to be an appropriate outlet for the anger which comes from her silent brooding in Euripides' tragedy.

[208] As Jacobson (1974) pp.121-2 sees her.

[209] Verducci (1985) pp.79-80 suggests that we must feel sympathy for this Medea, since her strong emotions make her genuine and openly truthful.

[210] Medea is an exception to the other "powerless" women, as Fulkerson (2005) p.15 notes, despite her proposed position of subjugation to Jason, since she *will* take action in a spectacular fashion. This is what sets Medea apart from other tragic heroines: she is triumphant in the end.

[211] Jacobson (1974) p.119 interprets this as Medea being resolved to commit evil deeds and having no conflict between passion and reason, as she had in Apollonius and Euripides. He notes, pp.116-17, that this mental turmoil and wavering is absent from *Heroides* 12, citing this as evidence of her being devoid of morality: however, the decisions have been made in the past, so that only the facts need to be recounted. He seems determined to blacken her portrayal.

It is important to note that, in *Heroides* 12, Medea is not presented as a sorceress, but merely as a hurt and rejected woman and wife. There is very little mention of her magic:[212] principally we see allusions to deeds she has performed in the past, which we know involved her magic. Nevertheless, here Medea is foremost an unfortunate woman scorned, and mention of her powers and potions are scarcely present. It would not have been impossible for Ovid to have written the letter with Medea as the formidable witch, angrily declaring all that she will do: however, this would not have fitted with the elegiac tone of the *Heroides*, where the women are seeking reconciliation with their loved ones, despite their anger in certain circumstances. Ovid chose to present a sympathetic portrayal of a hurt woman in this epistle and most definitely not one of a strange barbarian creature or a maleficent witch.[213] Any assumptions that we make about the text's allusions to Medea's future, are made purely on the basis that we already know the outcome: there is no evidence in the text that Medea is a murderous witch with evil plans, but we are likely to discern the signs of this in her character.[214]

Although it is not necessary to consider *Heroides* 6 in as much detail, we need to examine the letter from Hypsipyle to Jason, since the heroine has a fierce obsession with Medea, which should be illustrated here. In *Heroides* 12 Medea's pride is hurt and she focuses on the injustice that Jason has committed against her, by looking back on the past and all that he owes her, and occasionally referring to her love-rival Creusa; however, in *Heroides* 6 Hypsipyle is eaten up with bitter jealousy about her love-rival, Medea, so much so that it is the rival who becomes the real focus of the letter, rather than

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[212] Newlands (1997) p.180 rightly notes that Medea is the elegiac abandoned woman and not a *pharmaceutria*.

[213] Isbell's views, (1990) p.xi, that this Medea is an evil character who only briefly reveals herself as pitiful and, p.103, that every major surviving account of Medea portrays her as "a person of astounding and unparalleled evil" seem flawed: these Latin accounts all explore her softer side and the reasons for her evil actions, especially *Heroides* 12, in which Ovid is giving Medea her own voice and opportunity to present her case. Perhaps Isbell has taken this premise from the equally erroneous view of Jacobson (1974) pp.111-23, that Medea is inherently evil: this is not conveyed through the letter, and indeed it is unlikely that Medea would thus portray herself. Newlands (1997) p.179 has interpreted the letter more accurately: she remarks that the "few hints of Medea's dreadful powers do little to detract from her self-representation as an unjustly injured wife and lover, the victim of an ungrateful Jason".

[214] Barchiesi (1993) p.350 terms this "reflexive allusion": the ironies we detect, which are produced from our knowledge of events happening later in the life of characters in the "master texts", and also the self-conscious literary awareness that the heroines display. Reading future actions into this character is surely what Jacobson is doing (1974) p.111-23 in his biased account against Medea. Lindheim (2003) pp.35, 182 notes how the reader has the power to provide the missing closure of the letter, by filling in the future events known from other texts.

Jason or the love that Hypsipyle and he shared.[215] *Heroides* 6 acts as a counter-letter to *Heroides* 12, portraying Medea in a vastly different light from her own letter to Jason. Medea's notorious darker aspects are put on display throughout this letter, as Hypsipyle attempts to emphasise all the reasons that Jason should not be with this other woman or, rather, witch. It is this different portrayal of Medea that is of interest here and I consider Hypsipyle's letter as a companion piece to that of Medea:[216] in *Heroides* 6 we find explicitly stated the aspects of Medea to which we had detected vague allusions in *Heroides* 12.

In the first half of her letter Hypsipyle is largely concerned with recounting her past relationship with Jason, reminding him of the love they shared. She mentions Medea only once in the first seventy lines. This reference to her love-rival is an insult and, indeed, Hypsipyle appears unable to talk of Medea in anything but malicious terms: here she calls her the barbarian poisoner or sorceress (*barbara venefica*, 19),[217] sharing her rightful marriage bed. This sets the tone for the second half of her composition, which is an attempt to persuade Jason that Medea is not the woman for him, because she herself is a far better contender. From line 75 onwards, Hypsipyle is almost completely concerned with attacking the shortcomings of Medea.

In addressing Jason on the subject of his new wife, one of the first insults Hypsipyle levels against Medea again picks up the earlier spiteful comment that she is a barbarian. However, this time she is even more derogatory, terming her a *barbara paelex* (81): the sentiment that Medea is merely a mistress of Jason, and Hypsipyle's unwillingness to accept her legal status as his wife, is one later

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[215] As Verducci (1985) p.58 observes, Jason is almost entirely overlooked: she gives a detailed account of Hypsipyle's character, pp.56-66. Lindheim (2003) pp.118-24 believes that Hypsipyle is consciously presenting herself as another Medea in order to win back Jason's desire, since he is currently more interested in Medea (see also n.198 above). Fulkerson (2005) pp.47-9 similarly suggests that Hypsipyle is aware that Medea is the more interesting heroine and is therefore trying to compete with her; she also views Medea as trying to impress Jason by becoming more like Hypsipyle.

[216] Bloch (2000) p.198 notes that the two letters function as a pair and derive meaning from each other. Fulkerson (2005) p.40 comments that 6 and 12 form a diptych, and traces the thematic and verbal parallels and similarities on pp.43-50. Hinds (1990) pp.27-34 cites this as a further reason for believing that *Heroides* 12 is authentically Ovidian (see above, nn.42, 159 and 167): history repeats itself, and lines are echoed, precisely because Jason is a philanderer and treats his women equally badly; on the repetition see Jacobson (1974) pp.377-8.

[217] Bolton (2009) p.281 believes that Hypsipyle's use of the term *barbara* indicates that Medea is morally condemned for her ability to travel and, therefore, transgress boundaries. Relevant here is Dickie's observation, (2001) pp.15-16, that *venefica* could be employed as a term of abuse by a rival unwilling to acknowledge that a woman's charms had conquered the man. Currie (1998) considers why women were especially associated with poison.

echoed by Medea herself about Creusa.[218] However, the concept that Medea is an outsider who does not belong in this civilised Greek world, let alone Jason's bed, is one that Hypsipyle chooses to emphasise more. Undoubtedly it would also have been hurtful to Medea herself, since feeling ostracised and alone in a foreign world is a prominent notion in her own letter to Jason. Hypsipyle notes that Jason's parents do not want her as a daughter-in-law, and wishes that she would go back to wherever she came from to find a suitable husband:

> illa sibi Tanai Scythiaeque paludibus udae
> quaerat et a patria Phasidis usque virum. [6.107-8]

Hypsipyle mentions the names of these faraway lands to remind Jason that Medea is from a strange place, and the incorporation of the image of marshes suggests that this is an undeveloped and, therefore, uncivilised area. As well as attacking Medea on the basis that she is a barbarian, Hypsipyle also vehemently reminds Jason that Medea is a powerful sorceress. Medea only briefly mentions her abilities in her own letter, and therefore portrays herself principally as a woman rather than a witch. However, here Hypsipyle elaborates on her rival's formidable magic at length:

> illa reluctantem cursu deducere Lunam
> nititur et tenebris abdere Solis equos;
> illa refrenat aquas obliquaque flumina sistit,
> illa loco silvas vivaque saxa movet.
> per tumulos errat passis discincta capillis
> certaque de tepidis colligit ossa rogis.
> devovet absentes simulacraque cerea fingit
> et miserum tenues in iecur urget acus.[219]
> et quae nescierim melius... [6.85-93]

Hypsipyle uses the stock imagery of a witch's power, including the ability to reverse nature: Medea's predecessor has given Ovid the opportunity to expound on these popular topics of the Silver Age with some relish. Ovid appears to have later drawn on this passage in *Metamorphoses* 7, since it is an

[218] See above p.50. Similarly, Hypsipyle's comment that she gives up her vows for Medea to enjoy (*votis Medea fruetur!*, 6.75), is an idea which Medea uses of Creusa, whom she believes is enjoying the man that she had saved (at 12.173-4).
[219] Ogden (2001) p.xxix notes the role of voodoo dolls in necromantic and erotic contexts.

abbreviated version of the details to be found there, and much of the imagery employed in the epic is the same: for example, the depiction of Medea with her hair loose and flowing, symbolising her wild and unrestrained nature was employed in Ovid's epic.[220] Hypsipyle certainly does not hold back in portraying her love-rival in dark terms: she paints a picture of a powerful and maleficent witch.[221] The final suggestive line quoted above has the effect of leaving the reader anticipating the rest and asking exactly what are these unmentionable deeds that Medea performs.[222] The repetition of the word *illa* as the prominent first word in several sentences is also noteworthy, since it suggests the force of Hypsipyle's scathing hatred for her rival, "that woman".

As if to console herself, Hypsipyle pointedly questions how Jason could be attracted to such a creature, simultaneously warning him to beware of Medea and her powers:

> hanc potes amplecti thalamoque relictus in uno
>
> impavidus somno nocte silente frui? [6.95-6]

Certainly Hypsipyle wants to emphasise Medea's dangerous and dark side, which is not the same as that which we have witnessed in *Heroides* 12. Her reason for detailing Medea's sorceress aspects is twofold: firstly she wishes to highlight all that is bad about this woman in an attempt to dissuade Jason from his feelings for her; secondly, she is clearly jealous of her for having gained the man she sees as belonging to her and, unable to believe that Jason could prefer this strange woman to herself, Hypsipyle prefers to attribute their relationship to Medea's magic. While on the one hand she upbraids Jason for having been unfaithful, she contradicts herself on the other hand, by holding Medea's magic responsible,[223] resentfully informing Jason that he must have been bewitched:[224]

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[220] See above p.24. Certain words are also repeated here: *decinctas* and *capillis*. Bloch (2000) p. 200, n.2 has noticed this similarity and considers that Hypsipyle is caricaturing Medea. Knox (1986) pp.215-17 misses these correspondences when listing those between *Heroides* 12 and the *Metamorphoses* as evidence that Ovid was not the author of Medea's epistle.

[221] Lindheim (2003) p.119 describes Hypsipyle's vilification of Medea; Spentzou (2003) p.62 notes that Hypsipyle focuses on Medea's cunning and skill in manipulation. Verducci (1985) pp.58-9 comments that Hypsipyle knows too much here, threatening her own credibility, since at this stage Medea would still have been a young girl.

[222] Fulkerson (2005) p.50 proposes the theory that Hypsipyle knows, or has learnt, how to be a witch. Verducci (1985) p.57 recognises that this ellipsis does not end the catalogue of Medea's vices.

[223] Isbell (1990) p.48.

[224] Liveley (2005) pp.63-4 identifies this as Ovid reusing the elegiac motif of love-magic, which he employs in *Amores* 1.8 and 2.1; she defends the epistles from monotony, pp.67-8, with the argument that the recycling of elegiac themes reshapes each letter. Dickie (2000) does not include Medea on his

nec facie meritisque placet, sed carmina novit

diraque cantata pabula falce metit. [6.83-4]

We have seen Medea's ironic declaration that she is unable to use love-magic effectively, and Hypsipyle's accusations therefore suggest, or pick up, this theme from *Heroides* 12.163ff. Also, the term *meritus* is an important one in Medea's letter, and here we see Hypsipyle denying that her rival has any merits. Further on Hypsipyle, astounded that Jason could prefer "this woman", reiterates this more forcefully, also insulting Jason for his foolish choice:

hanc, o tu demens Colchisque ablate venenis,

diceris Hypsipyles praeposuisse toro? [6.131-2]

The use of the scathing *hanc* at the beginning of the line suitably underscores her resentment.[225] Hypsipyle employs different tactics to convince Jason that this relationship is an unwise move. Still on the theme of Medea's magic, she warns the hero that this woman is not only controlling him with her potions and powers, but also stealing the credit for his heroic deeds. Furthermore, she quotes the imaginary words of one of Pelias' party to his people, claiming the fleece was won by the girl and not the hero, which must be insulting to Jason:

non haec Aesonides, sed Phasias Aeetine

aurea Phrixeae terga revellit ovis. [6.103-4]

Thus Hypsipyle plays on Jason's male pride: however, she is making a valid point here, since Medea writes in her own letter that Jason owes her for assistance in achieving his deeds.[226] Furthermore, in texts concerning Jason and Medea, the heroine often takes centre stage and becomes the real focus, seizing the hero's glory: for example, we saw this in Ovid's handling of Medea in the *Metamorphoses*, since Jason largely fades into the background; and we shall also see that Valerius Flaccus makes her the real point of interest in his Silver Age epic *Argonautica*; furthermore, having

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list of women who practise love-magic; he notes, however, p.581, that respectable women were reluctant to employ sorcery.

[225] Jacobson (1974) pp.98-9: he considers that Hypsipyle seems more insulted that Jason has chosen this kind of woman, than that he has chosen another woman, to replace her.

[226] Sabot (1981) pp.2580-81, 2601, notes that both Medea and Hypsipyle declare that Medea is responsible for Jason's achievements; Bloch (2000) p.201 observes that the heroines unknowingly agree on this point. Liveley (2005) p.62, in discussing the elegiac role reversal, notes that the heroines of these letters declare that they played active roles in the heroes' quests.

been turned into the eponymous heroine of several tragedies, Medea has often taken the attention away from Jason and his heroic exploits, which are long forgotten by the time she commits the murder of her sons.

Unsurprisingly, in building her case against Medea, Hypsipyle recounts the Colchian's betrayal of her father (135), contrasting this action with her own heroic decision to save her father when the Lemnian women slaughtered all their men: she also notes that Medea has left her homeland, whereas she herself remains loyal to hers, and therefore appears to pick up Medea's concern for filial duty to her father and country, in which Hypsipyle succeeds where Medea fails. As is to be expected in an attack on Medea's nature, Hypsipyle mentions Medea's notorious murder of her own brother, to prove that she is an unnatural creature who would be capable of any crime,[227] including the murder of Hypsipyle's sons:

> Medeam timui – plus est Medea noverca –
> Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus.[228]
> Spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros
> corpora, pignoribus parceret illa meis? [6.127-30]

These lines are full of irony, in view of Medea's future murder of her own sons: Hypsipyle's feeling that her children would not be safe with their wicked stepmother is another valid point, for Medea is indeed capable of child-murder, even that of her own sons. Ovid repeats this ironic idea in Medea's own letter when she is reluctant to send her sons into Creusa's care for the same reasons.[229] The role is reversed here, although the irony functions in the same way. Hypsipyle's obsession can also be seen verbally in these lines, as she repeats the name "Medea" several times.

Hypsipyle presents a convincing case against Medea, and the latter emerges very differently in this letter from the one written in her own hand: in *Heroides* 6, the depiction of Medea is much more

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[227] Bloch (2000) p.206 has recognised that where Medea preferred to gloss over this topic, Hypsipyle readily elaborates on it.
[228] Huskey (2004) considers Ovid's focus on Medea's hands in connection with Absyrtus' murder: he discusses, p.277, how the subject *manus* is held back until the end of the line, sentence and couplet, to emphasise the source of Hypsipyle's fear. He believes that Hypsipyle does not mention Absyrtus' name in this passage in order to underscore the familial tie between Medea and her victim: see n.181 above.
[229] 12.187-8: see p.54 above.

similar to the well-known Medea we might expect. Both are very biased letters: it is quite natural that Medea would not present herself in a bad light, but that her love rival would. Certainly Ovid took the opportunity to explore both sides of Medea, and it is apparent that *Heroides* 6 is just as much about Medea as *Heroides* 12, again underscoring the early Silver Age poet's overwhelming fascination with this heroine.[230]

In answer to the original question, it seems that Medea herself does not truly live up to her own literary reputation: there is always expectation of, and allusion to, future events, but Medea does not become this figure in the course of the *Heroides*.[231] It seems that Medea was not able to change her story, but she has altered our perception of her character.[232] In *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle's depiction of Medea matches her literary reputation, but we must remember that in mythological time Hypsipyle's letter comes before Medea's, and also that Hypsipyle's bias against Medea is very strong. Furthermore, Hypsipyle's obsession with Medea makes the former heroine seem more irrational and unbalanced, and therefore a less trustworthy source, especially when we remember that Jason had left Hypsipyle some time before. Medea, on the other hand, is portrayed as a much more rational character who, after presenting a reasonable and justified argument, since her husband has abandoned her for another woman while she is still living with him, is aware that her anger and desire for revenge are beginning to control her. Hypsipyle's increasing anger leads her to call curses upon Medea which are

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[230] I suspect that Ovid wrote Medea's letter first, and then decided to take yet another perspective on Medea, through Hypsipyle's eyes, seeing this as an opportunity to return to his favourite heroine. Bloch (2000) p.204 notes that *Heroides* 6 is another twist on the Medea tale, dealing with the latter stages of her literary life through Hypsipyle's predictive allusions: it was necessary for events of *Heroides* 12 to precede Medea's most infamous crimes so that Ovid could realistically present some sympathy for her, so perhaps 6 was written after 12 to give Ovid the opportunity to recount Medea's later life and crimes in this collection. Mack (1988) pp.71-2 points out that Ovid could have chosen more diverse myths, so the similarities between Medea and Hypsipyle must represent an intentional repetition.

[231] Therefore Lindheim's view, (2003) p.34, that the heroines have the opportunity to portray themselves as they wish but nevertheless choose to be their traditional literary incarnations, does not seem applicable to Medea. She believes, pp.115-17, that Medea is unable to hide her true self and her tragic character shows through: although, undoubtedly, hints of the tragic Medea are present in the letter, such opinions are often based on our knowledge of Medea's later actions from other texts, rather than direct evidence from *Heroides* 12.

[232] Rather than viewing the epistles as an unsuccessful attempt to change the heroines' histories, as, for example, Fulkerson (2005) p.17 has, perhaps we should consider them successful attempts at portraying the heroines in a different light. Verducci (1985) pp.67-8 observes that the epistle has suffered a poor reputation, especially in comparison with Euripides' play and Apollonius' epic. However, it can be seen as the greatest letter of the collection, since Ovid took up the challenge of defending one of the most infamous criminals in myth and presenting her in a sympathetic manner, even while she admits her crimes.

amazingly predictive of the future tragedy she will endure,[233] and have begun coming to fruition by the time Medea writes her own letter, as if Hypsipyle is the sorceress with the mystical power to have her wishes carried out.[234] Overall, it is Hypsipyle who appears to have the more violent and vengeful streak and who has become more like the stereotypical Medea, rather than Medea herself. Indeed, after imagining carrying out a bloody act of violence on Medea, ironically more suitable for a barbarian than a civilised woman,[235] Hypsipyle declares: *Medeae Medea forem* (151).[236]

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[233] Bloch (2000) pp.203-4; Leigh (1997) p.606 succinctly notes that it has "eerie (because unwitting) precision". Fulkerson (2005) pp.50-4 offers a detailed discussion of the curse, viewing Hypsipyle's letter, and the curse in particular, as in some way exculpating Medea.

[234] At 6.152ff. Hypsipyle wishes for Medea to be left alone with two children, to become an exile ultimately seeking refuge in the air, to be wretched to all her family, and to be stained with bloody murder.

[235] Isbell (1990) p.47 notes that Hypsipyle accuses Medea of the same kind of barbarous violence that she displays. Verducci (1985) pp.65-6 indicates the irony that Hypsipyle would not enter into bloody violence with the rest of the Lemnian women against the men, but would now alone against her love rival; she notes, pp.80-1, that it is this portrayal of Hypsipyle which allows us not to be horrified by Medea. Fulkerson (2005) p.51 recognises how Medea emerges as relatively innocent in comparison with Hypsipyle; however, she notes, p.120, that Hypsipyle will do nothing while Medea does eventually take action, adding that we are possibly fooled by *Heroides* 12 into forgetting that Medea is deadly. Huskey (2004) p.276 similarly observes that Hypsipyle only expresses her violent streak in wishes, not actions.

[236] On this see Bloch (2000) pp.202-3 and Verducci (1985) p.65.

MEDEA IN OVID'S OTHER WORKS

Before drawing any conclusions from this detailed study of Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, it will be useful here to review briefly the extant short passages of mythological exempla[237] where Ovid mentions the heroine. References to the Medea legend are to be found scattered throughout his other works: there are examples in both his love poetry (*Amores*,[238] *Ars Amatoria*[239] and *Remedia Amoris*[240]) and his collection of poems from exile (*Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto*), and Medea is also mentioned in the poet's unfinished Roman calendar (*Fasti*).[241] Such brief passages of mythological exempla, which in some cases are only one or two lines long, are often especially revealing, since their relatively cursory nature dictates that the author is citing them to illustrate a point succinctly.[242] Since these are less substantial references, the important matter to consider here is theme, and especially any that recurs. I shall look at these incidental references to Medea to discover if any particular aspects of her character emerge prominently. If we can discern a particular portrayal of the heroine here, I shall consider why Ovid has chosen to lay emphasis on this characterisation especially.

A suitable poem to begin with is *Tristia* 3.9, since it is Ovid's most substantial extant reference to the Medea myth, outside the *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*. The books of *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto* were written by Ovid during his exile, imposed on him by Augustus for the mysterious *carmen et error*.[243] Ovid died after several years in exile in the Black Sea region of Tomis, which therefore makes these books his final works. The elegiac poems contain various pleas for a recall to Rome or, at

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[237] On Ovid's use of mythological exempla, see Davisson (1993), Graf (2002) pp.112-14 and Boyle (2008), especially pp.360-3. Canter (1933) offers a more general discussion of the mythological paradigm's use and purpose.

[238] Davis (1980) provides a brief survey of the use of exempla and anti-exempla in the *Amores*.

[239] Watson (1983) discusses mythological exempla in the *Ars Amatoria*, with particular reference to their contribution to wit in the poem.

[240] Jones (1997) pp.42-68 offers a general, though perhaps unnecessarily over-complicated, discussion of exempla in the *Remedia Amoris*; for mythological exempla specifically, which he places within the category of human exempla, see pp.50-9.

[241] The Latin texts used here are as follows: *Amores, Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris* – Kenney (1995); *Tristia, Epistulae Ex Ponto* – Owen (1915); *Fasti* – Frazer (1931).

[242] Cameron (2004) p.238 remarks that these references should be allusive in order to evoke a relevant aspect by colourful or paradoxical detail.

[243] *Tristia* 2.207: see n.36 above.

least, to be shown leniency, and they give details, often self-pitiful, of his wretched life of banishment in a remote and harsh land.[244]

Tristia 3.9 is a poem devoted to the etymology of the name Tomis, attributing its origin to a notorious mythological event which was said to have happened there: the 34 lines narrate, in summary form, Medea's murder of her brother Absyrtus, suggesting that the name Tomis is derived from his dismemberment.[245] It is unsurprising, given the abhorrent nature of her criminal actions here, that Ovid introduces her to us in this poem as *impia Medea* (9): it is noteworthy that on this occasion he names the heroine since, as we shall see, he nearly always refers to her using epithets and familial roles. In the same line, he further underscores the heroine's impiety by noting that her crime is against her father, the *desertum parentem*. Ovid continues to emphasise her criminal nature:

> conscia percussit meritorum pectora Colchis
> ausa atque ausura multa nefanda manu.[246] [15-16]

Indeed Ovid here tells us that Medea's past and future acts are more than criminal, by referring to them as unspeakable, suggesting that they are so terrible that the poet cannot bring himself to describe them, instead passing over them allusively. Furthermore this allusion, although vague, is enough to remind readers of Medea's future crimes: above all her actions to come, the audience will recall Medea's infamous murder of her own sons here. Ovid also highlights Medea's barbarian background in these lines, when he refers to her as *Colchis*, employing the name of her distant "uncivilised" homeland as her title. Therefore, our impression of Medea so far is not a good one. However, we should also note that the heroine, as she catches sight of her father's ship pursuing the Argonauts, is depicted as aware of "what she deserves" (*conscia meritorum*), again picking up this familiar theme of

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[244] The depictions of Tomis' harshness are considered to be exaggerated: Green (1994) pp.xxiii-xxvii. For a comparison of Ovid's exile poetry with the *Heroides*, see Rosenmeyer (1997), especially pp.36-7, where she notes parallels with the abandoned and isolated Medea in *Heroides* 12.

[245] The final lines, 33-4, explain this: *inde Tomis dictus locus hic, quia fertur in illo*
membra soror fratris consecuisse sui.
This theory derives *Tomis* from the Greek verb *temno*, meaning "to cut up", and the noun *tomé*, meaning "a cutting": Green (1994) p.245. Krevans (1997) p.78 notes that Apollodorus knew this version of the myth, 1.23-4, and that this is the complete inversion of Medea as kidnapped maiden: see Chapter 3, nn.653, 662, 735.

[246] Huskey (2004) pp.282-3 notes Ovid's use of *manus* in relation to Medea (see n.228 above), observing the echo of *Heroides* 12.115 in the use of *audere* (see p.45 above), and describing the reference to the future as opening up "an intertextual commentary on Medea's future" in Ovid's works. Interestingly he notes, pp.281-2, that Jason is not mentioned at all in this poem.

owing and deserving.[247] Furthermore, she is physically affected by this sense of guilt, since she beats her breast, in the typical manner of a grieving or distressed woman according to classical literature.[248] In the following lines, Medea continues to suffer the physical effects of her guilt:

et, quamquam superest ingens audacia menti,
pallor in attonitae virginis ore fuit. [17-18]

Medea's blanching here must arise from the realisation of having betrayed her family, which is prompted by her father's pursuit: this effect on her complexion is another typical representation of a distressed female in classical literature.[249] Therefore, we know that this Medea has a moral sense, although she has acted with impiety, since she is not only aware of, but feels guilt for, her wrongdoings. From these lines, it appears that Ovid depicts this Medea in a stage of transition from innocent young girl to criminal and murderess: while telling us that Medea remains daring (*audacia*), Ovid emphasises her youth, describing her as a terrified maiden. However, this is when she is caught in panic, before she has taken any action: on seeing her father approach, Medea quickly realises she must act to delay him. Here she exclaims her intention to use any deceit (*aliqua fraude*, 20) for this purpose. It is noteworthy that Ovid does not present this Medea as employing her evil sorcery, but as the wily heroine who uses her ingenuity to trick men: as we saw in the *Metamorphoses*, when she tricks the Peliades into murdering their own father by her deceitful and manipulative words, this type of woman was considered to be the most dangerous.[250]

Indeed Medea proves this in the following lines, when she employs this treachery to destroy men and, the ultimate betrayal, those of her own family: without any hesitation or sense of moral dilemma, Medea, catching sight of her brother, immediately and triumphantly declares that his murder will delay her father and bring her safety: *"vicimus" inquit: / "hic mihi morte sua causa salutis erit."* (23-4).[251] Here, as well as displaying her evil side in her plans, she is possibly depicted as

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[247] See above, especially p.38, n.157 and p.41, n.165.
[248] For example, see Medea's actions in Ovid *Heroides* 12.157-8 (p.48, above) and Seneca *Medea* 805-7 (Chapter 2, p.133).
[249] Again it can be found in other depictions of Medea: for example, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.136 (p.20 above); Seneca *Medea* 858-9 (Chapter 2, p.136).
[250] See pp.29-32 above.
[251] Hanson (1965) pp.55-6, discussing the Medea legend, cites the heroine's sudden decision to murder her brother as evidence that her magic powers are often secondary to her acute insight into men's nature (a weakness for their children), when it comes to defeating her enemies.

uncharacteristically selfish: although she at first rejoices in the first person plural that "we have conquered" (*vicimus*), she goes on to claim that this will mean safety for herself (*mihi salutis*). Medea's criminal acts during the early stages of her myth are always shown to be for the sake of Jason, and not committed on her own behalf: indeed this is an important premise of her argument against Jason when he faithlessly abandons her later on.[252] Therefore, if the use of the first person here is not merely for metrical convenience, Ovid can be considered as vilifying this Medea to a greater degree than is usual, both elsewhere in other literature and in his own works.

That Ovid's intention is to vilify Medea seems to be borne out by the remaining lines of the poem: here the poet depicts the heroine brutally murdering her brother by her own hand. Although in the extant versions of her tale Medea is portrayed as being involved in her brother's death, she is not always portrayed as the one directly responsible,[253] so Ovid's choice to follow this tradition here demonstrates that his characterisation of Medea is a darker one.[254] In contrast to his sister's wicked nature, Absyrtus is portrayed as unaware (*ignari*, 25) and innocent (*innocuum*, 26), as she stabs him with the sword. Although not explicitly stating that Absyrtus was a young boy, the use of these adjectives suggest that Ovid was using the version where Medea's brother was still a child when murdered,[255] thereby again making the heroine appear a more evil character. Finally, Medea's method of dispatching her brother is particularly cruel and gruesome:

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[252] For example, see *Heroides* 12.19-20, 109-12 and, most importantly here, 115-120 (see above, pp.40-1, 45-6) where Medea speaks of her part in her brother's murder, for Jason's benefit. However, O'Gorman (1997) pp.118-119, observing that Jason is not present in this poem, judges Medea's act of betrayal as pure *nefas*, since her violation of *pietas* is not explicitly given a reason.

[253] For example, in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 4.410ff., Medea plots the death of Absyrtus, but Jason strikes the blows, while she averts her eyes. Hanson (1965) p.56 believes that the crime should be attributed to Medea, given her later murderous acts.

[254] Seneca similarly follows this tradition, *Medea* 911-913: see Chapter 2, pp.141-2. However, in *Heroides* 12.115-20, it appears that Ovid has followed the version where Medea was not the one to kill him, although this is not entirely clear: see pp.45-6 above.

[255] Griffiths (2006) pp.47-9, 52 includes this murder as another infanticide by Medea, although acknowledging the possibility that he was an adult; Johnston (1997) pp.66-7 believes that, originally, Absyrtus would have been a child. In Apollonius' epic he certainly is an adult, leading the Colchians in pursuit of the Argo. Bremmer (1997) pp.83-100 discusses the various traditions of Absyrtus' death; he notes, pp.85-6, how Roman authors combined different versions, in innovative ways.

atque ita divellit divulsaque membra per agros
dissipat in multis invenienda locis.[256]
neu pater ignoret, scopulo proponit in alto
pallentesque manus sanguineumque caput.[257] [27-30]

Ovid appears to enjoy dwelling on the macabre details, a mannerism of the Silver Age, and so this bloody narration seems an opportunity for Ovid to display his rhetorical skills. The final lines of the narration (31-2) display the pathetic figure of Aeetes on his sad journey (*triste iter*, 32) gathering the many parts of his son, evoking pity for him and thereby emphasising the extreme cruelty of his daughter.

The subject of this poem appears to match Ovid's mood in his enforced banishment:[258] it seems suitable for the poet to associate his place of exile with this horrific legendary history, since it underscores his depiction of Tomis as a harsh land.[259] Therefore, we can consider the particular negativity of Medea's characterisation here to be principally for the sake of portraying Tomis as a hostile place, thereby increasing pity for the poet trapped there. He is not completely vilifying her, since we see hints of her youthful morality earlier in the poem;[260] however, when he reaches the murder which takes place in this region, he does not hold back on displaying Medea as a wicked figure.

Thus Ovid presents Medea the fratricide to us in his exile poetry. This is the only explicit mention that Ovid makes of the heroine as fratricide among his other brief extant references to Medea. However, we have an abundance of allusions to her role as murderess and, in particular, to her notorious act of infanticide. These references often arise in relation to Medea's role as a woman scorned, since it was

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[256] Huskey (2004) p.283 notes that the "d" alliteration in 27-8 suggests the thud of Absyrtus' limbs falling to the ground.
[257] This seems a possible reminiscence of Cicero's body parts displayed on the rostra by Antony: Oliensis (1997) p.189. She discusses, pp.186-90, with which character of the myth Ovid should be identified.
[258] Green (1994) p.244 notes Ovid's preoccupation with death in his exile collection.
[259] Green (1994) p.245 comments that the purpose of this poem is to associate his place of exile with violence, barbarism and treachery. The premise of Huskey (2004) is that Ovid reveals Absyrtus' name, and murder, when these details had previously been *nefas* in his poetry (see above, nn.181, 228), in order to emphasise the abhorrent nature of Tomis.
[260] Therefore Green (1994) p.245 seems correct in saying that Medea is not intended to represent a subtle Augustus, although it is an attractive theory.

this enforced position which led to her murdering her two sons by Jason, as an act of revenge against his faithlessness. Since the theme of Medea as murderess/infanticide is closely related to her experience of doomed love, the majority of these references are to be found in Ovid's love poetry. The *Amores* is a collection of poems discussing the pleasures and sufferings of love in the context of the upper classes of Roman society, often centring on Ovid's alleged mistress Corinna.[261] Although the precise order of the production of Ovid's works is uncertain, these amusing elegies are thought to be among his earliest writings. The *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris* are companion pieces of mock-didactic poetry, also written in the elegiac metre: this poetry purports to teach the art of love, or rather seduction, in a humorous manner, with books one and two of the *Ars Amatoria* intended for male addressees, while book three instructs women; the *Remedia Amoris*, a single lengthy poem in response to the *Ars Amatoria*, aims to teach the cures of love to both sexes. It is assumed that the frivolous *Ars Amatoria*, regarded as encouraging promiscuity, was the *carmen* responsible for Ovid's banishment.

I shall begin by discussing the lines of poetry where Medea's acts of murder are directly linked to her doomed love, since this combination accounts for the majority of Ovid's brief references to the heroine. In both *Ars Amatoria* books addressed to men, we find lines explicitly mentioning Medea's crimes. In book one the poet, while assuring men that women are easily caught, cites Medea's vengeful murders as a warning against the dangers of unrestrained female lust:[262]

> cui non defleta est Ephyraeae flamma Creusae,
>
> et nece natorum sanguinulenta parens? [1.335-6]

Although this reference is very brief at two lines long, as well as being allusive, since the heroine is not mentioned by name, the reader easily infers that Ovid is here speaking of events from the infamous Corinthian episodes of the Medea myth.[263] The mention of Creusa, accompanied by the flame, unmistakably refers to the cruel murder of Jason's new love by his former wife, when Medea

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[261] There has been much debate about whether she is a real or fictional figure, with the latter becoming the generally held opinion: Wyke (2002) p.196 notes that it is widely agreed that Corinna is a generalised figure of the mistress. There is not enough space for discussion of this here: see, for example, Otis (1938) pp.198-9, who believes that she is a comic fiction; Sullivan (1961) pp.522-8 considers both sides of the argument; Sharrock (2002b) pp.151-2 discusses Ovid's games with reality concerning Corinna; Buchan (1995) discusses her fictional status; Green (1982) pp.22-5 makes the somewhat surprising suggestion that Corinna was Ovid's first wife.

[262] Allen (1992) p.24 judges the exempla used for the lesson against lustful women as surprising.

[263] Green (1996) p.248 notes that the myths are so well-known that they have become oblique and brief; furthermore, the women are identified by, and have become, their crimes.

sent Creusa the poisoned robe which engulfed her in flames. Therefore the children in the following line, whose parent is bloodied by their death, must be Jason and Medea's sons, who were slaughtered by their mother shortly after she had dispatched Creusa, as the ultimate revenge attack on her husband. These lines emphasise sympathy for the victims of the horrendous crimes of passion, since the nature of their cruel demise is at the forefront of the poem for the reader to see.[264] However, since Medea is not mentioned directly, the perpetrator of these crimes is kept at a distance from these actions, and so it is possible to consider that Ovid is slightly diminishing her from responsibility here. As an exemplum these lines are, of course, exaggerating their intended point and, therefore, humorous:[265] Ovid warns his male readers of the hazards of boundless love in a woman, by citing one of the most extreme revenge attacks against infidelity that exists in classical mythology. While such vengeful behaviour was, and is, possible, a figure like Medea was not the type of woman an average man would meet every day. Ovid is therefore employing an extreme example to illustrate his point effectively, if rather hyperbolically.[266]

In book two of his didactic poem, Ovid can again be found warning his male readers about the dangers of women: this time he urges caution against getting caught with another lover, citing Medea as a notorious wronged woman:

> coniugis admissum violataque iura marita est
>
> barbara per natos Phasias ulta suos. [2.381-2]

Indeed Medea is perhaps the ultimate woman scorned because of her infamous reaction to Jason's "broken oaths" (*violata iura*):[267] this act of infanticide, although not detailed here, is implied when Ovid tells us that she was avenged "through her own sons" (*per natos suos*). Furthermore, Ovid is more explicit in judging Medea's mothering skills in the following line, when he compares her to Procne, "the other terrible parent" (*altera dira parens*): Procne's myth bears many resemblances to that of Medea, since she too killed her own son in revenge for her husband's infidelity. This

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[264] Green (1996) pp.248-9 discusses this section, aptly considering the women as hunters engulfing their entire families in their disastrous crimes.

[265] Watson (2002) p.152 observes the humour in Ovid's use of myth in the *Ars Amatoria*, noting that the resulting effect is often that epic heroines are deflated to the level of elegiac lovers; similarly, see Davisson (1993) p.219.

[266] Watson (2002) p.152 comments that the exempla undermine, rather than reinforce, the teacher of love because of their inappropriateness to the erotic context.

[267] On the crucial nature of the broken oaths, see n.80 above.

connection between the two heroines, and their comparison within the poem, makes it clear that Ovid intends the reader to recall Medea's murder of her own children at this point too: indeed we shall find that Ovid uses this juxtaposition of the two mothers who murder their own children as exempla several times.[268] Medea is again not named in the above lines, but is clearly identifiable through the derogatory epithets *barbara* and *Phasis*, recalling her homeland, and thereby suggesting the source of her savagery towards her own sons. It should also be noted that this Medea exemplum is introduced immediately after Ovid has spent several lines expounding the characteristics of angry women, employing stock imagery which is familiar from elsewhere in texts containing Medea: Ovid tells us that, next to the woman who learns of a love-rival, wild animals are less fierce (373-8); he informs us that the physical effects of her mental distress can be discerned on her face (378); and he also compares her anger to Bacchic frenzy (380).[269] All these details are intended to display the woman scorned as a terrifying force that cannot be restrained: to cite Medea at this point is therefore an apt warning to men considering infidelity, although this illustration is clearly another exaggerated and humorous extreme.

We also find a reference to Medea's failed marriage in book three of the *Ars Amatoria*, addressed to Ovid's female readers. First on a list designed to prove that men are the unfaithful sex is deceitful Jason:

> Phasida, iam matrem, fallax dimisit Iason;
>
> venit in Aesonios altera nupta sinus. [3.33-4]

Once again, Medea is not named in these lines, in which Ovid tells us that her husband took a new bride, therefore presenting her as the victim for once.[270] However, her role as victim is subtly

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[268] Larmour (1990) p.133 notes that, although the two myths were associated in the literary tradition, Ovid had a particular interest in the connections between them (see, nn.113, 122 and especially 132): on collecting and looking at Ovid's extant references to Medea in this section, it is particularly apparent, since the two stories recur together several times.

[269] For wild animals, see *Metamorphoses* 7.182ff (p.24, above); Seneca *Medea* 800ff., 862ff. (Chapter 2, pp.132-4, 137); Valerius Flaccus 8.453ff. (Chapter 3, p.215). For the physical effects of emotion, see n.249 above. For the Bacchic comparisons, see n.99 above. The Senecan chorus similarly uses the concept that no force can compare with a woman scorned to describe Medea, 579ff. (Chapter 2, p.124).

[270] Davisson (1993) p.220 considers this representation of Medea as problematic, since it contradicts that at 1.335-6, where she is an example of unrestrained female lust; this is an unnecessary concern, since Ovid is frequently inappropriate and contradictory in his employment of exempla, because his

undercut: Medea is again referred to with an epithet denoting her uncivilised country of origin, *Phasida*, and also as a mother, *matrem*. Although we have no details of the infanticide, the combination of these two words, along with the reminder of Jason's faithlessness, the cause of Medea's most infamous murder, cannot fail to remind any reader of that horrifying event. Once more Ovid is employing this exemplum in a witty manner: his premise, in this list of women who have been duped by their men, is that women have poor erotic technique and therefore are in need of his expert tuition in this book, in order to avoid a similar fate. The reader may suspect that Ovid would not have had the courage to say the chauvinistic "*nescistis amare*" (41) to Medea's face! He also makes a similar audacious comment about Medea, along with other women, in the *Remedia Amoris*:[271] he boastfully declares that, had she taken his advice, her relationship with Jason would not have gone wrong:[272]

> nec dolor armasset contra sua viscera matrem,
>
> quae socii damno sanguinis ulta virum est. [59-60]

Condescendingly, Ovid claims that Medea, designated once more as "the mother" (*matrem*) to underscore further her relationship to her own children (*sua viscera*),[273] would not have avenged her husband by killing their children, if she had followed his instructions: this is a high recommendation of the powers of his poetry, indeed.[274] Ovid here employs military imagery to describe Medea's actions against her sons, when he notes that sorrow would not have armed her (*armasset*) against the boys if she had listened to him: the mention of her grief implies that Medea was distraught by Jason's infidelity, thereby suggesting some justification for her action. Jason's misdemeanour is not explained, but we are left to understand it from the allusion to Medea being avenged against her

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purpose is not serious. Wright (1984) pp.4, 11, discussing Ovid's contradictory use of myths in the *Ars Amatoria*, believes that, since exempla can be employed to prove anything, they have no real value.

[271] Davisson (1996) pp.242-45 discusses this catalogue, and the unconvincing nature of the poet's claims to cure love. Interestingly she notes, p.244, that six of the eight exempla in this catalogue refer to women, observing that the trend is for female exempla employed in the poem to be negative, demonstrating that they are less easily curable than men.

[272] Graf (2002) p.114 cites this catalogue as an example of the Ovidian trick of turning stories on their head.

[273] Davisson (1996) p.244 has observed that half the catalogue concerns passion's disruption of parent-child relationships; see also pp.254-55 on maternal love and grief. Although the catalogue does not mention Procne, her myth is included through reference to her husband and sister.

[274] Davisson (1996) p.243 notes the "absurdity of his boasts". Jones (1997) pp.75-6 discusses the "comic deflation".

husband. The infanticide is also described in vague terms,[275] as the loss of kindred blood (*socii damno sanguinis*): Ovid has not chosen to portray it explicitly here. Therefore this is yet another reference to Medea's doomed love for Jason, combined with the terrible events to which it leads.

In one of his exile poems, we find a reversal of this idea of introducing tragic events into love stories: attempting to defend his love poetry to the emperor, he argues that love always features as a theme in tragedy, citing Medea's story as an example:

> tingeret ut ferrum natorum sanguine mater,
>
> concitus a laeso fecit amore dolor. [*Tristia* 2.387-8]

Although this is a slight variation on the theme that he had repeatedly used in his love poetry, his approach to the tale is very similar: we have a couplet referring to infamous events in the legend of Medea, which we cannot fail to recognise; the heroine is not named, so we are left to infer from the brief details that it is the Medea legend; however, she is labelled *matrem* again, poignantly reminding us of her relationship to the *natorum* that she kills; our horror is also increased by the bloody description of a sword stained with the children's blood; we learn that it was the wound of love that caused this terrible event, and so there is an element of sympathy for Medea, once more suffering sorrow (*dolor*). Although the context of Ovid's exile makes this poetry more serious, the treatment of the Medea legend here is very similar to that which we find throughout the love poems: there is a combination of horror and pity for the heroine. Less than 200 lines further on in the same poem, Ovid, while still attempting to defend the themes of his earlier poetry, again mentions Medea:

> inque oculis facinus barbara mater habet. [526]

Although Ovid's premise is that the emperor's home must contain scenes from love stories, Ovid only makes reference to the tragic events of the myth here: however, when read with the earlier reference in the same book, we understand that there is a doomed love affair involved. Furthermore, it is clear that the *barbara mater* who has crime in her eyes must be Medea, considering or plotting the slaughter of her children.

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[275] However, Davisson (1996) p.244, in the context of this catalogue, considers this a more graphic example.

The final love poem to consider, which contains direct reference to the infanticide, comes from the *Amores*, probably Ovid's earliest collection. In the poem Ovid reprimands his mistress for having an abortion, comparing her unfavourably to legendary wicked mothers who have killed their own children:

> Colchida respersam puerorum sanguine culpant
> aque sua caesum matre queruntur Ityn:
> utraque saeva parens, sed tristibus utraque causis
> iactura socii sanguinis ulta virum. [2.14.29-32][276]

This is the only example, from the other extant Ovidian references to Medea, in which Ovid openly states that the heroine is a bad mother: he notes that she is blamed (*culpant*) for her act of infanticide, although he is here using the third person, and possibly suggesting it is others, rather than himself, who reproach her for this. She is again paired with Procne, whose situation is very similar.[277] Neither of these mothers is named, as we have seen is frequently the case with these references to Medea, and again we identify her from an epithet recalling her barbarian homeland: *Colchida*. In this brief reference of only one line (29), yet another bloody image of the murder is drawn to evoke horror, as we witness Medea splattered with her own sons' blood (*respersam sanguine*). However, despite the damning depiction of the infanticides, Ovid's point here is that these savage (*saeva*) legendary child-killers are *not* as wicked as his mistress for aborting her baby. He demonstrates this distinction by noting, sympathetically, that unlike his mistress, these mythological women had justification for the sacrifice (*iactura*) of the blood of their children:[278] to be avenged on their husbands. The phrasing of line 32 is very similar to *Remedia Amoris* 59-60, suggesting that he was reusing his own material there.[279] Ovid does not explain that the husbands were unfaithful, and we are left to fill in these gaps from our knowledge of the myths, but he does comment, with a tone of pity, that they had sad reasons

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[276] For general discussions of this poem, often as a companion piece to 2.13, see Davis (1981) pp.2498-2499, Cahoon (1988) pp.299-301 and Connor (1974) pp.34-6.
[277] See above, n.268: Larmour (1990) p.133 cites this passage as proof of Ovid's particular interest in the connection of the two myths.
[278] Yardley (1977) pp.398-9 notes that two late Greek prose authors also cite Medea as at least having reasons for her act, in arguments against abortion: Theophylactus *Ep.*30.7-12 and Chariton 2.9.15-20.
[279] Green (1982) p.405 discerns a verbal echo of this line in *Remedia Amoris* 60: see above, pp.72-3.

(*tristibus causis*) for their deeds.[280] While holding up these exempla as the worst kind of mothers, he does justify and thereby, in some measure, exonerate their acts of murder.

There are other less direct allusions to Medea's crimes, from which the reader will nevertheless be able to infer her most notorious act of infanticide. One of these can be found in Ovid's *Fasti*: this was the poet's incomplete version of the Roman calendar, covering the first six months of the year, commemorating religious rites and festivals and their origins, on specific days.[281] It is presumed that he wrote this outwardly more propagandistic elegiac poem in order to appease Augustus,[282] but he was nevertheless exiled while in the process of producing it. Because of the nature of this poem, the incidental references to Medea are only loosely related to the context: they do not relate events in the Medea legend to the establishment of any rites on the day in question. One very brief allusion to Medea's acts of murder appears in book two, during the month of February, on the *Caristia Comitialis*, a day devoted to relations:

> Tantalidae fratres absint et Iasonis uxor. [627]

This line occurs within a list of mythological characters who have committed atrocities against their own family, and therefore should be absent from this day: in the middle of the list, including Procne a little further on, we have a reference to Medea. If the "the wife of Jason" should be missing from a family day, the obvious inference here is that this is due to her horrific act against her own, and Jason's, children, as well as the betrayal of her father and brother.

Another vague allusion to Medea's crimes is to be found in the third book of Ovid's *Epistulae Ex Ponto*. While imploring his own wife to aid his return from exile, Ovid comments that his wife has nothing to fear in petitioning Augustus' wife on his behalf, since she is not some wicked mythological figure:

> ...non impia Procne
>
> filiave Aeetae voce movenda tua est. [3.1.119-20]

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[280] Nikolaidis (1985) pp.386-7 cites this passage, with *Ars Amatoria* 2.381-2 (see above, pp.70-1), as evidence of Ovidian understanding and sympathy towards Medea.
[281] Herbert-Brown (1994) pp.1-31gives a detailed discussion of the poem's background.
[282] On the questionable status of Ovid's patriotism in the *Fasti*, see Boyle & Woodward (2000) pp.xxviii, xxxviii-xliv, xlix-liii, discussing the undercutting of Augustan panegyric in detail through specific episodes; for a brief summary, see Boyle (2008) pp.370-2.

Ovid lists several legendary female monsters who Livia is *not*, which is a rather backhanded compliment, subtly comparing her to these awful women.[283] Procne and Medea appear prominently, since they are first on the list of terrible females, once more paired together: this suggests that Medea here appears in her guise as child-killer, along with the similar Procne. We are also perhaps reminded of Medea's betrayal of her family, since she is identified as daughter of Aeetes (*filia Aeetae*). Therefore, as a brief exemplum, Medea principally appears here as the notorious wicked character of myth, and Ovid is thereby subtly associating Augustus' wife with Medea and other problematic characters.

As well as the theme of Medea as murderess/infanticide, the other prominent topic found in these brief references is that of magic, because of Medea's legendary role as sorceress, descended from the Sun. Just as in her myth, these two principal themes can intersect in Ovid's poetry, as the first "magic" allusion does here. It is found in the introduction to book two of the *Fasti* where, because of February's connections with purifications, Ovid mentions mythological characters who have been absolved of their crimes by others:

> vectam frenatis per inane draconibus Aegeus
> credulus inmerita Phasida fovit ope. [2.41-2]

Here the poet informs us that Medea, characteristically only identified by the epithet *Phasida*, to denote her barbaric origin,[284] did not deserve (*inmerita*) the help given by Aegeus,[285] again picking up this common theme in her myth. Since Ovid is referring to the final episode to take place in Corinth, it seems that we are to infer that it is the murders she carried out there, that of Creusa and the children, which make her so undeserving:[286] this conclusion is supported by the first line telling us that she flew through the air on serpents since, immediately after slaughtering her sons, this was her method of

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[283] Davisson (1993) p.231 notes that this catalogue is "unlikely to reassure".

[284] Keegan (2002) p.137 observes how Frazer's 1931 translation of this simple epithet into "the Phasian *witch*" displays Medea's notoriety. In this paper, which perhaps uses unnecessarily convoluted terms, Keegan's view that this is a paradigmatic template, showing "passive female/bestial consort > active male/naive protector", seems to read more into the brief reference than Ovid was likely to have intended.

[285] Keegan (2002) p.138 notes how this word emphasises Medea as a betrayer; however, he perhaps stretches the reference too far by imposing modern theories back onto Ovid's text, viewing Medea as reduced to a "masculinist guilt-object", and melodramatically describing her as "perversely rejecting the sureties of the reproductive and patriarchal economies".

[286] Although Medea was similarly undeserving of Aegeus' help for a crime that she was yet to commit: the attempt to poison his son Theseus. For this see pp.33-4 above on *Metamorphoses* 7.404ff.

escape from Corinth to Athens, Aegeus' home and the place of refuge offered to her. Medea's flight through the air on mythical beasts reminds us that she is not simply a human murderess but, indeed, a legendary sorceress. Her immense magical power is also emphasised: we are told that the serpents are bridled (*frenatis*), an adjective suggesting Medea's control over the beasts. Given that the context here is criminals, it seems that we are not to view Medea in a good light, especially since Ovid claims that she does not deserve absolution, and the sorceress imagery only serves to increase this impression.

However, in an exile poem from the *Tristia* collection, Ovid again uses the image of Medea the sorceress escaping in her dragon-drawn chariot, but this time he draws a comparison with himself:[287]

> nunc ego Medeae vellem frenare dracones,
>
> quos habuit fugiens arce, Corinthe, tua. [3.8.3-4]

This is an apt comparison by the exiled poet since Medea was also originally threatened with exile by the tyrant Creon, and perhaps the lines can be read as a subtle insult to the emperor Augustus for his act of tyranny. This threat of exile in part led to Medea's crimes, and then it was necessary for her to use her magic in order to escape. Here, as the poet seeks any method of escape,[288] for once no judgement appears to be made on Medea's actions: it is noteworthy, therefore, that this is a rare example of Medea being named directly. On almost every other occasion we have found her identified by epithets, or as a relation of other mythological characters but, on this occasion, where the poet is not judging her character badly, it is notable that she receives her proper title. However, the other time that we have met "Medea" was at the beginning of *Tristia* 3.9, the Absyrtus murder/Tomis poem, where she was indeed being criticised for her murderous and treacherous actions: she was labelled *impia* there, and so the judgement on her nature was clear.[289] However, that is a much longer reference to an episode of the Medea myth, a whole poem, and therefore it is more likely that we would find her named. Furthermore, once she is identified at the beginning of the elegy, she is then referred to by the same epithets and roles that are found elsewhere.

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[287] Williams (1994) p.199 notes that Ovid frequently uses tragic characters to dramatise the emotions and conditions of his life in exile, citing this couplet as an example.
[288] Davisson (1993) p.227, n.48, comments on the fantastic nature of this wish.
[289] *Tristia* 3.9.9: see above, p.65.

The other brief references to Medea's magic focus on the irony of its ineffectuality in matters of love. In the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid warns against employing love-magic, citing examples to prove that it does not work:

> non facient ut vivat amor Medeides herbae
>
> mixtaque cum magicis nenia Marsa[290] sonis.
>
> Phasias Aesoniden, Circe tenuisset Ulixem,
>
> si modo servari carmine posset amor. [2.101-4]

The fame of Medea's magic is displayed here, when Ovid notes that even herbs that belong to her (*Medeides herbae*) cannot force love to live. However, the poet boldly confronts one of the inconsistencies of the Medea myth, which is ordinarily overlooked in order for the story to make sense: Medea, one of the most powerful sorceresses of myth, was unable to use her magic to preserve Jason's love for her; similarly her aunt, the witch Circe, was equally inept when it came to keeping hold of Ulysses.[291] Again Medea appears in Ovid's poetry as *Phasias*, to remind us of her homeland which, as a remote and, therefore, strange region on the Black Sea, would be easily associated in the Roman mind with her mysterious powers. Citing the well-known failures of these skilled sorceresses, especially Medea's, since it had such mighty repercussions, is a very apt and humorous way for Ovid to demonstrate that magic should not be employed in matters of love.[292] The poet displays a similar attitude to love-magic in *Remedia Amoris*:

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[290] Dickie (2001) pp.134-5 records the aetiological myth told by Gnaeus Gellius, tracing the power of the Marsi back to Medea (and her sisters, Circe and Angitia), whose son was said to have ruled them.

[291] However, Rabinowitz (1998) p.74 notes the change from Circe, inspirer of passion, to her niece Medea, victim of passion. Griffiths (2006) p.42 cites Medea's role as victim of love magic, despite her mighty skills, as an example of the problematic status characterising her myth. Ogden (2008) pp.32, 42 comments on the peculiarity that the most paradigmatic witch of antiquity was never significantly credited with the most characteristic of witch spells. In *Heroides* 12.163ff., Medea notes the ironic ineffectuality of her magic in love, and in 6.83ff., Hypsipyle believes Jason has been bewitched by Medea: see above, pp.50, 59-60. Watson (1983) p.125, n.45, cites these lines as an example of Ovid's witty effect of reducing heroic characters to the level of contemporary elegiac lovers.

[292] Sharrock (1994) pp.50-2 notes that this stance differs from the norm of elegiac poetry, explaining it as Ovid's way of posing as a "sophisticated scientist" of the art of love, and the "voice of true reason". She discusses the connections between love, poetry and magic, pp.61-5. In an extended discussion of Medea, Circe and magic in the *Ars Amatoria*, pp.70, 74-6, she perhaps over-analyses the significance of this brief reference, when she rejects Medea and Circe's suitability as exempla here, in order to read a misogynous hint into the lines: the fear that the woman might put a spell on the man and gain power over him. Although, in classical antiquity, there is undoubtedly a fear of women in control, often expressed in literature by bestowing them with magical powers, it does not seem apparent in this brief humorous reference to failed magic.

quid te Phasiacae iuverunt gramina terrae,

cum cuperes patria, Colchi, manere domo? [261-2]

Here, since this poem is devoted to cures for love, the situation is reversed from the similar reference in *Ars Amatoria*, and we are to imagine Medea searching for a remedy to suppress her feelings for Jason. Ovid addresses the Colchian (*Colchi*) directly, and in a sympathetic manner, asking her what use were the herbs of Phasis when she desired to remain in her homeland: therefore we have two reminders of her foreign descent within this one couplet. As with the previous allusion to Medea's magic, Circe is also brought into the poem immediately after these lines:[293] we can understand this as a reminder of her foreign and strange origin, along with the two references to her distant homeland, which were often accentuated when Medea was in her sorceress role. Although she was a young girl at the time, she was nevertheless a powerful sorceress, and her inability to combat the love she struggled to overcome is, once more, a suitable illustration that magic is ineffectual against love.[294]

The final extant Ovidian reference to Medea features as part of an imaginary exchange between Ovid and Cupid, concerning the poet's exile. The god of love has visited the Black Sea region once before:

haec loca tum primum vidi, cum matre rogante

Phasias est telis fixa puella meis. [*Epistulae Ex Ponto* 3.3.79-80]

Cupid tells Ovid that he first saw this area, which is both Ovid's land of exile and Medea's homeland, when his mother, Venus, asked him to shoot the Phasian with his weapons. This rather gratuitous reference,[295] of course, alludes to the goddesses' plotting and interference in order to make Medea fall in love with Jason, so that she would assist him in his tasks. Here Medea appears as a victim of the conspiracy of the gods: her innocence is emphasised by her youth in this couplet, when Ovid refers to her as *puella*. Ovid is possibly drawing a comparison between the heroine and himself here: as an

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[293] The Circe exemplum is much longer at 26 lines: Davisson (1996) p.250, n.33, suggests that Ovid did not elaborate on Medea because her magic did, indirectly, help her win Jason, and punish him. Her second suggestion, that he was to treat Medea at length elsewhere, is more likely, especially considering that the other Medea exempla in his poetry are kept brief, excepting *Tristia* 3.9.

[294] Jones (1997) p.56 usefully summarises the point of this exempla as "the helplessness of famous magicians". Segal (2002) pp.3-4 cites these passages from *Remedia Amoris* as demonstrating Ovid's general attitude towards magic: sceptical and amused detachment. He also briefly considers, p.19, the links between the Medea and Circe tales in the *Metamorphoses*.

[295] Green (1994) p.340 notes that Ovid forces the situation so that he can make an allusion to the tale.

exile, he too portrays himself as an innocent victim of the plotting of higher powers. This would explain the reason for the uncharacteristic role for Medea in this reference, as an innocent young girl rather than as the criminal woman we perhaps have come to expect.

In conclusion, the overwhelming impression of Medea which emerges from these references is that of the villainess. Although the majority of these mythological exempla, from a variety of contexts, are only two lines long, they are nevertheless revealing. Despite their elusive nature, readers will often gather more from the lines than is explicit because of the infamy of the legend, filling in the gaps of the tale and reading in Ovid's subtle inferences from our previous knowledge of the myth.[296] The theme most frequently handled from the Medea legend concerns the heroine as a murderess, and more specifically as a child killer. Medea's act of infanticide was notorious and a source of fascination in Classical Antiquity, and the prevailing interest in this abhorrent deed is apparent here in Ovid's numerous references to this event in particular.[297] Since Ovid is using these exempla to demonstrate a point, he often chooses extreme situations, and therefore the part of Medea's myth which is most suitable here tends to be her excessive murderous actions.[298] However, there is almost always an element of sympathy for Medea, which is typical of Ovid's approach, deriving from considering motivations behind such extreme behaviour, especially that of women. Other themes handled in these references are Medea as a sorceress and a woman scorned: in both of these roles she can be portrayed as either a villain or a victim, although she most often appears as a villain for whom we should have some sympathy. It is only in the context of his exile poetry, when he is drawing a comparison between himself and the heroine,[299] that Ovid chooses to portray her as an innocent young girl. It is also interesting that the only time that Medea is named throughout the short references is in a similar context: other than this, one reference to "the herbs of Medea", and her identification in a long poem which was wholly dedicated to depicting her brother's death at her hands, the heroine is identified by

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[296] Davisson (1996) p.244 notes that, in the *Remedia Amoris*, the reader must supply knowledge of a myth cited briefly; indeed this can be applied to all of Ovid's poetry containing mythological exempla. Cameron (2004) Chapter 9 discusses Roman society's knowledge and use of Greek myths.

[297] Making it more noteworthy that Ovid does not cover this part of the myth in the *Metamorphoses*, and perhaps further supporting the idea that this was the topic of his missing tragedy: see above, p.9.

[298] Cameron (2004) pp.238, 243 cites Medea's shocking infanticide as especially suitable for mythological allusion, because of its vivid and memorable details, noting that her name became synonymous with revenge.

[299] Fulkerson (2005) p.146, noting that Ovid equates himself with a series of heroines throughout his exile poetry, notes that this possibly suggests that femininity indicates powerlessness: this is perhaps not applicable to Medea, particularly in the example of the chariot escape: see above, p.77.

epithets and roles. Medea is categorised in family roles as a mother, parent, wife, or daughter, or she is designated by her homeland as a Phasian, Colchian or barbarian, or simply referred to as a girl or maiden. Although this use of learned allusion can perhaps be attributed principally to the style of his poetry, it is nevertheless interesting that the vast majority of these references do not name the heroine. Ovid's choice depends on what he is trying to emphasise in her character, and this displays the variety of roles Medea plays in her myth. Furthermore it underscores the notoriety of this heroine: Ovid is able to leave his readers to identify Medea from these allusive references because she was such a familiar character from mythology and literature.[300]

[300] Canter (1933) p.222 notes that anonymous paradigms were employed when it was not necessary to name a character because of their familiarity; he also suggests reasons of convenience, to avoid monotony, and an appeal to the learned reader.

CONCLUSION

In his works Ovid displayed a strong interest in exploring human nature,[301] and frequently chose to treat female characters because they offered him greater opportunities in portraying the extremes of emotions, since women were considered less capable of controlling their feelings. Ovid created poetry in a variety of genres: elegy, epic and tragedy, and in each of these he also handled the character who was especially notorious for her extreme emotions and actions, Medea. Indeed she appears to have been a favourite topic of Ovid, who returned to her myth time and time again. This fascination must have derived, at least in part, from her diverse character making her particularly suitable for a variety of treatments: the Colchian heroine was one of the most complex mythological characters to exist because of her seemingly split personality, being both an innocent girl and powerful sorceress, and it appears that Ovid was therefore attracted to her and the literary opportunities these contradictions offered his poetry, especially from a rhetorical perspective. Therefore, her ambiguous nature, along with the variety of contexts in which he handled the figure, dictated that he was unable to present a singularly consistent portrayal of the character across his works.

This makes the question of her presentation in this author a particularly difficult one to address. Medea appears in a different light according to the context of each of Ovid's works, and sometimes as almost a different character within one genre: this becomes especially apparent in the incidental brief references, where she is variously employed as an exemplum to illustrate differing points within the love or exile poetry, and there does not seem to be a single opinion held on her character. Furthermore, she can appear as a diverse figure even within one poem: in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid considers both sides of Medea, who begins as an innocent child yet ends up an evil witch.[302] These polarities make her a particularly suitable subject for the epic, because Ovid is able to explore the changes she underwent throughout her life, in order to develop from one extreme to the other. However, in his epic, Ovid portrayed this development in clear stages, meaning that the account, when read as a whole, does not appear incongruous. Medea's letter in the *Heroides* collection is the heroine's attempt at rhetorical self-defence and, therefore, presents solely her point of view, which is understandably sympathetic. However, even within this collection we have an opposing view

[301] On this commonly held view see, for example, Isbell (1990) p.vii.
[302] Griffiths (2006) p.95 notes the multiple images of Medea as both victim and criminal in this account.

presented: aside from the vague allusions to Medea's darker aspects to be found in her own letter, we also have Hypsipyle's letter, which serves as a companion piece, and attacks Medea with the typical accusations frequently made against her, thereby presenting her less reputable characteristics.

Therefore it is not possible to discern a unified approach in Ovid's handling of Medea: she is certainly both victim and villain at different times. It is, perhaps, possible to consider the overall impression gained from the various accounts. On consideration of the brief references, where her murderous nature is most often considered, Medea principally emerges as a villain, but nearly always elicits some measure of sympathy from the audience: perhaps this characterises her most since, generally in the Ovidian portrayals, Medea does appear to deserve, and win, the audience's pity. Her nature enabled Ovid to create speeches from her point of view, involving an investigation of her mind, as he does in her youthful speech of dilemma in the *Metamorphoses*, and throughout *Heroides* 12: these encourage us to empathise with a wronged Medea, presented as the isolated victim of an ungrateful and faithless husband. Furthermore, these help us to realise that, whatever wicked crimes we know she will commit in the future, she is afflicted by external forces which leave her no option but to carry out wrongful actions, and take her on an inevitable course which, although she valiantly tries, she is unable to resist. On the other hand, Ovid also relished elaborating the depiction of an evil-minded creature in his epic, manipulating the innocent Peliades in order to commit an act of murder. From this section of the *Metamorphoses* onwards, Medea does not appear to be presented sympathetically; however, there is, perhaps, a certain amount of underlying admiration for the devious heroine, who cunningly plots and carries out her crimes, and always gets away with it.[303] The Silver Age tone of Ovid's work is best displayed in his depictions of Medea the sorceress, where the poet goes to great lengths in order to present a truly horrific and formidable image of a witch, although it should be noted that she employs her magic both for good and evil; furthermore, Ovid confronts the irony that, despite her powers as an almighty witch, her magic was futile in matters of love. Nevertheless, although he took great delight in portraying her darker side, he also made a great effort to portray her sympathetically, and we can

[303] Rosner-Siegel (1982) p.242 acknowledges this, but nevertheless views Medea's tale as marked by failure, since she does not win Jason's love and fails as a human. Similarly, Salzman-Mitchell (2005) pp.111-12 does not believe Medea gets away with it, since she loses her husband and children and cannot be a proper woman, viewing her ultimate transformation as a metaphor for her liminality. Boyle's interpretation of this "myth of human savagery", (2008) p.366, seems more accurate: he believes that such tales are designed to "confirm the moral and existential boundaries of human aspiration and life by illustrating the disastrous consequences of their transgression".

imagine that this was a challenge he would have enjoyed: portraying the evil child-killing sorceress as an endearing and likeable figure was an opportunity to demonstrate his rhetorical skills. If his tragedy had survived, it seems most probable that this, too, would have contained a Medea whose acts were beyond civilised understanding, yet whose reasons were presented as justified and understandable in some measure.

It can be concluded, then, that Ovid's Medea, despite her preceding reputation and despite being a product of the early Silver Age, can nevertheless be, and often indeed is, portrayed with sympathy. Overall it is not an impression of victim or villain that Ovid leaves us with, but rather a figure of fascination and admiration: he returns to Medea's tale repeatedly. Furthermore, she always seizes the scene magnificently, elbowing Jason off the pages of Ovid's literature: this should be the hero's adventure, but it is Medea's story that dominates Ovid's literature, and Jason barely features. Ovid seeks ways to understand and explain this dichotic creature, and it is her double-sidedness that makes her such a perfect character for him, and one that we suspect inspires a certain amount of awe in him. He allows her to be very prominent, even at the cost of a legendary hero over whom she eventually triumphs, having become a singularly powerful and dominant figure in a man's world, where she had begun as a passive young creature. Ovid helps her to defy her reputation as an evil figure, and this surely can be attributed in part to the challenge it offered the poet, allowing him the opportunity to employ rhetorical flourishes and elaborate at length. Medea appears to have been a favourite of Ovid and, although a sense of admiration can be detected, his interest must be attributed principally to the literary opportunities she offered.

It is unfortunate that Ovid's tragedy did not survive, so that we could see a more detailed Ovidian portrayal of Medea: the versions that we do have mainly deal with the heroine in a cursory manner. The figure in the *Heroides* is naturally a much deeper character than that in the *Metamorphoses* because of the brief episodic nature of the latter but both, nevertheless, have much to offer the Silver Age portrayals of Medea. Ovid's approach was light-hearted, and a touch of frivolity was present in all of his work: although his material was often traditional, he never handled it in a conventional manner. It is his new approach to subjects which can be interpreted as an indication that his poetry was the beginning of the Silver Age: he was the first, after the Golden Age, to explore a new way of

treating legendary topics. Therefore Ovid was an inspirational influence on those poets who followed him,[304] and those who were born in a much later age. Since Medea was so prominent amongst his works, undoubtedly the later poets who wrote about this figure were significantly inspired by Ovid's accounts.

[304] Conte (1994) p.359 remarks that Ovid's style made him easy to imitate.

CHAPTER 2: SENECA'S MEDEA

Seneca the Younger, a native of Corduba in Spain, and son of the rhetorician Seneca the Elder, was born during the reign of Augustus. He had a fairly turbulent life because of his involvement in public affairs: beginning as an orator, his political career brought him into contact with three of the Julio-Claudian emperors, with whom he had precarious associations: Caligula, Claudius and Nero. He particularly came to prominence under Nero, as one of his advisers: he had previously been exiled by Claudius, but was recalled by Nero's mother Agrippina, who appointed him as her son's tutor, and so they had a close relationship. For some time Seneca, jointly with Burrus, played a large part in successfully directing the government at Rome, but Seneca is also considered to have contributed to some of Nero's more questionable actions: since his own life during his time at court often appeared to contradict his written moral principles, he has often been considered a hypocrite.[305] After the death of Burrus, however, the alliance with the emperor broke down, and Nero commanded Seneca to commit suicide, on suspicion of his involvement in a conspiracy against him.[306]

His education at Rome, in rhetoric and philosophy, is evident in his many literary works, which are a true product of the Silver Age: his writing contains prominent evidence of the typical exaggeration and striving for effect and novelty of that period.[307] He was a prolific writer and produced both works of prose and poetry, including philosophical, ethical and geographical treatises, moral essays and epistles, satire and, of importance here, tragedies. There are ten tragedies which have been attributed to Seneca, although one, *The Octavia*, has now been recognised as an imitation, and the authenticity of another, *Hercules Oetaeus*, has been questioned. Seneca's Stoic interest is evident in these tragedies, exploring themes such as emotion versus reason. These plays are often based on Euripidean versions but are highly influenced by the Silver Age style, and contain much rhetoric, often dwelling on the more macabre and favouring highly embellished details. For this reason they have unfairly earned the reputation of being poor and overblown imitations of the Greek originals.[308] The *Medea* was one of

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[305] See Griffin (1976) pp.5-6. Herington (1966) p.432-43 summarises Seneca's philosophical views in his prose works.
[306] Griffin (1976) pp.29-66 gives a detailed summary of Seneca's life and, pp.67-111, political career.
[307] On "the declamatory style" of Seneca as a sign of his times, see Boyle (2006) pp.193-7; on the influence of the rhetorical schools on Seneca, see Costa (1973) pp.1-7.
[308] For example, Braden (1970) p.5 accuses the plays of being "monstrosities of overstatement", although he is attempting to defend them. Hadas (1939) p.220 notes that this opinion comes from unfairly judging them by Greek standards, rather than as products of their own times. Marti (1945) p.216 comments that Seneca's tragedies have suffered the most from the changing tastes of time, and

these tragedies, of uncertain date,[309] based on Euripides' tragedy, *Medea*. The infamous myth of the woman-turned-witch, who killed her children as an act of vengeance for her husband's infidelity, offered Seneca the perfect opportunity to explore philosophical themes and, more importantly here, fully exploit the Silver Age style.[310]

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that they appear as "debased imitations" of Greek drama to a modern audience. More recently, and usefully, Tarrant (1978) p.213 notes the futility of attempting a competitive comparison of Seneca with the Greek dramatists.

[309] Hine (2007) p.4.

[310] Jouan (1986) p.15 remarks that Seneca's *Medea*, with its bloody horror, is a sign of the imperial times of the author. Luck (1986) pp.31, 192 notes that "shock effect" had been an important function of drama since Aristotle, as horror was believed to cleanse the soul.

MEDEA

After Ovid's accounts of Medea, the next extant text we have dealing with the heroine is Seneca's tragedy, *Medea*. While Ovid covered various stages of her myth, Seneca's play is a snapshot of one point in her life, and focuses purely on the vengeful adult Medea. This is also the period containing the heroine's most infamous act: the slaughter of her own sons in order to take revenge on the faithless Jason. Since Seneca portrays these terrible events, and has a fondness for exhibiting the tendencies of the Silver Age, it is perhaps assumed that his Medea is drawn as a completely evil witch, vilified beyond redemption. Here I aim to consider whether it was possible for Seneca to depict Medea as anything other than a villain, and whether she displays any sympathetic aspects. Also important here is the influence of other authors on this account:[311] here I shall consider the influence of Ovid's versions of the heroine on Seneca's portrayal of Medea, and it will also be important to read Seneca's tragedy in conjunction with Euripides' *Medea*, since the differences in approach and handling between the Greek and Roman version will help to reveal Seneca's attitude and purpose.[312]

The context of the tragedy is that Medea, now a mature married woman living in Corinth, has been rejected by her husband, Jason, in favour of Creusa, the daughter of King Creon. She finds herself in a difficult predicament, as an unwelcome foreigner who is alone[313] with no home and nowhere to go, who also has two young sons in her care. Seneca thus presents us with a woman in the same situation as the wronged Medea of Ovid's *Heroides* 12. However, Seneca's Medea has advanced further. In *Heroides* 12, it appears that Medea has discovered the betrayal only recently, since the hurt is fresh there and she still displays her softer side, with the very idea of taking revenge only being vaguely formed in her mind; in this tragedy, however, she picks up where Ovid's Medea left off,[314] for this

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[311] Hine (2007) pp.16-18 notes the probability that other accounts existed which would also have influenced Seneca, but which we are unable to consider now, and so cautions against assuming too much importance for the extant texts.

[312] Abrahamsen (1999) p.107 notes the importance of considering the differences of Seneca's *Medea* from the Euripidean model, rather than viewing it as a defective imitation, in order to discern how Seneca creates a Roman version of the legend (see also n.308 above). Garton (1959) p.7 claims that Euripides' *Medea* appealed to Seneca, more than any other Greek play, because of the conflicting emotions found in it: he was able to apply it, not only to *Medea*, but to his other tragedies too.

[313] Boyle (1997) pp.122-3 importantly observes that her isolation is also emphasised by the opening speech, since she is alone there; in Euripides' *Medea*, the nurse opens the play. Kubiak (1989) pp.22-3 notes that the Euripidean Medea is silent during the first part of the play, while the Senecan Medea opens her tragedy with violent curses. Berry (1996) p.11 remarks that Medea begins the play alone and beyond the edge of social order, while remaining the centre of the play.

[314] Trinacty (2007) p.67; Fyfe (1983) p.77 notes that Medea enters the stage at the point of having realised Jason's abandonment of her and its consequences. Trinacty's paper is important in examining

Medea now has her mind fixed on the revenge which was only hinted at in *Heroides* 12,[315] and the play's plot is devoted to her plans, from formulation to completion. While the Ovidian Medea's desire for vengeance drove her towards something unknown, the Senecan Medea drives herself towards an unknown vengeance.

In his tragedy, Seneca assumes that his audience knows the context, which was probable given the fame and popularity of this myth, and especially since Seneca was basing the outline of his tragedy on the fifth-century B.C. Greek version by Euripides. Medea opens the play with a tragic monologue, in which she mentions the reasons for her predicament. However, the main purpose of this opening speech is to establish immediately the nature of her character.[316] These first 55 lines are important in emphasising many facets of her character, as they are presented in the tragedy: Medea primarily establishes her threatening and powerful nature, promising a magnificent and, as yet, uncertain vengeance. Therefore, although Seneca presents a woman scorned,[317] he does not elaborate on this background detail, and our initial impression is of a forceful and formidable woman, rather than a sympathetic figure, deserving our pity.

The monologue takes the form of a long and rambling rant, reminiscent of the abrupt and angry opening of Medea's Ovidian epistle:[318] however, the Senecan Medea presents her case with much more force and venom.[319] After calling on the gods of marriage[320] among others, she invokes the gods

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Seneca's use of the elegiac Medea of *Heroides* 12. He notes, pp.65-6, that Ovid took the tragic heroine and made her an elegiac and epistolary figure, and that Seneca then returns this elegiac Medea to the stage, so that she continues where Ovid's heroine ended, fulfilling threats uttered in *Heroides* 12, and elaborating on mere suggestions there.

[315] Medea's last line (12.212) declares: *nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit*; see Chapter 1, pp.54-5.

[316] Fyfe (1983) p.77 views the monologue as tracing the psychological motivation for Medea's actions.

[317] Roisman (2005) p.82 thus seems incorrect in saying that the cause of Medea's rage is not explained, but is correct in noting that her fierce nature leaves the greatest impression in this monologue. Costa (1973) p.61 discerns the emphasis on Medea as wronged *wife* in this speech, which Fyfe (1983) p.77 follows; Fyfe importantly observes that this displays how Jason's desertion has invalidated her existence, by removing the roles that defined her: that of wife and also mother, since he has removed her opportunity to have more children and, indeed, reversed that role when this leads to her destroying her sons. Hine (2007) p.112 comments that Medea is preoccupied with marriage and childbirth in this speech; on the imagery of childbirth throughout the play, see below, p.95.

[318] See Chapter 1, pp.39-40.

[319] Boyle (1997) p.128 refers to the opening monologue as a "virtuoso linguistic display".

[320] Dupont (1997) p.22 suggests that the presence of Juno, goddess of marriage, rather than Venus, goddess of love, confirms the legitimacy of Medea's marriage; she views Medea as ultimately trying to protect this rightful union. Fyfe (1983) p.77 notes the potential irony in calling on Juno, whose

who witnessed Jason's oath to her (*quosque iuravit mihi / deos Iason*, 7-8):[321] this seems a reasonable reaction on her part, since Jason has now broken his promises.[322] Medea addresses the gods as equals, and this serves to remind the audience of her divine background, and the mighty powers associated with this.[323] Furthermore, the gods she calls upon are largely ones associated with the underworld, which provides a foreboding tone, as well as reminding us of the dark side of Medea and her skills.[324] She depicts a particularly gruesome image as she summons the Furies:

> nunc, nunc adeste sceleris ultrices deae,[325]
>
> crinem solutis squalidae serpentibus,
>
> atram cruentis manibus amplexae facem. [13-15]

The bloody and dark imagery here is a mannerism of Silver Age rhetoric, with its tendency for the macabre: the "s" alliteration also suggests the hissing of the snakes.[326] Medea is here calling on the avenging goddesses using the imperative, which lends her a commanding tone.[327] Her request (17-18) that they should kill her love rival Creusa, along with the girl's father Creon, seems a disproportionate act of revenge for the betrayal Medea has suffered, especially since it is Jason who has committed the real crime against her.[328] This emphasises Medea's notoriously extreme personality, which was one of the reasons that she was such a feared figure: she was often portrayed as not respecting the boundaries of civilised human behaviour. This is the Medea that Seneca is portraying in the opening of his

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husband Jupiter was notorious for his affairs. Braden (1970) pp.33-4 observes that the gods Medea calls upon are Roman, despite the chorus' assertion that she is a barbarian; see below, pp.96-7.

[321] The Latin text used throughout is Zwierlein (1986).

[322] Mossman (2009) considers Jason's oath-breaking as ultimately responsible for the tragic events in Euripides, and this can also be applied to Seneca's version: see Chapter 1, n.80. Foley (1989) pp.65, 81 briefly acknowledges the significance of Jason's broken oath and Medea's motive of justice, recognising the gods' support for Medea at the end of Euripides' play.

[323] Dupont (1997) p.21 comments that Medea's powers give her the means of survival in her ostracism. She adds, p.24, that it is not Medea's barbarian background which makes her a monstrous criminal, but her ability to cross over into the world of the divine: this is the basis of Medea's inhumanity, or superhumanity, which Dupont considers.

[324] Herington (1966) pp.449-50 observes the figure of Senecan prologue as commonly solitary, over-life size, brooding and creating an aura of evil: this description can certainly be applied to Medea. Gessert (2004) pp.240-3 discusses Medea's funerary aspects, especially in the opening of the play, noting how she inverts the marriage ceremony with funereal type rites.

[325] Guastella (2001) pp.198-9 notes how the importance of the revenge motif is indicated by its appearance in the opening lines. Costa (1973) p.63 observes *ultrices deae* as a parallel of Virgil *Aeneid* 4.473 (*ultrices Dirae*) and 4.610 (*Dirae ultrices*), since both contain the appeal of a wronged woman to these avenging goddesses.

[326] Hine (2007) p.115.

[327] Hine (2007) p.114 comments that the repetition of *nunc* suggests Medea's impatience.

[328] Nussbaum (1997) pp.223-4 rightly notes that "we cannot avoid feeling the justice of her anger", acknowledging that we also discern the horror and wrongness of this revenge.

tragedy, and not a sympathetic and vulnerable figure, as Ovid had presented in *Heroides* 12: rather she resembles Ovid's Medea as he portrays her in the latter Medea episodes of *Metamorphoses* 7. Indeed, in this speech Medea expresses a wish to adopt the guise of a Fury herself, and she certainly appears as an avenging figure. Unlike Ovid's Medea in *Heroides* 12, Seneca's heroine already knows of the wedding between her husband and Creusa; similarly, in Euripides' version, Jason and Creusa's marriage has taken place before the opening of the play. Whereas in the *Heroides* this shock discovery increases the pity the audience feels for Medea, here she already knows of the illicit wedding and expresses aggressive anger rather than hurt. Thus her reaction here is a wish to be present at the wedding as a Fury, carrying her firebrand as a wedding-torch (37-9), just as they were present at her own wedding to Jason (16-17): the presence of such a Fury at ill-omened weddings is a familiar one in ancient literature.[329]

Thus Seneca's Medea is far from being a pitiable victim, although that is clearly how she wishes to present herself:[330] alluding to her departure from Colchis with Jason, she rather incongruously compares herself with Proserpina being carried off by Pluto, god of the Underworld: *dominam fide / meliore raptam* (11-12). Medea notes that Proserpina was snatched with "more faith", implying that she herself was also passively taken off by Jason who has been unfaithful to her, unlike Pluto who has demonstrated loyalty to Proserpina. Medea admittedly has been wronged by Jason, but she was not completely passive in abandoning her homeland and, although she is often considered as part of Jason's plunder, she was not raped and did not go against her will.[331] While the choice of Proserpina reminds us of Medea's previous meek nature, juxtaposed with her current situation it seems no longer

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[329] Costa (1973) pp.64, 67-8. Guastella (2001) p.199, n.8, notes the presence of the motif in two works of particular relevance: Ovid's *Heroides* 6.45-6 (Hypsipyle) and *Metamorphoses* 6.428-34 (Procne; on the parallels between Medea and Procne, see below, pp.137, 143, and n.552). Guastella comments on Seneca's unique way of using this motif, in Medea's attempt to transfer the Furies attendant at her own wedding, because of her brother's murder, to her husband's second wedding.

[330] Arcellaschi (1996) p.184 notes that she always speaks as if she is a perfect wife (see also n.590 below) and, indeed, she has been completely loyal to Jason: in that sense she is a victim of love (p.185), but her nature makes her less pitiable.

[331] Fyfe (1983) p.77 perhaps expresses her interpretation too strongly when she claims that Medea views herself as reduced to victim of ignominious rape; surely Medea compares herself to Proserpina since both were carried off by their future husbands, the only difference being that Pluto remained faithful, while Jason did not, a contrast which Medea is eager to emphasise in her position as wronged wife. Zissos (2008) p.318, discussing Valerius, notes that *rapere* did not necessarily exclude the woman's consent, but the father or husband's; on Valerius' comparison of Medea with Proserpina (5.343ff.), see Chapter 3, pp.171-3; on Medea as booty, see Chapter 3, nn.653, 662, 735.

an apt comparison for her character. However, Proserpina, in her role as a goddess of the Underworld, is a suitable parallel because it reminds the audience of Medea's infernal aspects.

Medea's chaotic state of mind is effectively conveyed in this opening monologue, by her angry wandering thoughts in her quest for revenge: she has set her mind on taking action but, as yet, has not decided the form of this. Her thoughts move from one target to another, as she calls for the deaths of her husband's new wife and the girl's father, before moving to ideas for a suitable revenge attack on Jason. These erratic thoughts suggest her mental instability and, therefore, potential for her to commit a deed of an immoderate nature. The only certainty here, as she questions herself about the most suitable form of revenge, is that she will take action to address the injustices that she has suffered at Jason's hands: there is no deliberation or hesitation about whether this is right, for taking vengeance is not in question, only the form of it:

> quodcumque vidit Phasis aut Pontus nefas,
> videbit Isthmos. effera ignota horrida,
> tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala
> mens intus agitat: vulnera et caedem et vagum
> funus per artus... [44-48]

The effect here is that Medea is gradually building herself up into a frenzy, as she mentions her vague, yet mighty and horrific-sounding plans for a revenge that seems disproportionate to the crime:[332] although she has suffered and it is understandable that she should want to avenge her injured pride, the horrid revenge she calls down upon the offenders is outside acceptable forms of behaviour in a civilised society. Medea thus does not acquire our sympathy at this early stage, and displays signs of the characteristically evil witch that we are familiar with from her myth, as she seeks to establish her own form of justice, thereby operating outside the laws which can be considered an indication of civilisation.[333]

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[332] Guastella (2001) p.197 notes that disproportionate revenge is a feature of Seneca's *De Ira*; however, there the vengeance lacks justice, yet here we see that the gods are with Medea and, indeed, she acts as an agent of justice: see below, pp.110-11, 124-5.

[333] Berry (1996) pp.12-13 relates this aspect to her barbarian origins.

In this monologue, Medea is full of heightened emotions and, in particular, anger: her pride has been injured and her fury will serve as the tool to aid her in gaining justice.[334] Although there is no hesitation here, Medea uses this irate self-address to spur herself on towards an unparalleled action. Medea appears to be aware that she has a reputation to live up to, as she mentions the stories they tell of her (*paria narrentur tua / repudia thalamis*, 52-3),[335] and she seeks to excel herself with an act greater and more destructive than any crime she has committed before:

> ...levia memoravi nimis:
> haec virgo feci; gravior exurgat dolor:
> maiora iam me scelera post partus decent.[336]
> accingere ira teque in exitium para
> furore toto...[337] [48-52]

The imagery here is replete with havoc and destruction, and Medea's claim that her past crimes, which the audience knows includes the betrayal of her father and involvement in her brother's murder,[338] were mere child's play, can only mean that this revenge will have mighty repercussions.[339] Furthermore, she openly acknowledges her part in the past crimes and here does not seek to pass the blame for these onto Jason, as she did in Ovid's *Heroides* 12: this is surely because she needs these as part of her repertoire to bolster her confidence and act as a foundation on which to establish newer and

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[334] Berry (1996) p.11 considers anger to be her main weapon and source of power. Arcellaschi (1996) p.186 describes Medea's anger as her criminal advisor. Jouan (1986) p.6 notes that Medea is characterised by fury and violence.

[335] Fyfe (1983) p.78 suggests that Medea, in her desperation, creates a mythic reputation for herself, using her association with the Sun and the Colchians: however, this seems unnecessary for Medea, whose previous deeds speak for themselves and have given her a notorious reputation already. Trinacty (2007) p.65, especially n.15, attributes the influence of Medea's self-consciousness to the self-references in *Heroides* 12 (5, 25, 182); he notes, p.66, that Seneca creates new aspects of established literary characters through the use of intertextuality. Schiesaro (1997) pp.92-98 discusses Medea's awareness of her literary nature and how she controls the plot, sharing an authorial role.

[336] Trinacty (2007) p.67 notes that, while highlighting the maternal imagery of Act One, 48-50 also suggest that Seneca will "produce" a greater plot than the light subjects of elegy, transforming the *Heroidean* Medea into a more grave heroine. On the childbirth allusions, see below, p.95.

[337] Henry & Walker (1967) p.171 quote 51-2 as evidence that Medea aims for power.

[338] On the extent of her involvement in his death, see Chapter 1, pp.45-6, 64-8 and below pp.145-7.

[339] Jouan (1986) p.3 notes that, although Medea's magic is in evidence, the criminal nature of her earlier acts receives more emphasis. Crime is indeed a prominent theme throughout the play: Perrenoud (1963) pp.490-1 observes that *scelus* is used 25 times, and *crimen* is employed more frequently than in any other Senecan tragedy; Rambaux (1972) p.1017 remarks that the past and its crimes have greater weight in Seneca's tragedy than in Euripides' version.

bigger crimes.[340] It should also be noted here that Medea is quite aware that this is the wrong course, since she openly acknowledges that she pursues crimes (*scelera*): it seems that now there is absolutely no evidence of the young Medea, who once was torn between following her heart, the wrong course, and her head, the right one. This Medea has completely given herself over to her heart and her emotions: reason has been abandoned in favour of angrily pursuing revenge for her injured pride and wounded heart, and there is no measure of moderation apparent.[341] Seneca's philosophical beliefs explored this concept of reason versus emotion,[342] and women were often considered as being most susceptible to yielding to their feelings because of their weak nature.[343] Medea herself acknowledges the female weakness when, rousing herself to commit evil deeds, she commands herself to "drive out womanly fears" (*pelle femineos metus*, 42).[344] The heroine is the ultimate example of total abandonment to the emotions and the destruction to which this can lead:[345] however, her actions are often far from womanly, as we shall see, which is why she was perceived as such a threat to society, since she attacked men and thus transgressed the boundary of acceptable female behaviour.

From this opening monologue, then, Seneca has established a character who, living up to her notorious reputation, commands little sympathy because she is far from vulnerable in the aggressive personality that she exhibits, and she openly seeks a vengeance which she acknowledges is a horrific

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[340] An idea which Roisman (2005) pp.83-4 overlooks in her attempt to vilify the Senecan heroine: she prefers to see Medea revelling in her crimes. Nussbaum (1997) p.224 notes that Seneca's heroines are not criminals until they are in love; she also remarks, p.225, that Seneca presents Medea as honest.

[341] Griffiths (2006) p.97 notes that violent human emotions are highlighted in the text.

[342] Foley (1989) pp.63-4 believes that this characteristic belongs to the Senecan Medea, not the Euripidean heroine, since this would make the Greek tragedy one of sexual jealousy. This implies that the Senecan play is a tragedy of sexual jealousy, which seems too simplistic an interpretation; indeed this is too straightforward for any version of the ever-complex Medea's revenge. Foley, pp.64, views Euripides' conflict instead as a maternal versus avenging Medea, which surely can also be applied to Seneca's heroine, simultaneously with passion/emotion versus reason.

[343] Zeitlin (2002) p.105 summarises this view.

[344] Hine (2007) p.119 notes that there is little stress on Medea the woman in this play. Roisman (2005) p.83 interprets this as evidence of Medea being "an unnatural 'man-woman'". This seems evidence of Seneca presenting Medea as the true heroic figure of his play, easily outshining the weak and insignificant men around her. Similarly, the premise of Foley (1989) is that the Euripidean Medea's masculine and heroic side emerges dominant over her feminine side, although she cleverly uses a combination of both in order to carry out her revenge.

[345] Berry (1996) p.7 labels Medea an instrument of destruction; Roisman (2005) p.73 views the play as an exploration of the destructive power of passion, especially love which has turned into hate and anger. Goldhill (2004) p.52 observes that, in Greek tragedy, every woman who expresses sexual desire causes violent destruction of the household; furthermore, if they articulate that desire, they become monsters: these points can be applied to Seneca's Medea. Rabinowitz (1992) p.39 has noted a correspondence between pornography and tragedy, since women are presented in both as passive victims or, more relevantly here, predators whose desire is destructive. Foley (1989) p.78 more widely views every female action in tragedy as unfeminine and destructive, and Euripides' Medea as a possible confirmation of the audience's worst fears about active women.

crime. However, Medea has still not yet decided the form of this: this monologue is merely the angry ranting of a woman scorned who has wicked intentions.[346] Nevertheless, in this speech Seneca has placed heavily ironic allusions to this revenge, which the audience is already aware of from previous literary accounts. These are quite unveiled references to the crimes that Medea will commit in Corinth, developing the ironic allusions found in *Heroides* 12: as well as alluding to setting Creusa and Creon alight in the palace, in her wish that the city should burn (35-6), more than once Medea mentions children and childbirth, in allusions which the audience cannot miss. While cursing Jason, Medea proclaims that she has given birth to her vengeance:

> ...quoque non aliud queam
> peius precari, liberos similes patri
> similesque matri – parta iam, parta ultio est:
> peperi... [23-26]

Here, with the juxtaposition of children and the declaration of the birth of vengeance, the audience could believe that Medea has the child-murders in mind already. However, Seneca is merely employing irony by mentioning them in the same sentence.[347] Similarly, we have already seen above (50), when Medea refers to her previous crimes as girlish, that she notes that she is suited to greater crimes, now that she has given birth.[348]

Seneca has employed this opening monologue to launch immediately into the wicked character of his tragic Medea. He has presented a formidable woman, whom Jason clearly should not have crossed: she does not evoke much pity and appears to be in control of the situation, rather than a vulnerable victim of circumstances. This greatly contrasts with the impression we are given of the protagonist in the opening of Euripides' *Medea*: there the nurse displays much sympathy for Medea in her

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[346] Mendell's claim, (1968) p.65, that the monologue creates an atmosphere of horror, perhaps overstates the point.

[347] Costa (1973) p.65 believes that Medea has the idea of revenge through her children here. Hine's view, (2007) pp.116-17, that the thought of child-murder is not explicit in these lines and should not be considered as having already been conceived, seems more accurate: Seneca simply seems to follow Ovid's precedent with these irony-laden lines.

[348] Garelli-François (1996) pp.195-7 discusses the link between children/birth and vengeance that is hinted at throughout in the language of the play. Trinacty (2007) pp.68-9 comments on the link between motherhood and revenge, which he notes was first suggested in *Heroides* 12: *ingentes parturit ira minas* (208). Robin (1993) pp.109-10 discusses the concept of the womb as evil in the play.

predicament, and describes her mistress as emotionally distraught, a state in which we cannot imagine Seneca's strong-willed Medea indulging. Indeed, this Roman Medea displays few signs of care or concern for Jason, and it is often difficult to imagine that she ever loved him:[349] her anger has completely taken hold of her and her overwhelming concern here appears to be her injured pride and her inability to accept this passively, whatever the cost. Seneca has thus chosen to portray his Medea as more formidable and evil, from the outset, than his Greek predecessor: she enters the scene and immediately seizes the stage with her forceful personality.

This is the introduction that we have to Medea, from the heroine herself. To learn more about the character it is also important to consider the opinions that other figures in the play express about her. After Medea's opening speech, we have the first choral ode (56-115): the chorus, representing citizens of Corinth, are openly hostile to Medea, emphasising her isolation from all society. They clearly favour Jason's new bride, who is one of their own people and, in contrast with Medea's wishes, hope for favouring gods to be present at the marriage (56ff.): their opening parallels Medea's[350] since, just as she called on the gods to witness Jason's faithless oath, they call on them to preside over the wedding.[351] Indeed the chorus contrasts Medea with Creusa: they state that Jason is accepted by Creusa's parents (*soceris sponse volentibus*, 106) implying, on the other hand, Aeetes' dislike of Jason.[352] The reason they give for this is that Creusa is a Greek, while Medea is a mere barbarian: indeed they claim that Jason has had a lucky escape from his foreign wife, denoting her barbarism by

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[349] Arcellaschi (1996) p.186 notes that Jason has now lost his former attraction in Medea's eyes; Trinacty (2007) p.68 comments that, now Medea has moved beyond elegy, she "no longer carries a romantic torch for Jason". On the other hand, Perrenoud (1963) p.490 believes that Medea does still love Jason deeply, which explains her excessive behaviour. However, her immoderation is an indication of her mighty pride, and the wounding of it, so Herrman's view (quoted by Perrenoud), that this is a question of jealousy, seems flawed.

[350] Henry & Walker (1967) pp.173-4 believe that the choral ode exposes Medea's incoherence by replacing the imagery she uses with a more refined version. However, the chorus have very contrasting wishes to Medea and similar imagery is shared to underscore the differences: Hine (1989) p.413 notes that Seneca is purposely creating a conflict between Medea and the chorus, through the correspondences in their prayers for the support of the gods; he examines the correspondences to prove that Medea wins this competition. Motto & Clark (1988) p.338 note how "such an ill-matched pair of songs appropriately set the stage for tension, irony, and shock that will be the drama's dominant and repeated strategies". Kubiak (1989) pp.23-4 interprets the contrasting imagery in Medea's opening speech and the chorus's ode as evidence of opposition, not just conflict.

[351] Costa (1973) pp.70-1 notes that this ode takes the form of a processional chant or wedding-hymn, briefly discussing the genre of the epithalamium. Krill (1973) discusses the identities of the gods in 56-74. Hine (2007) p.122 observes the contrast between Medea's speech, seeking the disruption of Corinthian society, and the chorus's speech, seeking its integration.

[352] Abrahamsen (1999) pp.113-15 suggests that Medea's exclusion is underscored in the text by Seneca's application of the kinship terms *socer* and *gener* to Creon and Jason.

labelling her as "of Phasis" (*ereptus thalamis Phasidis horridi*, 102), recalling her distant homeland, and also derisively remarking on her wild and "unbridled" (*effrenae*, 103) nature, which derives from this background.[353] Medea is clearly represented as an unaccepted outsider and, for this reason, the audience must feel a certain amount of pity for her. Generally in this play the barbarian aspect of Medea is kept to a minimum,[354] in favour of emphasising her sorceress aspects. There is, however, a reference to it in the opening speech by Medea herself, when she mentions her lands.[355] The chorus treats Medea as a scourge which they want rid of as quickly and quietly as possible, as their final disgruntled utterances of this passage display:[356]

> ...tacitis[357] eat illa tenebris,
>
> si qua peregrino nubit furtiva marito. [114-15][358]

This chorus's hostile attitude to Medea differs from that of the Euripidean chorus to its heroine. In the Greek play they express pity for Medea's plight and greatly empathise with her, since her situation is presented as the unfortunate predicament of females, and that chorus is representative of Greek women. They act as friend and confidante to her, and attempt to comfort Medea in her suffering, clearly taking her side. All of this is in marked contrast with the approach of the Senecan chorus, who seem to regard the foreign woman with nothing but contempt. On the one hand this can be viewed as Seneca portraying his heroine with less sympathy, since he does not present her side of the argument,

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[353] Hine (2007) p.128 comments that the chorus does not deny Medea's status as Jason's wife: they must accept it in order to compare that marriage unfavourably to the new one. However, Benton (2003) pp.275-6 believes that Medea's legitimate status as Jason's wife is questionable as a foreigner. Abrahamsen (1999) pp.109-10 notes that marriage between a Roman (which Jason represents) and non-citizen was legal if *conubium* were granted, citing 102-6 as proof that parental consent was missing and Jason reluctantly married Medea, thereby making their marriage illegal; she concedes, p.111, that the chorus acknowledge the marriage, but believes that the context sets it in the past. She interestingly compares Jason and Medea's marriage with that of Antony and Cleopatra, pp.115-16: as Antony had no legal obligations to Cleopatra and could marry Octavia for political reasons, so Jason, in the Roman audience's eyes, was acting within the law by leaving Medea for Creusa.

[354] Hine (2007) p.131.

[355] See line 44 above, p.92.

[356] Costa (1973) p.81 suggests that the chorus possibly catches sight of Medea suddenly.

[357] Fyfe (1983) p.79 observes that various characters, including the chorus, have a desire to keep Medea silent because they fear the power of her speech; furthermore, she notes that this fear has grounds since, not only does Medea use speech to bolster her self-confidence and motivation, but later we see its power when Medea overturns the forces of nature through her incantation (740ff.). Star (2006) pp.233-5 discusses Medea's use of imperatives especially. Kubiak (1989) p.11 notes that Medea refuses to be silent, since that would mean submitting to the laws of discourse, and Medea transgresses laws (see below, n.371); he considers, pp.20-21, the spectacular nature of language and the power that the play derives from its rhetorical excesses.

[358] Motto & Clark (1988) discuss the irony in 114-15, viewing the lines as a naive and sulky afterthought, and an indication that the chorus seriously underestimates Medea (p.339).

and makes it appear that all are in agreement that she is trouble; on the other hand, this can be considered as adding to our pity for the Senecan heroine, since she is presented as completely ostracised by all.[359]

In Act Two, Seneca introduces the audience to Medea's interaction with other characters. The protagonist enters the scene with her nurse and at first it appears that she is delivering a second monologue rather than addressing another character (116-49).[360] We gain this impression because Medea is again angrily ranting about her unfortunate situation: this reaction is in response to having heard the chorus' wedding song for her husband and his new bride,[361] a situation which she labels an "evil" (*malum*, 117). This surely evokes a measure of pity for Medea, as we realise that hearing the song must smart and make the nature of Jason's infidelity more real to her. Furthermore, it is worsened by the chorus' open support for the newlyweds. Here Seneca gives Medea the opportunity to explain the background to her circumstances, and thus gain more sympathy from the audience. She bitterly launches into a series of rhetorical questions, illustrating Jason's ingratitude towards her:

> hoc facere Iason potuit, erepto patre
> patria atque regno sedibus solam exteris
> deserere durus?[362] merita contempsit mea
> qui scelere flammas viderat vinci et mare? [118-21]

She explains here that she has given up everything for the sake of Jason, and the questions express her astonished disbelief that he could have so easily forgotten the debt he owes her. Medea's attack on Jason's cruel treatment of her picks up the theme of his ingratitude which is especially prominent in *Heroides* 12: there *meritum* was a frequently employed term, because Medea, quite understandably, believes that the many actions she has performed on Jason's behalf deserve recognition in the form of

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[359] Boyle (1988) pp.78-9 comments on the chorus' joyful entrance, in contrast to Medea's dark and frenzied opening, noting that their exit, leaving Medea alone on stage, underscores her isolation.
[360] Hine (2007) p.130 considers it a soliloquy.
[361] Trinacty (2007) pp.69-70 discusses the echoes in 116-17 of *Heroides* 12.137-40, where Medea hears the wedding procession pass her door.
[362] Hine (2007) p.130 views the 'p' and 's' alliteration of 118-20 as indicating Medea's scathing anger. Benton (2003) pp.275-6 cites this as an example of imperialism in the text, as Medea describes Jason's imperialist aggression.

conjugal loyalty.[363] Here, recounting her former notorious deeds, in order to encourage herself towards a worse type of revenge this time (*scelera te hortentur tua / et cuncta redeant*, 129-30),[364] Medea goes on to admit that she has committed crimes in the name of love:[365]

> ...funestum impie
>
> quam saepe fudi sanguinem – et nullum scelus
>
> irata feci: saevit[366] infelix amor. [134-6]

Medea openly acknowledges her misconduct and, indeed, unlike in Ovid and Valerius' accounts, almost seems proud of her crimes, as she declares them in order to exhort herself to further acts. However, as in the *Heroides*, Seneca's Medea blames Jason for the crimes because he is the reason that she undertook these deeds. The final line here, with its "unhappy love", can be read as an allusion to Virgil's Dido, since this epithet is frequently applied to the heroine in the *Aeneid*.[367] The two women share certain similarities in their situations: both have been deceived by a hero whom they errantly believed had promised them a life of marriage together; it emerges that both have been somewhat naive in their belief since the hero, in both instances, was merely using the woman to advance himself in his mission; and the hurt at this unfair betrayal, and the difficult situation it has left them in, having given up their former royal position for the man, drives them from *amor* to *furor*,

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[363] See Chapter 1, especially p.38, n.157 and p.41, n.165. Although Guastella (2001) pp.202-3 recognises the echoes of *merita* from *Heroides* 12.21 (*est aliqua ingrato meritum exprobrare voluptas*), he does not believe that Seneca's Medea is similarly reproaching Jason as ungrateful; this opinion seems incorrect on the basis of lines 118-21 alone, which he quotes.

[364] Braden (1970) p.16 refers to this as a Senecan technique, whereby a character invokes their ancestry or mythological precedents in order to spur themself into action. Fitch & McElduff (2002) pp.28-30 describe these precedents as an excuse for horrific actions. Bartsch (2006) p.255 describes Seneca's *Medea* as "the most striking display of the self exhorting itself to a path of action", observing (pp.263-6) that the heroine's self-encouragements often echo Stoic maxims. For a detailed consideration of Senecan characters adhering to Stoic ideals of consistency (although criminal), through self-address, see Star (2006); for Medea specifically, see pp.231-9.

[365] Arcellaschi (1996) p.185 does not doubt her sincerity; he notes this in relation to his theory that Medea chooses the children as victims because they are the product of this lost love that meant so much to her. Garelli-François (1996) p.195 believes the degree of the crimes measures the intensity of Medea's love: however, since there are so few traces of this left, perhaps it is a measure of how great her love *was*: see above, p.96.

[366] Chaumartin (1995) pp.102-3 discusses the meaning and application of *saevit*. Costa (1973) p.84 observes that *saevit*, in the present tense, symbolises that Medea's love for Jason raged when she was committing crimes and still rages now; however, see above, n.365.

[367] Hine (2007) p.132 refers to *Aeneid* 4.68f. specifically.

leaving both women raging. Medea openly declares the madness that derives from her anger[368] and drives her on to pursue a suitable, but uncertain, revenge:

> adeone credit omne consumptum nefas?
> incerta vecors mente non sana feror
> partes in omnes; unde me ulcisci queam? [122-4]

The difference, of course, is that although Dido at first threatens the founding of the Roman race, since she acts as a distraction for Aeneas, ultimately she is merely a menace to herself, when she commits suicide; Medea, on the other hand, is dangerous to society at large and the destruction that her *furor* will bring down is not upon herself, but on others around her.[369] It is this mighty destruction that Medea implies in the passages above: before now she has committed evil deeds for love, so she implores herself to imagine her capabilities if her revenge is not for love but against it, and her mind rehearses various possibilities for the victims. Increasing the impression of Medea's unstable mind and suggesting a split personality, Seneca portrays her addressing herself in the third person, as she seeks a vengeance that surpasses anything that has ever been done:

> si quod Pelasgae, si quod urbes barbarae
> novere facinus quod tuae ignorent manus,
> nunc est parandum...[370] [127-9][371]

Here we see one of the few references to her background in this play: Medea herself reminds us of her barbarian origin here, and the Greek cities are opposed to the *barbarae* ones, just as the Greek city of Corinth is opposed to the barbarian woman herself.[372] Medea's unstable mind is also symbolised in

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[368] Harris (2001) p.64 observes that Roman writers, such as Seneca, associate madness and *ira*; he discusses the meaning of the word *ira* in his consideration of the Latin vocabulary for anger, pp.68-70.
[369] On Medea's destructive passion, see n.345 above.
[370] 129 echoes the opening of Horace's famous Ode 1.37, *nunc est bibendum*, celebrating Octavian's defeat of another notorious woman considered a destructive menace to society: Cleopatra.
[371] Kubiak (1989) pp.9-10 cites 127-30 to support his view that Medea operates with violence beyond the law, while Jason is bound by it. Relevant here is Luck's description, (1986) pp.4-5, of a *magus* as not only compelling gods by means of threats, but also not recognising sin and being above morality and law, "a law unto himself".
[372] Hine (2007) p.131 discusses the barbarian representation of the heroine; he notes that the Pelasgi signify the Greeks in general. Harris (2001) p.222 considers Seneca's comments associating barbarians and anger (*de Ira* 2.15) as an extension of the tradition attributing irascibility to "the Other", including women: see n.533 below.

her address to her "frenzied sorrow" (*dolor furiose*, 139-40)[373] as if it is a sentient being. Having Medea thus speak to her emotions makes her appear even more deranged, and also displays the magnitude of these feelings, which are clearly so overwhelming that they are beginning to consume and control her: these addresses to herself and her emotions continue throughout the play.[374] Medea's wandering mind also underscores her confusion: as she seeks the ultimate victim to punish, she erratically jumps from blaming one person to the next, moving from Creusa to Jason and finally deciding on Creon, as she threatens to bring the tyrant's house down in flames (*alto cinere cumulabo domum*, 147).

In lines 137-42 Seneca uses his rhetorical training to depict Medea conducting an argument with herself, in which she swings from blaming Jason to attempting to defend and excuse him from culpability.[375] Indeed she softens towards him: *si potest, vivat meus, / ut fuit, Iason* (140-1). Here she fondly refers to her husband with the possessive adjective *meus*, displaying the scant remains of her love for him, as well as her ability to be more tender and human. Ultimately here, in this rare moment of weakness, she wishes to reinstate her marital relationship to its former condition. This is perhaps evidence of Medea's battle between her remaining love for Jason and her implacable desire for revenge, or the ongoing struggle between *amor* and *furor*. It is probable that Seneca has derived inspiration for a more tender depiction from Ovid's portrayal of Medea, and perhaps felt it was necessary to include some more elegiac elements in his depiction:[376] in the *Metamorphoses*, we see Ovid portray Medea's inner turmoil and struggles in her mind, and in the *Heroides* we see a Medea who alternately softens and hardens, caught between love and anger towards her unfaithful

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[373] Dupont (1997) pp.38-9 believes that Medea's grief is her last link with humanity. Edgeworth (1990) p.155 discusses Medea's addresses to her *dolor* as if it is an external agent. Henry & Walker (1967) pp.175-6 interpret the many addresses to *dolor* as an indication that Medea has no identity and suggest her grief is responsible for her *scelera*: however, this ignores the other emotions which she addresses, and which rule her. Fitch & McElduff (2002) p.32 note that speaking of the passions as a separate entity is a method of "shielding the self from responsibility" in Senecan tragedy.

[374] Hine (2007) pp.132-3 discusses the recurrent theme of Medea's madness throughout the play, of which these addresses to the emotions, and self-addresses, must be a sign. However, Star's argument, (2006) p.244, n.51, is that self-addresses help Senecan characters "achieve stability and consistency". Gill (1997) pp.221-2 notes that the language of madness is unique to Seneca's Medea. Hershkowitz (2004) pp.24-5 and n.97 describes the madness in Seneca's tragedies as equally influenced by Virgilian and Ovidian epic as Greek tragedy.

[375] Medea is confused in her upset state, but Henry & Walker (1967) p.176 misinterpret her character in believing that she "exists as she responds to momentary impulse or circumstance"; Medea's reactions are understandable due to her unfortunate circumstances. However, it is correct that she is often reactive to her situation.

[376] See n.314 above on the elegiac influence on Medea.

husband.[377] However, considering the overall impression we have of Seneca's Medea so far, this seems slightly incongruous, and it can alternatively be explained as evidence of her possessiveness over what she considers her rightful property, her husband.[378]

Having given two opposing points of view, that of Medea and the Corinthian chorus who are hostile towards her, Seneca now presents another character's perspective: that of Medea's nurse, as she attempts to calm her raging mistress. She responds to this frenzied speech of Medea with an agitated plea that she should keep her emotions hidden: the nurse fears that Medea is endangering herself with her open threats, and she displays concern and loyalty towards her mistress. Therefore we can see that Medea has not alienated everyone around her, and still retains at least one confidante who cares for her welfare. It should be noted that the nurse does not disapprove of the idea of revenge, but merely wants Medea to take a quieter approach to this (*ira quae tegitur nocet*, 153):[379] this does not necessarily justify Medea's desire for vengeance, but here Seneca is displaying another character who views Medea as wronged: she summarises her mistress's hopeless situation:

> abiere[380] Colchi, coniugis nulla est fides
> nihilque superest opibus e tantis tibi. [164-5]

However, perhaps instead of believing that the nurse sympathises with Medea, we are to understand the nurse as saying whatever she believes it takes to soothe Medea's rage. The Roman nurse's concern certainly does not appear as far-reaching as that of the Euripidean version: the Greek nurse opens the play, presenting Medea's case in a most pitiable and detailed manner to the audience, and is clearly

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[377] Costa (1973) p.84 notes that this is not a feature of the Euripidean Medea.
[378] Fyfe (1983) p.80 remarks that Medea needs Jason in order to exist in society, which is true but, as we later see, Medea can operate very well outside (human) society; Guastella (2001) p.198 is perhaps more accurate in saying that the divorce "deprives her *former* life of any meaning". Thus Fyfe's proposal, that Medea's sole purpose throughout the dialogues with Jason and Creon is to get Jason back for this genuine purpose, seems unlikely: although there are apparently more tender moments, the overall impression suggests that Medea has moved from a desire to get him back, to an acceptance that he has gone and realisation that she must take action to protect her injured pride. See below, pp.106, 117 and Chapter 1, pp.48-50 on her possessiveness.
[379] Hine (2007) p.134 notes that nurses usually seek to dissuade their mistresses from wrongdoing, discussing various examples, concluding that the nurse may be aiming merely to get Medea's attention, although he recognises that her argument throughout is not a moral one. See n.357 above on characters' wishes to silence Medea.
[380] Costa (1973) p.87 comments on the suitability of this word, meaning "have departed", for suggesting Medea's physical and spiritual isolation.

genuinely worried about her mistress and the children.[381] However, in Seneca's play the nurse's principal role is to act as the voice of reason, and her measured approach further emphasises her mistress's lack of restraint and balanced judgement in her passionate state.[382] Indeed, the nurse's comments appear only to inflame Medea further in her crazed anger, urging her on to fulfil her plans for revenge: thus spurred on, Medea boldly proclaims her formidable powers over the elements and the gods, reminding us of the extent of her abilities:

> Medea superest: hic mare et terras vides
> ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina. [166-7][383]

Having so far failed in her attempt to dissuade Medea, the nurse engages in a rapid exchange of views with her,[384] appealing to Medea on the basis that she has lost everything and, ironically, reminding her that she is a mother (*mater es*, 171). However, Medea is defiant and is neither able nor willing to calm her rage. It is clear that the nurse recognises her mistress's extreme fury and capabilities, although perhaps she is not fully aware of the extent of them at this stage, when she impatiently issues an order to Medea:

> compesce verba, parce iam, demens, minis
> animosque minue: tempori aptari decet. [174-5]

Here the nurse openly reproaches Medea for her crazed state of mind, when she labels her *demens*: earlier she had also explicitly declared her to be Fury-like (*siste furialem impetum*, 157).[385] It is only at this point that Medea herself begins to realise her full potential, as her previous reputation seems to

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[381] However, Costa (1973) p.85 believes that this nurse is more developed than in Euripides. Seneca's nurse does partially take on the sympathetic role of the chorus, which is absent from this play, but her pity cannot be carried too far: as her nurse, she would have had an obligation to go along with Medea, and she does not present a particularly sympathetic view of her mistress overall, as in Euripides.

[382] Herington (1966) p.454 notes that, often in Senecan tragedy, a duel is fought out between the passions of one character and the reasons of another.

[383] Henry & Walker (1967) p.171 quote 166-7 as evidence of Medea's aims for power: see also n.337 above. Bartsch (2006) pp.257 notes that Medea's "will to triumph" permeates 164-71.

[384] Costa (1973) pp.86-7 notes the typical Senecan influence of the rhetorical school, particularly the epigrammatic nature of this argument and counter-argument. Boyle (1997) pp.16-17 discusses this verbal duel; Braden (1970) pp.18-19 cites it as an example of Senecan characters bouncing off each other "like billiard balls", noting that Medea uses the nurse's comments for her own self-dramatisation. See also Hine (2007) pp.134-5.

[385] Hine (2007) p.135 discusses *furialis*. Similarly in Euripides' play, 1260, the chorus designate Medea as a bloody avenging Fury.

dawn on her:[386] when she declares that she will become Medea (*fiam*, 171),[387] this is the first sign that her previous confusion is clearing the way for certain revenge.

Indeed, rather than becoming more mentally unstable, Medea's mind begins to calm as she becomes more wily and calculating. We witness this side of her character develop in the following scene with Creon. The king of Corinth and the heroine are quite openly hostile towards each other and it is clear from the start that Creon's attitude towards Medea dictates that he will not present a favourable view of her. On seeing the king approach, Medea derisively comments on his tyrannical nature (*Pelasgo tumidus imperio*, 178),[388] while Creon, muttering to himself, expresses his fears about the harmful barbarian woman (*Colchi noxium Aeetae genus*, 179) he seeks to exile:

> molitur[389] aliquid: nota fraus, nota est manus.
> cui parcet illa quemve securum sinet? [181-2]

Creon's comments act as a brief summary of the anxieties, particularly male ones, about powerful female figures such as Medea. She is considered dangerous because she is a woman with power (*manus*) and, what is more threatening, she employs the feminine wile of deceit (*fraus*) to support her abilities further: such ideas can also be found in Euripides' play, where the devious Medea herself declares that women are not suitable for good deeds, but are skilled in evil (407-9). Medea is seen as a threat to the natural, male, order of the civilised world, and so is considered a most evil plague (*pessimam luem*, 183). However, there is no evidence that Seneca necessarily wants us to find Creon's judgements valid, since he presents him as a cowardly tyrant. Unlike Euripides' Creon, who is similarly presented as tyrannical, Seneca's king does not issue orders to Medea directly, but cowers

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[386] Rather than viewing her as living up to her previous reputation, Benton (2003) pp.277-8 believes that Medea decides to live up to the identity that the Corinthians impose on her. Although an interesting viewpoint, it seems unlikely since Medea's previous acts cannot be denied: the Corinthians are not fabricating Medea's criminal reputation.

[387] Fitch & McElduff (2002) pp.24-5 describe Medea's methods of self-construction: she looks to precedent, and self-names to define who she should be; they observe that she names herself eight times in Seneca, as opposed to just once in Euripides. See also Bartsch (2006) pp.258-9.

[388] Braden (1970) p.33 discusses Medea's counterculture in her arguments with Creon (who symbolises official power), and the chorus in the opening scenes (who symbolise order and legitimacy): he notes that, because she has been isolated by society, she (symbolising the unruly, wild and illegitimate power and presence) is able to oppose them and has no fear in destroying them, which she achieves by outwitting them. Similarly, Bartsch (2006) pp.272-4, 280-1 observing Medea's isolation in the play, notes that she must reject community values in order to become "Medea". Kubiak (1989) pp.24-5 interprets the opposition between Medea and Creon as one between absolute violence (which becomes terrorism, as she threatens to throw society into chaos) and absolute power.

[389] Costa (1973) p.90 notes the aptness of *molitur*, used of "plotting something sinister or disastrous".

behind the commanded protection of his attendants when he sees her approaching to confront him,[390] thus losing any credibility and authority he might have had. Quite differently in Euripides' play, it is Creon who boldly approaches Medea. In both plays the king's first words to the heroine are an insult and an order to leave the kingdom,[391] motivated by his fear of her potential actions: in Seneca he describes Medea as fierce and threatening (*ferox minaxque*, 186-7) and a cruel and horrible monster (*monstrumque saevum horribile*, 191),[392] underscoring her inhuman aspects, and thereby emphasising his fear which, unlike his Euripidean counterpart, he does not openly admit to her.[393] These words are surprisingly forthright and abrupt, considering he initially shrinks back from addressing, or even being in the proximity of, Medea.

Being the strong character that she is, Medea could not possibly accept this hostile greeting without feeling provoked into conflict. Thus she immediately embarks on a battle of wills with the king, quite reasonably demanding justification for his sudden tyrannical decision to impose banishment on her.[394] Medea is not a woman who will go quietly: Creon is foolish to underestimate her by believing that she can be treated as a mere inconvenience and brushed aside so easily. Her pride will not stand such an insult: it is necessary for her to rebel defiantly against such treatment, taking suitable revenge, and proving that she is much mightier than he believes. Creon also displays a lack of wisdom in allowing Medea to speak: having already accused her of using deceit (*fraus*, 181), he should be aware of the probability that Medea will be able to put forward a powerful and convincing argument.[395]

Indeed, Medea does demonstrate her powers of persuasion and manipulation, which are further underscored by the contrast with Creon's ineffective and weak argument in response: Euripides' Creon is immediately honest about his reasons for banishing Medea, admitting that he fears what she will do to his daughter, Jason and himself; Seneca's Creon, on the other hand, avoids answering her

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[390] Hine (2007) pp.137-8 notes how Creon's failure is indicative of his weakness and Medea's power. Fyfe (1983) p.81 views the fear of Creon, and Jason, as proof of the reality of Medea's power.
[391] Hine (2007) p.137.
[392] Garelli-François (1996) pp.193-4 explores Medea's paradoxical roles as both *mater* and *monstrum*. Segal (1983) p.238 identifies *monstrum* as a key word of the play, commenting that Jason has brought back this untameable creature with her latent monstrosity. With Medea referred to in such terms, Dowden's comment, (1997) p.48, that mythical monsters are usually female, is interesting here.
[393] Hine (2007) p.144.
[394] Hine (2007) pp.137-8 cites this as proof that Medea has previously heard about her impending exile.
[395] See n.357 on the power of Medea's speech.

question, and instead defensively resorts to sarcasm, as his comment on her culpability demonstrates: *quae causa pellat, innocens mulier rogat* (193). However, Medea sets forth convincing rhetoric to support her argument, once Creon foolishly allows her to plead her case. She begins by emphasising her current pitiful position as a suppliant, isolated in a foreign land:

> quamvis enim sim clade miseranda obruta,
> expulsa supplex sola deserta, undique
> afflicta... [207-9]

Medea thus attempts to increase sympathy for herself. She also takes this opportunity to contrast her current situation with her previous one, as princess of a vast kingdom, in order to underscore the fragility of royal power to Creon: this should serve as a warning to him about what the future holds since, as we know, Medea will seek a revenge which reduces him to nothing. Although she may not have decided upon this yet, her ability to present a well-thought out argument now makes it probable that her calculating mind is beginning to plan it. Medea does not use the humble tone of a person seeking favour: instead, seemingly knowing the power of her argument and anticipating Creon's inability to respond,[396] she confidently continues. Next she proudly announces the benefits that she has bestowed upon Corinth, asking Creon to imagine the misfortune Greece would have suffered if she had not saved the Argonauts and delivered them safely to his city, clearly viewing herself as ultimately responsible for Jason's successes in his tasks: this seems to have been inspired by Ovid's treatment of the myth, where Medea makes similar claims.[397] Here (239ff.) Medea speaks of the past in the future tense, imagining other possible outcomes, displaying that her imagination has returned to that time when she was forced to make a decision between her father and duty on one hand, and Jason and her love for him on the other (*virgini placeat pudor / paterque placeat*, 238-9).[398] She gives the men as a gift to Creon, but possessively claims Jason as her own (*unum mihi*, 235): this territorial nature over her rightful possession, which she understandably believes she has earned, can also be found in *Heroides* 12, where Medea similarly views Jason as belonging to her exclusively.[399]

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[396] Fyfe (1983) p.81 recognises that Creon and Jason avoid answering Medea's questions about justice.
[397] *Metamorphoses* 7.56: *titulum servatae pubis Achivae*; *Her*oides 12.203: *dos est mea Graia iuventus* (Chapter 1, p.51).
[398] Costa (1973) p.94: he notes that the change in tense also reflects her mental state. Hine (2007) p.142 observes the alliteration.
[399] Her.12.157-8: See Chapter 1, pp.48-50.

A principal theme in Medea's argument is that of guilt and culpability. To her credit, Medea openly acknowledges her crimes, admitting that she has committed them, but she will not accept ultimate responsibility for the deeds which she has carried out for the sake of Jason. She points out, rightly, that had it not been for him, these would never have occurred, and thus she holds him culpable.[400] Creon, on the other hand, prefers to view Medea as solely responsible, dissociating Jason from the crimes because he did not physically carry them out.[401] Medea's argument is a largely convincing one since, as she points out, she is as guilty of these crimes now as she was when she and Jason were first accepted into Corinth by the king:

> ...si placet, damna ream;
> sed redde crimen.[402] sum nocens, fateor, Creo:
> talem sciebas esse, cum genua attigi
> fidemque supplex praesidis dextra peti. [245-8][403]

If Creon could offer her protection at that time, then he cannot justify her banishment on the basis of her former crimes which pre-date his acceptance of her.[404] She uses this well-calculated argument to seek a place to stay in Corinth. The arrogant Creon, discounting any accusations of tyranny, defends his decision to exile Medea on the basis that Acastus, king of Thessaly and son of Pelias, desires retribution for his aged father's death at her hands. Here Creon describes Medea's wicked deceit, whereby she falsely convinced Pelias' daughters that, if they wounded their father, she would fill his veins with a rejuvenation potion. Ovid's version of this tale in the *Metamorphoses*, must have influenced Seneca here: the tragedian's pun, describing the pious sisters' impious act, *piae sorores*

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[400] Guastella (2001) p.200 interestingly suggests that Medea admits her guilt in an attempt to keep the link with her husband, for whom she committed the crimes.
[401] Benton (2003) p.276 believes Medea has been made the scapegoat, since that is the only way that the Corinthians will be able to accept Jason.
[402] The meaning of the phrase *sed redde crimen* has been the subject of several articles: see Perrenoud (1963) and Stégen (1971). Perrenoud, pp.496-7, summarises the issue in viewing Medea as not denying accomplishing the acts, but seeing herself only as an instrument to carry out the crimes for which Jason is morally responsible, since they were committed for him. It seems to me that she openly acknowledges her crimes, for she could not attempt to deny them, given their magnitude and fame; however, she holds Jason responsible because they were committed in his interest.
[403] Guastella (2001) p.200, n.10 notes that 245-51 shares the theme of "conscious guilt" with *Heroides* 12.106-32 (see Chapter 1, pp.44-7).
[404] Lawall's view, (1979) p.421, that Creon is acting from honourable motives in seeking to protect Jason, thus seems flawed: indeed, he principally seems to be looking after his own interests. Stégen's premise (1971) p.370 seems valid: he argues against Jason as the *crimen* itself, instead, pp.371-2, believing *redde crimen* to be a demand to be told the new crime for which she is being banished. This is Medea's calculation to gain a day's delay, knowing that Creon cannot tell her the true reason for her banishment: his fear of what she will do because of Jason's marriage to Creusa.

impium auderent nefas (261), appears to echo that of Ovid, *his ut quaeque pia est hortatibus impia prima est* (*Metamorphoses* 7.339).[405] Creon depicts Medea in a very poor light, reminding us of her most evil criminal actions, with which he does not consider Jason to be involved: in apparent desperation to be rid of her, while ordering her to leave, he launches into a scathing attack on her character, which is important as a summary of the stereotypical fears about such a formidable woman:

> tu, tu malorum machinatrix facinorum,
> cui feminae nequitia, ad audendum omnia
> robur virile est, nulla famae memoria,
> egredere, purga regna, letales simul
> tecum aufer herbas, libera cives metu,
> alia sedens tellure sollicita deos. [266-71]

Typical ancient male anxieties about such a woman are especially evident in this passage, as Creon accuses Medea of having a female nature, but male strength.[406] This would have been considered a most dangerous combination, for women were generally held to be ruled by their unrestrained emotions, as well as being deceitful and treacherous by nature, but they were also normally considered weak and therefore not threatening.[407] However, Medea was a rarity, since she had the strength of mind and powers capable of controlling gods and nature, not just humans: hence Creon's revilement, emphasised by the harsh repetition of *tu* at the beginning of the passage, and his futile commands for her to be gone: he knows that she has the upper hand physically, through her powers, and mentally and, furthermore, that she is capable of anything. The reader senses that Medea would take this reaction as a compliment rather than an insult: she desires to have such an impact and, far from *nulla famae memoria*, she is greatly concerned with her reputation, as her references to previous deeds emphasise. This is in contrast with the Euripidean Medea's claims that her preceding reputation hinders her, since it makes people fear her (292ff.).

Strong-willed as ever, Medea finds it necessary to continue to battle on for a genuine reason for her banishment, and also to refuse accepting responsibility for crimes committed for Jason's sake. The

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[405] Hine (2007) pp.143-4; see also Chapter 1, p.31.
[406] Arcellaschi (1996) p.188 views Medea's loss of femininity as an indication of her *furor*.
[407] Although it should be noted that Dowden (1997) pp.44-57 warns readers to beware of assuming too much about ancient society and history from mythology.

question of guilt remains a central point of her argument: *totiens nocens sum facta, sed numquam mihi* (280).[408] Finally she changes her tactic and, feigning acceptance of her banishment, resorts to pleading to bid her children farewell before she leaves: of course, this is heavily ironic for the audience, who know the outcome of this tragedy will be the boys' deaths, but there is nothing in the text to suggest that she has decided upon this vengeance already. This approach more closely resembles that of her Euripidean counterpart who, in the parallel scene with Creon, rather than taking the Senecan Medea's defiant and demanding stance, immediately places herself in a position of supplication and seeks to reason with the king, even assuming an inferior position next to his royal power. It seems incongruous that Seneca's Medea, who has just boldly delivered such a fine and strong argument, should now resort to her womanly nature to win her battle of wills: not only does she use her motherhood as an argument, as her Euripidean predecessor did, but she even turns on the waterworks: *parumne miserae temporis lacrimis negas?* (293). An important difference between the two plays, however, is that the Euripidean Creon is exiling the children along with Medea, whereas the Senecan Creon offers to raise them. It is questionable which of these situations creates more sympathy for Medea: in Euripides, Medea has a greater challenge in that she must find protection for her children as well as herself; in Seneca, the mother faces a painful, imposed separation from her children, which is a poignant and ironic situation given her eventual choice of revenge.

Creon, despite his suspicions that Medea is buying time for trickery (*fraudibus tempus petis*, 290), allows her one more day in Corinth: Medea has proved, in this one scene alone, her superior powers of manipulation. However, it seems that the Euripidean Medea had calculated from the outset that this tactic was more likely to assist her in obtaining her wishes, as she informs the chorus that this was always part of her plan (364ff.): the Senecan Medea is either slightly less astute or, more likely, her anger and defiant nature have a greater hold on her.[409] It seems that her Euripidean predecessor can be seen as more devious and therefore, perhaps in some measure, more evil.[410] Indeed, the Euripidean

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[408] Costa (1973) p.97 discerns here an echo of Ovid's *Heroides* 12.131-2: *ut culpent alii, tibi me laudare necesse est, pro quo sum totiens esse coacta nocens*; see Chapter 1, p.47.

[409] Henry & Walker (1967) p.175 comment that Medea is not coherent enough for plotting; Roisman (2005) p.87 believes her to be more straightforward than her Euripidean counterpart, with supernatural abilities having replaced cleverness, p.85.

[410] Henry & Walker (1967) p.172 analyse Medea's argument with Creon, noting that the latter is hardly a worthy opponent, making Seneca's Medea less powerful than the heroine of Euripides, whose Creon was more of a match to be outwitted: however, surely Seneca has purposely weakened his heroine's opponents in order to emphasise further her strength and might.

Creon comments on her quiet and clever nature designating her as a truly dangerous enemy: furthermore, she herself confirms this in her following exchange with the chorus. The Roman Medea, on the other hand, is not plotting from the start, but angrily responding to situations as they arise. However, her calculating nature does begin to emerge so that she is able to feign supplication in the end, and delay her exile long enough to carry out her revenge.[411] In contrast with the wily Medea, Creon's final words in this scene display his foolish nature in underestimating her: after recently having declared his fears of the woman, he insensitively informs Medea that he must leave to attend the wedding rituals of her husband and his daughter, imprudent words which the audience imagines must only serve to incense Medea further.[412]

Before the scene in which Medea confronts Jason for the first time, the second choral ode is delivered. This ode contains a warning about the transgression of nature's boundaries leading to a social decline, referring specifically to Jason and the Argonauts crossing the seas in the first ship.[413] In this criticism of the hero, which serves as an introduction to Jason, the chorus notes that Medea makes a suitable reward for such illicit behaviour:

> quod fuit huius pretium cursus?
>
> aurea pellis
>
> maiusque mari Medea malum,[414]
>
> merces prima digna carina. [361-3]

This insult displays that the chorus clearly still has little regard for Medea, but interestingly they now criticise Jason too, whereas before they were in support of his marriage to their princess. The idea that Medea serves as a divine agent of retribution for his bold act of transgression, and attempt to control

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[411] Boyle (1988) p.95 describes Medea's ability to be an actor within her own play: see also Griffiths (2006) pp.63-4 and, n.450 below.

[412] This lack of pity is evidence that Creon has not yielded to Medea because of his "humanitarian spirit", as Lawall (1979) p.421 believes: rather he has submitted because he seeks to silence her; Lawall does, however, perceive Creon's insensitivity in dealing with Medea, and his underestimation of her.

[413] Seneca is possibly also implying Rome's crossing of boundaries in its empire building: see Benton (2003) pp.282-4 on Seneca's unfavourable view elsewhere of imperialism, and its mixing of cultures causing a decline in Roman society; Berry (1996) pp.14-15 observes that the distinction between citizen and barbarian is dissolved by the Argo. In contrast, Desy (2005) uses the rhythm and metre to argue that the second ode is not pessimistically depicting a decline from the Golden Age of humanity, but instead an optimistic view of the expansion of the Roman Empire. See also Fyfe (1983) pp.86-91 on the so-called Argonautic odes.

[414] Costa (1973) p.106 comments on the alliteration of this line as a possible "contemptuous jingle".

nature, has been widely discussed:[415] if this view is accepted, it partially excuses Medea's murderous actions in this tragedy, since Jason is perceived as having set in motion this series of events when he set sail on the Argo,[416] and Medea is merely fulfilling them in delivering the vengeance which Jason deserves, and which is served to him by the gods. Here she is represented as the prize of the journey, which recalls imagery elsewhere depicting her as the booty which the pirate Jason carries off.[417]

Before Jason enters the stage, there is a brief exchange between the nurse and Medea. However, the two women barely engage with each other: this scene exists principally to highlight Medea's increasing madness, which clearly has a firm grip on her. Euripides' Medea was very cool after her conversation with Creon, in which she had total control throughout, since she was scheming all along: she is left relishing the prospect of revenge, as she considers a variety of choices, but her wits clearly remain with her. The Senecan Medea, on the other hand, is driven to distraction by the madness that engulfs her after her heated altercation with the king. Failing to calm her, the nurse conveys Medea's mental distress through a description of her physical state, for the audience's benefit:[418]

> incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit
> cum iam recepto maenas insanit deo
> Pindi nivalis vertice aut Nysae iugis,
> talis recursat huc et huc motu effero,
> furoris ore signa lymphati gerens.
> flammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat,
> proclamat, oculos uberi fletu rigat,

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[415] Lawall (1979) discusses Medea as an embodiment of raw nature, especially in acting on behalf of the sea, and specifically the god Neptune, in her revenge against Jason; this seems particularly apt, since the sea, like Medea, cannot be tamed or subdued by civilisation and, therefore, similarly has mighty power. Pratt (1963) p.216 also believes Medea's revenge symbolises the vengeance of the sea. Fyfe (1983) p.87 emphasises Medea's connection with female beasts of the sea, such as the Scylla, and importantly terms her "nature's instrument of justice"; Desy (2005) p.928 disagrees with this. Berry (1996) p.10 interprets Medea as Nature's human medium and concludes, pp.15-17, that Nature and Medea work together to punish Jason's transgressions.

[416] Benton (2003) explores the concept of anxieties of imperialism through the depiction of Jason's voyage as instigating the end of the Golden Age. Boyle (1988) pp.82-3 and (1997) pp.58-9 notes that, in this and other Senecan tragedies, "history is both determinant and cyclic".

[417] See above, p.91.

[418] This third person description is considered as evidence that the tragedy was written for recital rather than the stage: Hine (2007) p.155; see also n.594 below. However, Hollingsworth (2001) pp.138-40 argues against this, believing that Seneca exaggerates the stage movements of Medea through the nurse's description, in order to evoke pity and fear.

renidet, omnis specimen affectus capit.

haeret: minatur aestuat queritur gemit. [382-90]

A woman is often perceived as having been driven mad by emotions that consume her, because of her weakness and susceptibility to them, just as Medea is portrayed as under the control of her anger here.[419] The nurse provides evidence that Medea's emotions have her in their grip, in her depiction of the physical effects on her mistress: she is not merely mentally affected but, raving, runs through a range of physical reactions as well.[420] In the simile here, comparing Medea to a maenad, the nurse uses stock imagery employed for emotionally crazed women: in classical literature we frequently find that women suffering extreme emotions are compared to maenads and bacchants, revelling wildly:[421] the male writer's purpose in such commonplace portrayals is to display that a woman subject to her emotions, as females were commonly held to be, was beyond reason and rational, male, control. Seneca is presenting a vivid image of a wild Medea, beyond the bounds of sanity and, therefore, control. To emphasise the force of her mistress's emotions, the nurse even compares Medea with a Fury: *vultum Furoris cerno* (396).[422] This boundless emotion is an indication that she is capable of anything, as we know her to be from her legend. Her nurse also expresses fears of what her mistress will do, believing that in her rage she will surpass her previous criminal actions (*se vincet*, 394), as she pursues revenge: indeed we have already witnessed signs of Medea's concern to outdo her previous notoriety.

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[419] Seneca had a particular interest in exploring the emotion of anger, since he devotes a philosophical work to it, *De Ira*: Guastella (2001) explores Medea's wrath and its connection with Seneca's treatise; see also Marti (1945) pp.229-30. Evans (1950) relates Seneca's Stoic portrayal of tragic characters to his doctrines: see especially pp.174-7 on Medea's anger and its physical indications; she notes, pp.176-7, that Seneca places more emphasis on Medea's *ira* than Euripides does. Hine (2007) p.154 discusses Seneca's physical descriptions of anger. Arcellaschi (1996) pp.187-8 notes that Medea is compelled by both *ira* and *furor*, observing that the former gives way to the latter; he also comments on Medea's state of metamorphosis as she remains poised between anger and fury.

[420] Marti (1945) p.233 cites 385-9 as an example of the physical descriptions in tragedy matching the symptoms of harmful passions to be found in Seneca's philosophical treatises. Robin (1993) p.108 describes the physical and emotional pathology familiar to several Senecan tragic heroines; she notes that it is Senecan women who tend to display raw emotion and weep, while it is the men in Euripides.

[421] See 806ff., 849 (pp133, 136 below); *Metamorphoses* 7.257-8 (Chapter 1, p.24); Valerius Flaccus 6.755ff., 8.446ff. (Chapter 3, pp.183, 214-15).

[422] Hine (2007) p.155. Herington (1966) p.455 considers this physical description to be an allegory of anger; he notes the similarity between her characterisation and Seneca's portrayal of anger in *de Ira* 2.35.

Any attempt by the nurse to alleviate her fury is futile: having seen that Medea is a defiant and aggressive woman, even when calm, we expect that she cannot be reasoned with while in this state of mind. She is a force to be reckoned with, and we have no doubt that she will take action since she is far from being a passive woman, of the ideal classical type. Medea picks up the theme of her own boundless emotions in her speech, when she replies that her hatred should now have the same limit imposed on it as her love for Jason has (*si quaeris odio, misera, quem statuas modum, / imitare amorem*, 397-8):[423] in other words it will be characteristically without restraint. Harshly countering the nurse's concerns, Medea ironically asks if she should passively accept such fate without consequence (*regias egone ut faces / inulta patiar? segnis hic ibit dies...?*, 398-9).[424] Of course, the audience and the nurse know that the answer to this pointed question is "no" and that the overly proud Medea must act. Indeed, during a long rant, the heroine herself states that no force of nature could now hold her back from revenge:

> non rapidus amnis, non procellosum mare
> pontusve coro saevus aut vis ignium
> adiuta flatu possit inhibere impetum
> irasque nostras: sternam et evertam omnia. [411-14][425]

Medea and her rage are becoming quite formidable, as she spurs herself on towards her plan for revenge: we are witnessing her gradually changing from an angry woman scorned into the notorious sorceress with immense powers, and she compares the strength of her anger with legendary beastly forces of nature, such as Scylla and Charybdis (407-10). After briefly reflecting on Jason's cowardice and poor treatment of her, she continues in her rant and declares her destructive intentions:

> ...faciet hic faciet dies
> quod nullus umquam taceat – invadam deos
> et cuncta quatiam...

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[423] Garelli-François (1996) p.195 discusses the mirrored structure of these lines, in noting that Medea's love is the inverse of her hatred. Luck (1986) p.30 refers to Medea's "power of hating" as the dominant theme.

[424] Although it is possible to interpret Medea as passive in relation to the emotions that rule her: Nussbaum (1997) pp.230-1.

[425] Garton (1959) p.8 cites this passage as an example of the characteristic Senecan rant, which was not a common feature in Greek tragedy; he notes that the rant "enriched" the heroic character and lent a "looming quality", which certainly applies to Medea, who seems to excel in the activity. Hadas (1939) p.223 comments that these outbursts are not mere bombast, but display the intensity of such characters; he remarks, pp.226-7, that the emotional intensity adds dramatic interest.

...sola est quies,

mecum ruina cuncta si video obruta:

mecum omnia abeant. trahere, cum pereas, libet. [423-8]

The repetition of *faciet* here underscores Medea's determination, and we have no doubt that she will succeed in her terrible plan to cause destruction and chaos. Again she displays a concern with her reputation and a wish for her revenge to be widely known forevermore. Medea is depicted as a most frightening woman, and Seneca here plays on the worst male fears about such a woman: her nature makes her destructive and she is so dangerous that she can turn all order upside down,[426] and she is completely beyond all boundaries of human civilisation. These are her final words before Jason's entry onto the scene: after this tirade, the audience feels that there can be no hope for him now. It should be noted that Medea does not name Jason either in this scene or in the previous exchange with Creon:[427] this further emphasises her bitterness, since it appears that she now cannot even bear mention of his name.

However, that is not to say that Jason necessarily evokes sympathy: although this is not a study in his character, we should give some thought to our reaction to him in order to ascertain how deserving Medea is of our pity. In his first speech (431ff.), before the enraged Medea aggressively confronts him, Jason's hollow words display him as self-centred: while pitying his own unfortunate situation, Jason claims that he was forced to choose between faith to Medea and his own death.[428] Furthermore, he proudly declares that the choice he made was motivated not by fear, but his desire to protect his children:[429] there is evident irony in these lines since we know that the outcome of his choice will be their death at the hands of the woman he scorned. Thus the following lines, displaying that Jason foolishly underestimates Medea's desire for revenge, contain even more strikingly heavy irony:

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[426] Fischler (1994) p.120, in referring to imperial Roman women in texts (and since Seneca was close to the imperial household, he may have derived some inspiration from his experiences there), comments that the most threatening women are depicted as turning virtue and society upside-down: Seneca's play displays one of the most threatening women of legend as having this power, and using it. Henderson (1983) p.98 equates the termination of Medea's marriage with her dissolution of the cosmos. See also n.345 above on Medea's destructive nature.

[427] Costa (1973) pp.92, 110.

[428] Hine (2007) p.158 observes that Jason's strained expressions suggest "a man struggling to justify his actions".

[429] Lawall (1979) pp.423-4 interestingly considers this to be a Virgilian choice, where Jason is passively forced to choose between Medea and his duty towards his children, as Aeneas had to choose between Dido and his duty to his country: this therefore adds a Roman dimension to the tragedy.

...quin ipsam[430] quoque,

etsi ferox est corde nec patiens iugi,

consulere natis malle quam thalamis reor. [441-3]

Jason's description of Medea, applying to her the characteristic and unflattering epithet *ferox*,[431] also shows that he does not hold his former wife in very high estimation, and so has a similar attitude towards her as that of Creon. Furthermore, Jason, having only just summoned divine justice to his aid (*Iustitia, numen invoco ac testor tuum*, 440), is also unaware of the irony of his words as he confronts his former wife, who can be considered as a divine agent of retribution for Jason's bold act of transgression in sailing across the seas.[432] Jason is ignorant that he originally brought with him the divine agent of justice he calls upon and, furthermore, that it will be him who pays the penalty. The scene is now set for the first confrontation between heroine and hero, who display less than good will towards each other.

After Medea's recent raving with anger and desire for revenge, the audience imagines that the least Jason can now expect is a verbal onslaught from this formidable woman. Indeed, Medea delivers a long, angry speech of over 40 lines at Jason, rather than to him, symbolising her dominance over her silenced husband, just as she dominates the text.[433] It is full of rhetoric designed to highlight Jason's unjust treatment of her: this is an attempt to make him realise and acknowledge this, as well as an appeal to make her situation easier now, and therefore partially undo the wrongs that she has suffered at his hands. Although this speech appears to have been well-calculated to gain a response from Jason, displaying evidence of Seneca's rhetorical training, the overall impression is of a rant in which Medea barely stops to draw breath, and therefore it appears to express genuine emotion. Her main argument is based on Jason's ingratitude, which is also a prominent theme of *Heroides* 12: using similar

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[430] Hine (2007) pp.158, 163 notes Jason's use of this word as an indication that he cannot bear to utter Medea's name. He names her once, when he addresses her at 496, which nevertheless remains impersonal since it is in the third person: *Medea amores obicit?* Similarly, she rarely uses his name (see p.114 above).

[431] Costa (1973) p.90 observes that Horace uses this characterising epithet of Medea in *Ars Poetica*.

[432] See above, pp.110-11, and below, pp.124-5.

[433] Boyle (1997) p.132 notes that characters fail in their attempt to silence her and, as her power in the play grows, so too does the dominance of her language; see also n.357 above. Berry (1996) pp.7-8 remarks that rhetoric is the principal vehicle of movement in the play, as it expresses Medea's growing passion; Kubiak (1989) p.8 comments that we are assaulted by language and image, shaking the foundations of reason and power in the play.

language to her Ovidian counterpart, Seneca's Medea vehemently exclaims that he is an *ingratum caput* (465).[434] She also claims her significant part in Jason's tasks, reminding him that his success came at her order (*cum iusso meo*, 469): this similarly picks up Hypsipyle's claims in *Heroides* 6, that Medea has stolen Jason's glory.[435] Medea directs a succession of pointed questions at Jason, highlighting the predicament which he has caused.[436] Essentially she seeks from Jason the resolution of her situation: it has arisen from the criminal deeds she committed in order to help him, and thus she views these deeds, and her situation, as ultimately his responsibility. She reminds him of these acts throughout the speech, just as Ovid's Medea did in her letter,[437] in a vain attempt to stir Jason's feelings of guilt. She considers the harsh irony of being forced to flee by the person for whom she first fled, effectively conveying her sense of feeling trapped:

> pro te solebam fugere - discedo, exeo,
> penatibus profugere quam cogis tuis.
> quascumque aperui tibi vias, clausi mihi -
> quo me remittis? exuli exilium imperas
> nec das... [449-50, 458-60]

As an isolated foreigner, guilty of committing many atrocious deeds, she has no one to turn to and nowhere to go: she has lost everything for Jason, giving up her family, home and prosperous future for this *adulterum*, as she bitterly labels him (456).[438] Her reaction is therefore understandable, and Seneca is presenting Medea as a wronged woman who is justifiably irate. As in the scene with Creon, it is to Medea's credit that she openly acknowledges her wrong-doing. She recounts her crimes, reminding Jason and the audience of some of the atrocities, and admits that she deserves punishment for her part in them (*merui*, 462): this again picks up the prominent theme to be found in *Heroides* 12, where Medea is preoccupied with what she and Jason rightly deserve.[439] However, here she is very convincingly presenting her case that Jason is culpable for these crimes since they were committed for

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[434] Costa (1973) p.113 notes that this is evidence of Medea's real feelings bursting out. See Chapter 1, especially p.38, n.157 and p.41, n.165.
[435] 6.103-4: see Chapter 1, p.60.
[436] Hine (2007) p.159 discusses the long tradition of such a set of questions.
[437] *Heroides* 12.105ff.: see Chapter1, p.44.
[438] Costa (1973) p.113 comments on the "taut and bitter brevity" of *adulterum secuta* here. Hine (2007) p.160 observes that Medea believes Jason, as her rightful husband, is an adulterer in his new relationship with Creusa.
[439] See above, pp.98-9, n.363.

his sake, and so wins the audience's sympathy for her predicament, despite the bloody and horrific nature of some of her acts. As she recalls the past, we are reminded of the *Heroidean* Medea, although there is a significant difference: while Ovid's Medea remembered the past fondly and became sentimental, softening towards Jason as she relived the moments, the tragic Medea's only emotions are anger and hatred, motivated by her pride and the cruel betrayal she has suffered at his hands. This Medea has advanced from the Ovidian one, since she has hardened towards her former love almost completely. This, of course, will enable her to carry out her revenge most effectively.

However, this does not make her an evil witch: indeed, at this stage Seneca continues to present her sympathetically as a woman scorned, especially in contrast with the insensitive male characters that she must deal with in the play. Her feminine skill of manipulation is also evident, as it was when she adopted the position of suppliant in her altercation with Creon. She again seeks from Jason what she is owed and deserves, recalling her earlier demonstration of possessiveness to Creon. Medea wants her dowry back (*hac dote*, 489), which is a theme that is also found in *Heroides* 12, where Ovid's heroine makes repeated references to it:[440] she views her dowry as the many deeds that she has carried out on Jason's behalf which, of course, he cannot return to her; so, in other words, she demands her rightful husband back in his place.[441] She appears very possessive, and this is emphasised by her reference to Jason as a prize, when she says to him *sit pretium Iason* (518): previously Medea has been viewed as the prize, making this a role reversal for the couple. It should also be noted that, although she begs for Jason to return to her, the audience has the impression that she no longer wants him, since her love seems to have waned: this appears to be an exercise in protecting her pride, and restoring herself to her rightful position.[442] Uncharacteristically for such a strong-willed character, Medea appeals to Jason by many things, ironically including his hope for their sons: *per spes tuorum liberum* (478).

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[440] See Chapter 1, p.51.

[441] Costa (1973) p.116 observes that this is also found in Ovid's Scylla, *Metamorphoses* 8.67-8. Guastella (2001) pp.206-8 discusses Medea's dowry, comparing *Heroides* 12.199ff. and discerning a difference in the Senecan Medea's demands: however, it seems that they both request the return of the rightful possession which they have earned, Jason, while expressing it in slightly different words. Abrahamsen (1999) p.113 notes that Medea employs the term *dos* to prove that she is married to Jason and that her wish to have her dowry returned stems from a legal sense of having been betrayed.

[442] Costa (1973) p.111 believes that Medea forgets her desire for vengeance upon the sight of Jason, and proceeds to appeal to him. At 501ff. (p.116), Costa again detects pitiful pleading which, as he himself concedes, contrasts "strongly with her prevailing *furor* throughout the play": this is surely the point, since she is predominantly angry and demonstrates little sentimentality throughout; she seems more concerned with preserving her pride than regaining her husband and 501ff. therefore does not appear as pleading, but the anger of a wronged wife. Similarly, Hine (2007) p.159 views the plea as a "vehicle for further reproach".

This irony is redoubled in the following exchange with Jason, when she herself, having significantly disowned her sons in a reckless moment of bitterness (*abdico eiuro abnuo*, 507),[443] resentfully hopes that they never have to witness the day that Creusa's offspring become their siblings. Knowing her nature, we realise that she would only beg in order to obtain her wishes, and we recognise her act of supplication as quite insincere: we have to admire her artfulness in some measure, whether we find it despicable or not since, ultimately, she will achieve her aims, and it displays her resourcefulness even at a time when she is controlled by extreme emotions.

However, she does not win Jason over, but enters into a heated debate with him, before emerging triumphant, although this is unknown to Jason. The hero appears foolish and arrogant in his discussion, where he refuses to accept any culpability for the crimes Medea has committed for him, while expecting Medea to be grateful that he has kindly negotiated exile for her (490ff.). This arrogance must be both insulting to, and infuriating for, Medea, who is already fiercely angry: Jason strikes us as most insensitive, particularly when he speaks selfishly:

> obicere crimen quod potes tandem[444] mihi?
> ...restat hoc unum insuper,
> tuis ut etiam sceleribus fiam nocens. [497-9]

These words make it clear that Jason's first concern is himself, and it is understandable that Medea becomes so enraged and combative when speaking with him. She accuses him of wanting rid of her, labelling herself the detested mistress (*paelicem invisam amoves*, 495), so that he can pursue his relationship with Creusa undisturbed, and insinuating that he desires the advantage and power that such a royal marriage will bring him (529). Medea, driven by her fury, issues a stark warning to Jason, which he does not heed, since he foolishly underestimates his former wife: *est et his maior metus: / Medea* (516-17). Instead, Jason patronisingly humours Medea (*cedo defessus malis*, 518), doubtlessly

[443] Costa (1973) p.117 notes that this is a purely emotional reaction. Hine (2007) p.163 compares this to the Euripidean Medea's curse on her children at 111ff.
[444] Costa (1973) p.116 notes that *tandem* adds a tone of impatience to the question.

adding fuel to the fire of her rage.[445] Just as Jason had summoned justice, Medea eventually flares up and, in her blazing anger, imperatively calls upon Jupiter in his avenging role:

> nunc summe toto Iuppiter caelo tona,
> intende dextram, vindices flammas para
> omnemque ruptis nubibus mundum quate. [531-3]

Medea appears formidable and mighty as she commands the king of the gods, respectfully addressing him as highest (*summe*), yet speaking to him in the manner of an equal. Her confidence and audacity here make it clear that she believes right and justice are on her side, as indeed it proves to be by the end of this play, in the form of Medea herself.[446] She makes a similar grand assertion of her powers a few lines earlier, boldly declaring to Jason her superiority over Fortune: *Fortuna semper omnis infra me stetit* (520).[447]

It is only now that Medea finally begins to form the details of her revenge: this is further evidence that she is not completely evil throughout, since she has not had the murder of her sons in mind all along. While talking with Jason, she realises that his vulnerable point (*vulneri locus*, 550) is their children, when he forbids Medea to take them with her into exile, as he cannot bear to be parted from them (*spiritu citius queam / carere, membris, luce*, 548-9).[448] Once more this shows that Jason does not realise the full capabilities of Medea: if so, he would have been wary to express this so strongly. Even now, it is unlikely that Medea has decided to kill the children, and the idea is certainly not explicitly expressed in the text: it has merely dawned on her that she must attack Jason at this weak point.[449]

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[445] However, Nussbaum (1997) p.230 interprets 518 as evidence that Jason is exhausted. Motto & Clark's assessment, (1993) p.216, of Jason as a "weak, cowardly, passive" man, now lacking the supposed heroism displayed in his voyage, seems more accurate.

[446] Hine's initial suggestion, (2007) p.165, that Jupiter does not respond to her prayers, seems incorrect; his afterthought, that Medea's later vengeance might be an "indirect response" from Jupiter, seems more to the point.

[447] Hine (2007) p.158 interestingly observes that Medea has reverence in praying to the gods, but she also attacks them and is as powerful as them. He discusses, p.164, the Stoic belief that the wise man is superior to fortune.

[448] This can be seen as underscoring Jason's insincerity, since he did not hesitate to leave Hypsipyle, pregnant with his offspring: *Heroides* 6.119ff. Dupont (1997) pp.49-50 believes that another motive for Medea's murder of her boys is that she no longer wants to be reminded of her connection with Jason.

[449] However, Costa (1973) p.119 believes that she here conceives the idea and then it lies dormant until later: as he himself concedes, it would be rather an oversight on her part, and poor characterisation on Seneca's, if she forgot such an evil plan for another few hundred lines. We must beware of reading hints of this momentous act as indicative of Medea's plan, merely because of our

Having found a solution for her vengeance, Medea's approach instantly alters: she immediately ceases the battle of wills, and calmly requests a last day to bid farewell to her sons. She also becomes apologetic for her previous aggressive behaviour: of course, she is cleverly feigning this attitude in order to trick Jason into believing that he has won this argument, successfully playing on his arrogance now that she realises she has regained the upper hand.[450] His final patronising and insensitive words make it evident that he has been deceived:

> precorque et ipse, fervidam ut mentem regas
> placideque tractes: miserias lenit quies. [558-9][451]

Medea will, of course, ignore this request and make Jason regret his dismissive treatment of her: shocked that Jason seems to have so conveniently cast her aside and forgotten her, she utters more threats, spurring herself on:

> ...excidimus tibi?
> numquam excidemus.[452] hoc age,[453] omnis advoca
> vires et artes... [561-3].

It is probable that Seneca based this scene between Medea and Jason, at least in part, on the corresponding sequence in Euripides. However, the Roman tragedian has compressed several Euripidean scenes into a single one in his briefer play, since the Greek version contains two meetings between the heroine and hero, with intervening scenes containing the chorus and Aegeus.[454] There are other notable similarities and differences in the portrayal of the meeting. The most striking difference is that the Euripidean Jason is an even more unsympathetic, insensitive and arrogant character:[455] the

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knowledge from other accounts: it seems far more probable, as Costa eventually acknowledges, that she only plans to take them away from him at this point, if she has any plan in mind at all.

[450] Boyle (1988) p.95 recognises this as an example of a character becoming an actor before another character as audience. Mendell (1968) p.118 comments that this quick change of attitude could not be convincing except to a smug and, by implication, foolish character like Jason.

[451] Hine (2007) p.166 aptly terms this "shallow sententiousness".

[452] Fitch & McElduff (2002) p.31, n.29, cite 561-2 as proof that Medea's self-construction is intended to prove her existence to herself and others, after Creon and Jason have treated her as a "non-person".

[453] Costa (1973) p.120 comments on the apt sinister undertones present in the phrase *hoc age*, which was uttered during Roman sacrifices at the moment of the victim's slaughter.

[454] The first meeting begins at line 456; the chorus sing at 627; Aegeus enters at 663; the chorus and Medea address each other from 759; the chorus sing again at 824; Jason and Medea confront each other once more at 866.

[455] Nussbaum (1997) p.230 rightly notes that Seneca's Jason is more appealing than Euripides' version; however, Seneca has not portrayed a man "believably worthy of Medea"; nor does Jason win

Senecan hero seems more clueless than heartless next to his haughty Euripidean predecessor, who harshly chides Medea as if she is a naughty child: however, it is likely that Seneca took Jason's foolish attitude of expecting Medea to be grateful for banishment from this arrogant version of the hero. Although this does not increase sympathy for the Roman version of Jason, it does therefore seem that the Euripidean Medea possibly deserves more sympathy than our heroine, with respect to her husband's attitude. In response to this harsher treatment, and despite the forceful rage of the Senecan Medea, the Euripidean Medea is naturally more defensive and angry as soon as she speaks to Jason: while the Senecan Jason's first thoughtless words about Medea were spoken without her present, the Euripidean Jason launches into abusing his former wife immediately upon meeting her. However, it is evident that both Medeas are more than capable of forcefully presenting their side of the argument. Many of the topics Seneca uses in their altercation also seem to have been lifted from the Euripidean version: for example, in a long rant, the Euripidean Medea recounts her deeds on Jason's behalf, to remind him of his debt to her, and she reproaches Jason for his ingratitude in a more scathing manner, before pointedly asking him where he expects her to go, now that she has given up everything in order to advance him. A significant difference is that the Euripidean Jason haughtily counters Medea's rant with a long argument of his own, which makes him appear more an equal of Medea; this is unlike the Roman version, since there Jason and Medea enter into brief exchanges immediately after Medea's long speech, suggesting that the hero of the Roman tragedy is more meek than his predecessor,[456] whom we imagine would have been too proud to accept Medea's abusive tirade without responding.

In some ways, Seneca's Medea can be seen as more deserving of our sympathy because of her circumstances: she truly is abandoned with nowhere to go and no one to turn to; the Euripidean Medea, on the other hand, secures a safe haven for herself with Aegeus in Athens. This is an opportunity which Seneca's Medea does not have, and Jason will not allow her to keep the boys, so she is forced into a predicament and situation of complete isolation.[457] The murder of Medea's children as an act of revenge in the Greek tragedy, in light of the two comparable situations, thus

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the reader's sympathy. Jouan's view (1986) p.7 suggests that Seneca has rehabilitated the character; admittedly, he is not "macho" like his unsympathetic Euripidean counterpart.

[456] Henry & Walker (1967) pp.169-70 amusingly refer to Jason as a "human fly" because of his insubstantiality as a character and, particularly, because of Medea's contemptuous treatment of him.

[457] Abrahamsen (1999) pp.116-17 notes that children would usually remain with the non-citizen parent in a marriage without *conubium* (see above, n.353), so Jason's demands violate normal practice.

seems superfluous and purely motivated by spite, especially as she instantaneously decides upon her plan for revenge after Aegeus has promised her refuge: it does not even seem that she has had time to plan this. Furthermore, she is not motivated by realisation that the sons are Jason's vulnerable point: indeed, Euripides' Jason does not display much regard towards them.[458] It seems that, in Seneca's version, Medea is trapped with no way out and nothing to lose, and is acting responsively to her situation, rather than deceitfully scheming all along. We also see the same ironic hints about the children that feature in the Senecan tragedy, during the argument between Jason and Medea in Euripides. The Senecan Medea's absolute ostracism is further emphasised by the chorus: in Euripides, they are present during the argument between the couple, and interject to lend their support to Medea, even wishing afterwards that Jason will meet the ruin he deserves; in Seneca the chorus is not in the scene between Medea and Jason but, if they were, we can be certain that their hostility towards Medea would undoubtedly make them side with Jason.

It is in the second Euripidean scene with Jason that we witness Medea feigning apology and flattering his proud nature by obsequiously responding as he would wish: in both plays the foolish man is easily manipulated by such deception. This is a scene from which Seneca is likely to have derived inspiration for the corresponding sequence in his play: however, at this point, Euripides' calculating heroine has planned her revenge exactly, but the Senecan Medea behaves in this way only once she realises she has found a weak point in Jason, and before she has worked out a plot for retribution: she reacts rather than plans ahead. Although the Roman Medea identifies Jason's weak point as the children, she does not appear to have formulated a plan which encompasses their deaths: after Jason leaves the stage, the only familiar piece of her revenge that she mentions is her plot to send her sons to Creusa with the poisoned gifts. There is only the most veiled of allusions to the murders, which the audience may perceive: this is when she commands herself on to an unknown action which even she is not capable of, addressing herself imperatively in the third person:[459]

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[458] Although at 557ff. Jason speaks of bringing up his offspring, including new children by Creusa, it does not seem that he has his children's interest at heart, like the Roman Jason does: Costa (1973) p.112; similarly, Hine (2007) p.158 comments that Euripides' Jason is more detached.

[459] Dupont (1997) p.37 interestingly notes that the third person address is not a mere rhetorical conceit, but indication of Medea's dual personality, which she interprets as her humanity and inhumanity. Fyfe (1983) p.80 alternatively considers this to be evidence of Medea distancing herself from her crimes, and thus her guilt over them, especially her familial ones: she views it as a process whereby Medea eventually can place herself in the role of avenger of her brother's murder; see below pp.145-7.

...hac aggredere, qua nemo potest

quicquam timere. perge, nunc aude, incipe

quidquid potest Medea, quidquid non potest. [565-7][460]

A further important difference in the Euripidean text is that the children are characters on stage: this can act both to increase and decrease our pity for the heroines. We see the Euripidean heroine battle at length with her maternal feelings as she struggles to force herself towards the act upon which she has decided, with her tears displaying that she does care deeply for her sons: indeed, the scene where the tutor reports that the treacherous gifts have been accepted by Creusa, and she has agreed to let the boys stay, is a particularly poignant one, as Medea considers the cruel irony of the situation that will bring both that which she desires and that which will cause her the utmost grief. It seems particularly cruel that Medea first employs the children as tools to engineer the downfall of her love rival, by having them take the poisoned gifts to Creusa, although in Seneca this is only briefly mentioned (575-6), while Euripides' Medea elaborates extensively on this plan (784ff.).[461] We witness less of an emotional struggle in Seneca's tragedy since there is little interaction with the children, and therefore we do not see such hesitation and battle of emotions. On the other hand, since the boys are only briefly present in the Roman text, they are not at all personalised, and Medea's role as a mother is kept to a minimum:[462] thus, in some ways she can be considered less of a monster than Euripides' heroine who, having planned ahead, faces her children, deliberates over her evil plan, and nevertheless carries it out.[463]

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[460] Henry & Walker (1967) p.177 quote 566-7 in a list of examples (424-5, 428-9, 744-5, 900) where Medea speaks "megalomaniac utterances", suggesting that these are without substance and merely to affirm her own existence and identity to herself: however, Medea clearly demonstrates her abilities. Roisman (2005) p.83 believes that Medea demonstrates "power-hunger and egotistical possessiveness". Kubiak (1989) pp.19-20 equates Medea's "law-destroying violence" with terrorism, which he believes is not realised until the scenes of infanticide.

[461] Guastella (2001) p.209, especially n.35, comments on the lesser attention paid to the murders of Creon and Creusa compared with that of the children, in Seneca. Admittedly, the text always appears to be leading up to the infanticide, but Guastella perhaps slightly overstates his point: there is very little psychological exploration in the murders of the King and his daughter, since Medea has no qualms about carrying these out; however, in its place is the very long witchcraft section, which Seneca has also been eagerly anticipating, as Guastella recognises.

[462] Braund (2002) pp.184-5 believes that the absence of the children in Seneca's version makes his Medea appear more self-absorbed, especially in her self-debate.

[463] Roisman (2005) p.83 has overlooked some of these points in her rather unbalanced analysis of the two Medeas, in favour of viewing the Senecan Medea as inherently evil.

To return to the Roman tragedy, after the scene between Jason and Medea, there is a long choral ode of 90 lines which contains two main themes. Firstly, listing many elemental forces of nature, they sing that there is not one that can compete with the anger of a woman scorned,[464] reminding us that Medea is a rival to nature:[465] this concept can be found in Euripides' *Medea*, where the heroine herself comments that there is none more bloodthirsty than a wronged wife (265f.), although there the description is considerably more tame and Seneca's striving to excess displays typical Silver Age rhetorical practice.[466] In an implicit reference to Medea's current emotional state, they note that no force is as mighty, *quanta cum coniunx viduata taedis / ardet et odit* (581-2)[467] and comment on the blind fire of anger controlling her: *caecus est ignis stimulatus ira* (591). The majority of the ode, however, is devoted to Jason's transgression of natural boundaries, in his act of the first sailing across the seas: the chorus consider his bold act of taming the sea as impious and potentially offensive to the gods, recounting the punishments that other Argonauts have endured, praying that their dear Jason should be forgiven and spared.[468] The two topics of the ode are linked by the theme of nature, of which Medea is implied to be a mighty force, greater than any other.[469] Thus Seneca once more establishes that the act of vengeance that Medea is about to embark upon is not only a form of personal revenge, but a divine act of retribution where she is the agent of justice. Near the close of the ode (664-7), the chorus also mentions Pelias, in his role as instigator of this impious voyage: they believe that the unpleasant end that he met, through Medea's wily machinations, is the punishment for originating this unlawful journey.[470] The chorus clearly hold Pelias at fault since, in their prayer to

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[464] Costa (1974b) p.106 cites this as evidence that the Senecan chorus functions in the same way as the Euripidean one, moralising in general terms on themes of the play, and thus placing the characters onto a wider background of mythology.

[465] Hine (2007) p.168 notes how this picks up the wider theme of Medea's powers over nature. Throughout his commentary on this ode, pp.167-75, he detects links with, and allusions to, Medea and her myth.

[466] Hine (2007) p.168 observes how Seneca has made Medea's strength, which is mightier than the forces of nature, even more powerful, by amplifying the description of a woman's anger in Euripides. See Chapter 1, p.71, on *Ars Amatoria* 2.373ff., comparing a woman scorned to a wild animal.

[467] Henderson (1983) p.96 makes interesting comments on the sounds and alliteration of lines 579-82.

[468] Costa (1973) p.121 considers the chorus as describing the act as a crime against cosmic laws; he notes the tone of doom which arises from the rhetorical catalogue of the Argonauts' suffering.

[469] Fyfe (1983) pp.88 goes further in considering her an "anti-civilisation", noting, pp.88, 90, that Jason, in beginning the voyage and using Medea along the way, unleashed a force that could not be controlled: thus responsibility can be traced back to him.

[470] Segal (1983) pp.240-1 reads much symbolism into the three lines on Pelias' death, mentioning the "narrow waves" (*angustas...undas*, 667), which can be considered a reversal of the wide seas that the Argonauts conquered at his command. He considers the narrow waters as an allusion to childbirth, recalling that Medea's cauldron was supposed to be Pelias' place of rebirth; he views this as a reminder of Medea's ultimate triumph, her revenge through infanticide, and thus sees her power as a mother and woman to be all-conquering, since she triumphs over this man and Jason. Although this is

protect Jason, they comment that he was merely acting under his orders, which also unintentionally underscores his weakness as a hero.[471] Thus it is possible to view Medea as administering justice in this too, thereby exonerating her in some measure from his murder.[472]

However, this choral ode has an important function, other than the themes it contains: it acts as a bridge between Medea considering her revenge, and Medea carrying out her revenge. Indeed, her character in this play can be split into two distinct halves, and the division can be noted at this point. Throughout the first half of the play, Medea is predominantly an angry woman scorned, but she is emphatically a woman: Seneca has so far presented her as a human being susceptible to overwhelming emotions, as all her ranting has displayed. However, her final words before the choral ode contain ominously dark tones: commandingly, she calls upon Hecate, her protecting goddess who has connections with the underworld, and initiates rituals that are associated with this goddess: *vocetur Hecate. sacra letifica appara* (577).[473] Just as in the opening speech of the play, where she similarly summoned dark gods to her side, this utterance contains tones of foreboding and hints at the atmosphere to come when we next meet her.[474] Up until this point, however, there has been very little indication of Medea's darker aspects: she has certainly acted as a formidable woman but, aside from her bold addresses to the gods, she has appeared human.[475] Thus the two allusions that Seneca does make to her darker side in the first half of the play can be seen to frame this section, where Medea the woman is the protagonist.

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a tempting theory, picking up wider themes of the play, it seems to stretch the three lines too far. Griffiths (2006) p.46 also recognises the cauldron as having symbolic associations with female regenerative powers.

[471] Hine (2007) p.175. As Henderson (1983) pp.108-10 notes, blaming Pelias is wishful thinking by the chorus: they hope that Medea's wrath has been spent on him, so that Jason is not in danger.

[472] Lawall (1979) p.425 considers Medea to be an unwitting agent of Neptune already for this act.

[473] On Medea's associations with Hecate, see Chapter 1, n.84.

[474] Costa (1973) p.121.

[475] Therefore Henderson's view, (1983) p.94, that to consider that Medea was ever a human being in the play is a misreading of Seneca's text, seems erroneous; similarly, Berry (1996) over-emphasises Medea's monstrous side and, p.9, judges her as lacking vulnerability. Costa's opinion is more accurate, (1973) p.9, that the play is an exploration of Medea's case for sympathy: indeed, it seems that Seneca's intention was to test his rhetorical skills to discover if this notorious female monster could evoke any pity from an audience, while presenting her at her very worst. Henderson is, of course, correct that Medea is a mighty elemental force, but this aspect of her emerges as the play progresses, and it is after this ode, which he discusses, that this side of her becomes unmistakable; he usefully summarises the elemental aspects of the Medea myth, as given in Seneca's text, p.99.

When we return to Medea, after the choral ode, we find that she has undergone a transformation into a witch. The metamorphosis was instigated by her discovery of the method for attacking Jason: as soon as she realised that the children were his weak point, her approach altered and, now that we have reached the second half of the play, we realise that this moment was the beginning of her transformation into an almost completely new character. Seneca delays presenting her to his audience after the ode, in order to increase the audience's anticipation: firstly he has her terrified nurse (*pavet animus, horret*, 670) describe the state of her mistress. This serves as a suitable introduction, in which Seneca can build up the depiction of his heroine-turned-sorceress, whetting the audience's appetite to meet this strange figure, and to view the scene which is his pièce de résistance: Medea's incantation. We learn from the nurse that Medea's behaviour surpasses anything that she has previously exhibited: it exceeds both that which we have witnessed in the first half of the play, and anything which the nurse, her close confidante, has ever experienced:

> immane quantum augescit et semet dolor
> accendit ipse vimque praeteritam integrat.
> vidi furentem saepe et aggressam deos,[476]
> caelum trahentem: maius his, maius parat
> Medea monstrum...[477] [671-5]

However, in this introduction there is little sign of Medea the witch, aside from her drawing down the heavens, an often-depicted ability of witches:[478] the nurse essentially here describes a woman in an extremely heightened emotional state, with disproportionate reactions to her unfortunate circumstances. The nurse fears where her mistress's unrestrained behaviour will lead, as the repeated *maius* emphasises, and yet she still appears to remain loyal to, and express concern for, Medea in her increased state of grief. Seneca is making it clear that Medea is especially formidable and frightening in her current state, since even the nurse, the only person in the play to have shown any genuine

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[476] Hine (2007) p.177 reads "attacking the gods" as an indication of her magic: during their rites, witches call on deities of the underworld and seek to control the gods of the upper world.

[477] Hine (2007) p.177 observes the "m" alliteration in these lines connecting the words *Medea*, *monstrum* and *maius*. See n.392 above, on Medea as *monstrum*. Griffiths (2006) p.97 notes that the interplay between Medea's name, *mater*, *malum* and *monstrum* reflects the complexity of her character.

[478] Costa (1973) p.129 lists literary passages containing witches with this skill. Especially relevant here is the ability of Ovid's Medea to draw down the moon (*Metamorphoses* 7.207 and *Heroides* 6.85-6, see Chapter 1, pp.25, 58-9, n.104), and Valerius' Medea was later given this attribute (*Argonautica* 7.330, see Chapter 3, p.193). Hill discusses (1973) the "Thessalian trick" in detail.

degree of care for her, is apparently overwhelmed by her reactions. Furthermore, Seneca emphasises the excessive actions by describing Medea resorting to measures she would have avoided before:

> ...quidquid diu
> etiam ipsa timuit promit atque omnem explicat
> turbam malorum... [677-9]

The nurse's use of the present tense enlivens the scene in these lines, and signifies its vividness to her.[479] It is clear that Medea intends to outdo her previous actions, and the nurse quotes her mistress's self-hortatory declaration that she plans to do so:

> "...iam iam tempus est
> aliquid movere fraude vulgari altius". [692-3]

With the mention of Medea's *turbam malorum*, the nurse begins to elaborate on the details of this host of evils, and Medea's recent metamorphosis into a witch becomes apparent to the audience for the first time. Firstly, we are informed that Medea's evil side is emerging: she prepares a ritual with her *laeva manu* (680), the left hand being traditionally ill-omened;[480] and she summons furious plagues, or destruction, (*pestes ferventis*, 681) and every monster (*omne monstrum*, 684). In a typical device of the Silver Age, Seneca has the nurse narrate a catalogue of excessively ghoulish items and creatures. We learn that, with her incantations, Medea invokes fantastic serpentine beasts, characteristic of the most horrific of witches:[481]

> squamifera latebris turba desertis adest.
> hic saeva serpens corpus immensum trahit
> trifidamque linguam exertat et quaerit quibus
> mortifera veniat; carmine audito stupet... [685-8]

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[479] Costa (1973) p.129. Boyle (1997) p.130 discusses Medea's theatrical isolation in 690-704, making the nurse herself the audience; Hine (2007) pp.176-8 considers the possibility that the nurse was describing events currently happening on stage before the audience. He also notes that the word *explicat* suggests the deployment of troops for an offensive.

[480] Costa (1973) p.129.

[481] Nussbaum (1997) pp.234-40, 248-9 recognises the importance of snake imagery throughout the play: however, its function is perhaps less complex than her interpretation, pp.235-6, that it represents Medea's love, anger, anger of her love, the cycle of passion, crime, retribution, final triumph, and even Medea herself. Medea's ability to summon snakes with spells is used as an example of the power of Medea's language by Fyfe (1983) pp.82-3.

As well as the sorceress's association with such repellent monsters, it is significant that this serpent is under her control: her power is so great that she has dominance over such unruly beasts,[482] and this is an ability that she has possessed since her youth, when she controlled the serpent guarding the Golden Fleece. Furthermore, the serpent is a monster seeking victims to kill: Medea is thus not only associated with death-bringing creatures,[483] but has power over them and, therefore, can be considered as having similar power over life and death. A further indication of magic can be found in the snake's typical three-forked tongue: the number three traditionally has magical associations, and therefore often features in such rhetorical lists of magical characters.

No description of a witch would be complete without the inclusion of the many weird and wonderful ingredients she uses in her magic: since this text was written in the Silver Age, with its tendency towards overblown rhetoric, Seneca relishes the opportunity to compile a long and elaborate catalogue, of 25 lines, on the noxious herbs that Medea uses.[484] These are attributed with bloody and deathly associations, and hail from numerous distant and often uninhabitable foreign lands, representing the furthest reaches of the known world, and making them seem exotic and strange. Seneca effectively turns a mundane list of plants into a catalogue of goriness that adds to the tone of the passage, thereby enhancing Medea's frightening aspects, for example:

> quodcumque gramen flore mortifero viret,
> dirusve tortis sucus in radicibus
> causas nocendi gignit, attrectat manu. [717-19]

This list of weird herbs must, at least in part, derive from the one found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Medea is gathering herbs to prepare a magic potion.[485] Similarly, the nurse includes a

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[482] Segal observes, (1983) p.238, that Medea is presented as a *monstrum* who conquers *monstra*, making her comparable with Hercules; see above n.392. Hine (2007) p.178 discusses this conventional magic skill.

[483] Fyfe (1983) p.82 comments on the repeated use of *mortifera/o* in the nurse's speech, and its interweaving with words of production and generation: she views a parallel with what she terms Medea's "perversion": her destruction of the sons to whom she gave life. Similarly, Boyle (2006) p.209 and (1988) p.95 notes a Senecan interest in the paradox that what creates or gives life, destroys it: Medea seems the ultimate example.

[484] Hine (2007) p.176 notes Seneca's fondness for such lists.

[485] *Metamorphoses* 7.223-33; see Chapter 1, p.26. However, there the locations are all in Greece, with several in Thessaly, the land of witches: Hine (2007) p.180. As Costa (1973) p.133 comments, these strange sounding names emphasise the large repertoire of herbs to which Medea has access.

surprisingly brief, but no less macabre, description of Medea's use of creatures' entrails in her magic concoction, another fundamental element in the depiction of a witch:

> mortifera carpit gramina ac serpentium
>
> saniem exprimit miscetque et obscenas aves
>
> maestique cor bubonis et raucae strigis
>
> exsecta vivae viscera... [731-4]

The harsh "s" alliteration of these lines, creating the impression that the words are hissed, and possibly representing the creatures' cries of pain, adds to the atmosphere of horror as Medea tortures conventionally sinister live animals so that she can create her poison. It should be noted that Ovid similarly portrayed Medea using the screech-owl as a victim for her concoction.[486]

Finally, labelling her mistress a *scelerum artifex* (734), the nurse presents to us the climax of the scene: the crazed Medea herself, singing a frenzied incantation.[487] Thus, after the nurse's 65 lines elaborating on Medea's current state, the witch scene and all its associated imagery is extended even further, by the sorceress herself, for another 100 lines: Seneca clearly enjoyed embellishing this section, employing his rhetorical training to the full, and hence satisfying the tastes of his Silver Age audience. Medea's words and actions continue to display the characteristic traits of a witch, confirming and amplifying the preceding description by the nurse.[488] From the opening moment of her incantation, it is evident that Medea is intent on death and destruction, as she prays to gods of the underworld:

> comprecor vulgus silentum vosque ferales deos
>
> et Chaos caecum atque opacam Ditis umbrosi domum,

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[486] *Metamorphoses* 7.269; see Chapter 1, p.27. Costa (1973) p.135 briefly discusses the owl.

[487] Costa (1973) p.128 interestingly notes that the incantation scene is unique in extant classical tragedy and, p.136, observes that it can be divided into four sections, praising the monody for its varied pace and themes. Hine (2007) p.184 discusses the division into sections, according to metre, in detail. Boyle (2006) p.197 cites this scene, referring to it as "Medea's black mass", as an example of the "style of shock" which Seneca employs. Butler (1909) pp.46-7 judges the scene as detrimental to the play.

[488] Macintosh (2000) pp.1-2 notes the Senecan Medea's greater ability to perform in, and stage-manage, her play than the Euripidean heroine, whom she designates the "consummate performer"; she comments on the Senecan Medea's performance, especially in relation to the witch passage, which she describes as a play-within-a play and, p.7, as a "thrilling theatrical event".

Tartari ripis ligatos squalidae Mortis specus.

supplicis, animae, remissis currite ad thalamos novos. [740-3][489]

Medea's language is replete with the imagery of death, darkness and destruction that she aims to bring down on the house of Creon, continuing for this purpose, after these lines, to summon to her aid the mythical figures enduring punishment in the underworld.[490] Her wishes seem completely disproportionate to the offence against her, but it must be remembered that she is no ordinary slighted mortal, and she does not understand the concept of compromise:[491] she is a divine sorceress who has been offended and underestimated and, where her pride as a woman would not allow this to pass unavenged, her nature as a witch will not allow the revenge to be anything but mighty and both worthy of, and exceeding, her reputation for evil-doing.[492]

To this end, she continues with her ritual, demonstrating her formidable powers over all nature. Seneca portrays her in the typical manner of a witch, able to reverse the forces of nature and effectively turn the cosmos upside down.[493] Once more the tragedian has spared no detail in his rhetorical tour-de-force, and I quote only a few lines here:

et evocavi[494] nubibus siccis aquas

egique ad imum maria…

pariterque mundus lege confusa aetheris

et solem et astra vidit et vetitum mare

tetigistis, ursae. temporum flexi vices. [754-5, 757-9][495]

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[489] Costa (1973) p.137 observes the tone of "frenzied or sinister excitement" and that the steady rhythmic pound creates an impressive opening for Medea's incantation. Kubiak (1989) p.18 quotes 740-7 to illustrate Medea's attempts to overturn myth, since it is related to law.

[490] Costa (1973) p.138 comments on the aptness of including the Danaids in this list, since they were punished for killing their husbands on their wedding night. Similarly, Hine (2007) p.185 observes that Ixion, Tantalus and the Danaids all killed relatives, and so are appropriate here.

[491] Dupont (1997) p.48. Zerba (2002) p.320, discussing Euripides' Medea, comments that Jason has done nothing of great magnitude wrong in the eyes of Greek society; however, we should remember that, to the semi-divine barbarian Medea, the offence is massive. See n.322 on Jason's oath-breaking.

[492] Rambaux (1972) p.1028 notes that the magic scene does not just serve the tastes of the age, nor simply follow tradition but, importantly, symbolises the terrifying power of this heroine.

[493] Garelli-François (1996) p.193, in reference to these powers, rather strongly labels Medea a "mistress of Chaos" who threatens to bring hell to earth. Pratt (1948) p.4 describes Medea's rage as rising "in crescendo to a frenzied madness which allies itself with everything evil in nature and destroys all in its path".

[494] Fyfe (1983) p.83 lists this among Medea's phrases demonstrating her control of nature through language: see n.357 above.

Medea's bold declarations contain much cosmic imagery and it appears that she does, indeed, have power over everything. Seneca's thorough style, although overstated, conveys the sense of Medea's boundless might most effectively. Raving, Medea persists with her rites, dedicating them to Phoebe, who was identified with Medea's protecting goddess, Hecate.[496] In a list which Seneca appears to use in order to exhibit his mythological knowledge, Medea offers the goddess many items of a gruesome nature.[497] The change in metre for this list seems to signify Medea's chanting ritual.[498] Examples of the imagery include blood (*cruenta manu*, 771;[499] *vectoris perfidi sanguis*, 775; *sanguineo caespite*, 797); fire (*facem ultricis*, 779-80; *fax* 800); death (*cinere defecit rogus*, 777; *medio sepulcro*, 799; *funereo*, 802; *Stygia unda*, 804-5); poison (*virus*, 778); snakes and magically associated numbers[500] (*novena serpens ligat*, 772); mythical monsters (*Harpyia*, 782); body parts (*membra*, 773; *pinnas sauciae Stymphalidos*, 783); night (*pleno lucida vultu pernox*, 788-9; *nocturnos ignes*, 800); dark and light (*lurida*, 790; *tristem pallida lucem*, 793).[501] This list of offerings is yet another aspect of Medea's ritual, full of magical and macabre associations, maintaining the atmosphere of the scene. There is one item on the list that has particular significance:

> piae sororis, impiae matris, facem
>
> ultricis Althaeae vides. [779-80]

The torch of Althaea refers to a myth, narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,[502] and also picks up an earlier reference to the tale by the chorus:

> ...fratrem, Meleagre, matris
>
> impius mactas morerisque dextra
>
> matris iratae... [644-6]

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[495] Kubiak (1989) p.22 cites 757-9 as evidence that Medea's assault on law has struck at the base of "power and order and being"; he concludes, p.27, that she seeks to destroy all powers which have oppressed her.

[496] Since one of Hecate's roles was as Luna, Costa (1973) p.140 attributes the omission of the drawing down of the moon from Medea's magical skills to Hecate being her addressee: see n.478 above on this tradition; on Hecate's associations with the moon, see Rabinowitz (1998) pp.43-58.

[497] Hine (2007) p.176 observes that Medea is very thorough in carrying out her rituals, despite her limitations of one day.

[498] On this, see Hine (2007) pp.184; interestingly, p.189, he observes that the metre is the same as that of Horace's *Epodes*, including the one on witchcraft.

[499] Hine (2007) p.189 remarks that her bloodstained hands, while suitable for her magic, would be considered ill-omened elsewhere.

[500] Costa (1973) p.142 remarks here that multiples of three are the ritual number *par excellence*; Hine (2007) p.189 gives references to further discussions on magic numbers.

[501] The full notes in Costa (1973) pp.142ff. and Hine (2007) pp.189ff. explain the mythology here.

[502] 8.445-525.

Althaea's son Meleager killed her brothers and, in revenge, she burned his life-giving fire-brand, knowing that this would end his life. Seneca chose to use this tale since it has even greater resonance in the Medea legend than the reference to a *matris iratae*, which can equally be applied to Medea.[503] Medea's brother Absyrtus was killed either by the heroine or by Jason, with her assistance, in order to aid their escape from Colchis: Medea vaguely refers to this earlier in the text, but the murderer is not explicitly declared.[504] As we shall later see, when Medea comes to murder her sons, similarly in a revenge attack, it is the thought of her murdered brother that spurs her onwards to this horrific crime. It should also be noted that the chorus consider Althaea's murder of her son to be a justified revenge attack (*meruere*, 646): the death of a brother was considered worse than the death of a child since offspring were replaceable.[505] Therefore, by association, this implies that Medea's vengeful murder of her sons will also be justified in some measure, which maintains the idea of Medea as divine agent of retribution against Jason.

Medea's physical description of herself also adds to the themes of the imagery and simultaneously enhances the atmosphere. She depicts herself exhibiting crazed behaviour on behalf of her patron goddess:[506]

> tibi mota caput flexa voces
>
> cervice dedi,
>
> tibi funereo de more[507] iacens

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[503] Costa (1973) p.143. He also detects reminiscences of Ovid *Metamorphoses* 8.475-7:

> *incipit esse tamen melior germana parente.*
> *et, consanguineas ut sanguine leniat umbras,*
> *impietate pia est...*

Line 779 perhaps also contains an echo of the Peliades episode in the Medea section of *Metamorphoses* 7.339: see Chapter 1, p.31. See also Hine (2007) pp.173, 190.

[504] At 125 Medea says of Jason: *utinam esset illi frater!* She encourages herself with her former crimes a few lines later, including 131-3: *...nefandae virginis parvus comes*
divisus ense, funus ingestum patri
sparsumque ponto corpus...
Addressing Jason to remind him of deeds committed in his interest, at 473 she says: *...traditum fratrem neci...*

[505] Bremmer (2007) p.99 records the appearance of this idea in Sophocles' *Antigone*, and previously in Herodotus; see also Visser (1986) pp.152-3, and p.161, n.17. Abrahamsen (1999) pp.116-18 views Medea as forced into choosing the status of daughter and sister, since she has been robbed of her role as wife and mother. Bremmer notes, p.100, how Medea's murder of her brother severs all family ties. Purkiss (2000) pp.35-6 observes that this view was held in the Renaissance period, adding that Medea's murder of her only brother also kills off her father's line; she makes the interesting connection between this "castration" and the one Medea performs later on Jason: see below, pp.151-2.

[506] She addresses this to Phoebe (770), who can be identified with Hecate: see Rabinowitz (1998) pp.43-58, Hine (2007) p.127, and n.496 above.

passos cingit vitta capillos…

tibi nudato pectore maenas

sacro feriam bracchia cultro. [801-3; 806-7]

Besides this open demonstration of frenzy, Medea underscores her madness by referring to herself as a maenad: as we have seen,[508] this is a comparison frequently employed by writers in the depiction of women crazed, whether by grief, anger or some other emotion. The actions of baring her breast and slashing at herself are also reminiscent of a woman at the height of her grief.[509] Furthermore, in the words addressed to her hands, requesting that they become used to shedding her own blood (*assuesce, manus, stringere ferrum / carosque pati posse cruores*, 809-10), the audience detects irony in Medea's unknowing allusion to the approaching murder of her own sons.[510]

Medea's feral nature is emphasised throughout her self-portrayal. Her movements and the sounds she emits are reminiscent of a wild animal:[511] this is also an example of stock imagery employed for the description of a woman in the grip of madness, symbolising her abandonment of civilised human behaviour. Medea's actions are emphasised as more uncivilised still: her lack of restraint can also be discerned in her dishevelled hair (*passos capillos*), since this is loose and flowing, rather than in a neat hairstyle. As she earlier explained, this is habitual for her people: *tibi more gentis vinculo solvens comam* (752).[512] This is one of the few references to her barbarian and, therefore, uncivilised background. Medea also notes that she walks about barefoot (*nudo pede*, 753), which is another reflection of her wildness and lack of control in her appearance. Medea, particularly as she appears in

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[507] On the basis of these words, Costa (1973) p.145 suggests that the headband is entwined with cypress leaves, because of their association with death.

[508] See p.112 and n.421 above.

[509] Costa (1973) p.145 comments that this is also the ritual action of worshippers of Bellona, the war-goddess; see below, p.205, on Valerius' comparison of Medea with Bellona (7.635ff.).

[510] Costa (1973) p.145.

[511] Relevant here are the horrid animal noises which Erictho emits as she performs her necromancy, which Ogden (2001) p.229 discusses. Lucan was writing his epic in the same period as his uncle, so we cannot be certain whether he was influenced by Seneca's *Medea* or vice versa. The heightened excess in the depiction of Erictho possibly makes her the most hideous Silver Age witch: Ogden (2008) pp.51-5 and (2001) pp.xxix-xxx, 144-5 offers detailed discussions of the maleficent creature.

[512] It is uncertain whether this means the Colchian race or witches: Costa (1973) p.140; as Hine has noted, (2007) p.1873, witches did not generally consider themselves as part of a group and, besides, Medea is in a league of her own. Costa also notes that this depiction of unrestrained behaviour is characteristic of magic rites, since in ancient times it was held that those involved should be free of constrictions; Hine traces the image back to that of Canidia in Horace *Sermones* 1.8.24: *pedibus nudis passoque capillo*.

this sorceress scene, is thus a contradiction: while having power and control over all of nature, she simultaneously is an example of an unrestrained wild creature that cannot be tamed.[513] It is such inexplicable dichotomies which instilled further fear in men: she is presented as a confusing and incomprehensible enigma.

Before addressing Hecate with the real reason for her prayer, Medea makes an apology for invoking her too often: within this, Medea inserts a bitter comment that Jason is completely responsible for this (814ff.), thereby displaying her ongoing concern with culpability for the actions that she has been forced to take, and simultaneously diverting any divine anger onto him.[514] Finally she gets to the point and makes her cruel request to Hecate. Medea details the horrific fires, originating from mythological beasts and figures, which are latent in the garments she sends to her love rival.[515] Her appeal to Hecate seeks that the goddess should increase (*adde*, 833) the poisons in order to cause maximum harm to Creusa:

> meet in pectus venasque calor,
> stillent artus ossaque fument
> vincatque suas flagrante coma
> nova nupta faces. [836-9]

Here, Medea again appears as the woman scorned and displays a completely vindictive nature: in her desire to punish Creusa, she is behaving disproportionately in her excessive wish to have her cruelly tortured, merely because she has dared to be a rival for Jason's affections. Medea verges on hysteria as she calls this punishment down upon her enemy, and this extreme nature must surely be evidence that she is no mere slighted woman, but a divine being who should never have been crossed. In Medea's fantasy ending for Creusa, soon to be played out, the girl will suffer a gory and agonising death, compatible with the macabre tastes of the Silver Age.[516] Indeed, Seneca has taken the description to such a height, in his attempt to depict Medea's unrestrained evil, that the imagery

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[513] Segal (1983) p.238 notes that Medea embodies the two extremes of culture and nature.
[514] Hine (2007) p.193.
[515] Du Bois (1991) p.147, in reference to the Medea and Deianeira myths in general, rather imaginatively suggests that such poisons smeared on robes are symbolic representations of female sexual liquids, and therefore the danger of the female body.
[516] Hine (2007) p.194 remarks that this anticipatory description functions in place of the messenger's report, which is so brief in this play.

verges on comic: we imagine Creusa as a human match, with her hair ablaze, when Medea expresses her hope that the girl will outshine her wedding torches.[517] Of course, this is cruel, but Seneca's attempts to outdo himself, in the depiction of gruesome imagery, leads to such humorous effects. Creusa does not deserve such harsh punishment, if any at all, since she is an innocent pawn in the male leaders' games of political marriage: her character is not developed at all in this play, featuring only secondarily through reports, and we understand that she is married off to Jason at her father's will, since it is in his interests to make such a union. Creusa has merely had the extreme misfortune to get caught up in the cross-fire between a weak hero and his formidable sorceress ex-wife.

Similarly cruel is Medea's use of her children in these games: once she has received an affirmative sign from Hecate that her plans are divinely sanctioned, in feigned supplication she sends the boys with the murderous gifts to Creusa and, in thus involving them, endangers their lives. Medea asks her sons to return promptly so that she may enjoy a last embrace (*ultimo amplexu ut fruar*, 848),[518] ironically labelling herself their ill-fated (*infaustae*, 845) mother:[519] although we here detect indications of the filicide, there is no evidence in the text yet that this is her intention. Medea's immediate change from a chanting witch into a caring mother appears incongruous: Seneca has not only included this in the same scene as the extensive magic rituals that have just taken place, but also presents no transition, since she simply suddenly stops being a witch.[520] It is uncertain whether this should be attributed to Seneca's weakness as a poet, or whether he intended to depict Medea as so manipulative and evil that she can flick the divine/human switch instantaneously at will.

This Senecan witch certainly appears to owe her influence to Ovid, rather than Euripides: in the Greek text, Medea was barely a witch at all, and remained a woman throughout, with her magic aspects kept to a minimum and scarcely mentioned. However, it is apparent that Seneca derived his inspiration from his more recent predecessor: in the *Metamorphoses*, particularly in her preparation to rejuvenate

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[517] Dupont (1997) p.32, without observing the potential humour, remarks that this is a nuptial torch for Medea's anti-wedding. Seneca perhaps took inspiration from the real, and grim, occurrences of Christians used as human torches by Nero: see Tacitus *Annals* 15.44.
[518] Costa (1973) p.148 comments on the "sinister ambiguity" in the word *ultimo*. Similarly, Hine (2007) p.195 remarks on the funereal sense of the word.
[519] Hine (2007) p.195 records that this word can more aptly mean "bringing ill-fortune".
[520] Although Costa (1973) p.147 suggests a short pause before the children enter the stage.

Aeson,[521] we find over-elaborate descriptions of a deadly and gruesome witch, including the familiar imagery of death, blood, horror and eeriness: fierce and fantastical beasts, weird and wonderful ingredients gathered from the furthest reaches of the world, horrific body parts of strange creatures, and even a cauldron. Both Ovid's and Seneca's Medeas are very similar to the present-day concept of a witch: indeed, the accounts seem to be missing only the black cat and broomstick, although she does have her dragons and chariot.[522] Seneca has taken the Ovidian material and amplified it in order to create a truly evil Medea, who is transformed into a witch. Nevertheless it is unclear whether we should interpret his Medea as worse than Euripides' parallel character: after all, the wicked actions that the Euripidean Medea commit are all undertaken on a purely human level, and thus her deeds can be considered far worse, since they are the acts of a woman and a mother, rather than a divine figure removed from the mortal realm, with its laws and rules of behaviour.[523]

Although the incantation scene is the crowning glory of the play, with its elaborate and excessive descriptions, and clearly one that Seneca relished creating, we have not reached the climax of the action: Medea has attained evil heights of intention, but has merely spoken wicked words and has not yet performed any actions. Before the play moves to the outcome of her conduct, we have a brief and welcome moment of respite from her intensity, with the intervening choral ode. In this ode the chorus, giving us another perspective of this crazed woman, confirms the previous description of Medea by the nurse, and picks up much of the earlier descriptive imagery. Concerned with where her fury will lead (*quod impotenti / facinus parat furore?*, 851-2), the chorus recount the physical indications of the cruel Maenad's (*cruenta maenas*, 849) madness: a face rigid with anger (*vultus citatus ira / riget*, 853-4); her head shaking with wild movement (*caput feroci / quatiens...motu*, 854-5); reddening then blanching (*flagrant genae rubentes, / pallor fugat ruborem*, 858-9);[524] and, in a simile aptly comparing Medea to a wild and savage beast, pacing like an agitated tiger:

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[521] See Chapter 1, pp.23-9.
[522] Ogden (2008) p.46, referring to Latin witches in general, makes a very similar comment.
[523] Roisman's judgement, (2005) pp.84-5, seems rather unbalanced: she does acknowledge that Seneca suggests a human mother would not kill her children, but without fully considering the implication of this for Euripides' Medea. She summarises the Senecan Medea's magic abilities in order to claim that it "epitomizes his heroine's superhuman evil".
[524] Costa (1973) p.149 cites possible influential lines from other texts, including Apollonius of Rhodes describing young Medea in love (3.297-8) and Ovid's Althaea (*Metamorphoses* 8.465-6); on Medea's resemblance to Althaea, see above, pp.131-2. Arcellaschi (1996) p.188 interestingly observes that redness indicates her *ira*, while paleness indicates her *furor*, and thus Medea's face mirrors her soul.

huc fert pedes et illuc[525]

ut tigris orba natis

cursu furente lustrat

Gangeticum nemus. [862-5]

This simile is also a suitable comparison since the tigress is angry at the loss of her cubs: Medea, too, will shortly be without her children, ostensibly because she is going into exile without them, although the audience knows differently. Indeed, the situation is the reverse of that for the tigress since, rather than deriving anger from the loss of her children, it is Medea's anger that will lead her to cause this loss. The imagery of a lioness or tigress bereft of her cubs is a familiar one, and Euripides similarly used it of his Medea.[526] Particularly relevant here, however, is Ovid's comparison of Procne with a tigress in the *Metamorphoses*:

...traxit Ityn, veluti Gangetica cervae

lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas. [*Metamorphoses* 6.636-7]

Procne also murdered her son in revenge for her husband's faithlessness and thus it is most probable that Seneca is here making a conscious allusion to his recent predecessor, and the child-killer that he depicted.[527] These allusions not only foreshadow the events to come later in the play, but perhaps can also be considered as Seneca reminding his audience that it was not only the barbarian Medea who was guilty of such acts in myth, but civilised Greeks as well.[528]

The chorus' hatred of Medea is clearly motivated by fear, as the series of rapid questions which they pose emphasises.[529] They are selfishly concerned for their city and king, and wish for Medea to be gone, praying for the next day to come quickly, so that she can depart into exile.[530] They display their

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[525] 862 interestingly resembles a surviving line from Ovid's lost *Medea* tragedy, as quoted by Boyle (2006) p.168: *feror huc illuc ut plena deo.*

[526] At 187 and 1342. See Fyfe (1983) p.84 on the aptness and poignancy of this simile.

[527] Costa (1973) p.149.

[528] Hall (1989) p.188 notes that, although Medea is legendarily labelled a barbarian family killer, there are several Greek, and hence "civilised", mythical characters who have committed family murders and infanticide, such as Orestes, Althaea and Oedipus: see also Chapter 1, n.113.

[529] Costa (1973) p.148 discusses the effects of this ode, noting how its conciseness and vividness builds up tension for the following messenger scene, where the deaths of the king and his daughter are reported. Fyfe (1983) p.84 notes that their fear underscores Medea's dominance.

[530] Fyfe (1983) p.84 detects irony in the chorus' prayer being to Medea's ancestor, Phoebus.

hostile prejudices against this foreign woman, when they refer to her as an "abominable Colchian" (*nefanda Colchis*, 871). The chorus errs in underestimating Medea, just as other characters in the play have: despite witnessing her formidable nature,[531] and expressing fear of its effects, they nevertheless naively believe that she will abide by the imposition of exile, as if she is only a threat within the short time before that, when she is close to the city. Their naivety is especially surprising since they appear to realise that she is completely immoderate and her emotions are a dangerous combination of love and anger that knows no bounds:

> frenare nescit iras
>
> Medea, non amores;
>
> nunc ira amorque causam
>
> iunxere; quid sequetur? [866-9]

The theme of love and anger combined is an important one in the play,[532] and particularly Medea's internal struggle with them, which must be motivated by Seneca's interest in the Stoic concept of reason versus emotion: consequently this play considers the effects of such mighty emotions mixed in Medea who, as a member of the weaker sex, was believed to be more susceptible to such passions.[533] Furthermore, Medea evoked fascination since she was a woman who apparently had no limits to her feelings and actions,[534] which we shall see in the fifth and final act of the play, describing the fruition of her plans.

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[531] However, as Hine (2007) p.195 has noted, it is unlikely that the chorus has witnessed all that has previously happened, otherwise they would know more about her plans.

[532] Trinacty (2007) pp.72-4 discusses the combination of love and anger, in relation to this passage and 133-5, observing its derivation from suggestions in *Heroides* 12: he discusses the heroine's battle between elegiac feeling (love) and tragic emotion (anger), noting that she finally allows her anger/tragic nature to win, simultaneously reminding us that the reason for this anger is her love/elegiac nature. Guastella (2001) pp.205-6 acknowledges this dangerous "fusion", and considers the role of the emotions separately, viewing *amor* as the driving force when Medea was a *virgo*, and *ira* now that she is a *coniunx*; he suggests that the combination helps her recreate her identity, now that she is no longer maiden or wife because of Jason's abandonment: although it does not seem that she has undergone an identity crisis, it is perhaps necessary for her to re-establish herself in a new social position.

[533] Harris (2001) pp.28-9, 406 notes the belief in antiquity that anger was a typical vice of women, and devotes a chapter to the discussion of this stereotype, pp.264-82.

[534] Nussbaum (1997) p.221 considers Medea's ultimate problem to be immoderate love. Pratt (1963) pp.217-18 observes that language expressing lack of control pervades the portrayal of Medea. Segal (1983) p.241 suggests that the fascination with exploring the "uncharted depths of Medea's passion" is a parallel to the play's theme of exploration of the uncharted world.

At the beginning of act five the messenger briefly enters the scene to report that the palace is engulfed in flames that, rather than being quelled by water, are augmented by it: this is another indication of Medea's power over nature, and her ability to reverse natural norms. We also learn that Creon and Creusa are dead, with the use of a macabre detail (*nata atque genitor cinere permixto iacent*, 880). This whole scene is surprisingly brief at only 13 lines, especially in comparison with the counterpart scene in Euripides' play which is considerably longer at almost 100 lines. Furthermore, the cursory nature of the scene is noteworthy since it seems an opportunity missed by Seneca to embellish the gruesome effects of Medea's poisons in the Silver Age manner. This is perhaps explained by the focal points being, for Seneca, the preceding witch scene, and the deaths of the children at the climax of the play.[535]

On learning this news, the nurse advises Medea to flee the city at once. Medea is characteristically defiant as she launches into her final monologue[536] of the play: completely ignoring the nurse's advice, she brushes it aside with comments on the enjoyment she derives from her revenge:

> egone ut recedam? si profugissem prius,
> ad hoc redirem. nuptias specto novas.
> quid, anime, cessas? sequere[537] felicem impetum.
> pars ultionis ista, qua gaudes, quota est? [893-6]

In the Euripidean version, it was the messenger himself who told Medea to go (1121ff.), but the reaction of the heroine is the same in both tragedies: she is delighted to hear the results of her terrible actions, although in Euripides' version she relishes dragging the details out of the messenger, which she cannot do here, since she is not present with the messenger. The Senecan Medea here refers to the spectacle as a kind of wedding, recalling the original cause of so much offence to her: the union of

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[535] Costa (1973) p.150 suggests that the brevity can be attributed to Seneca not wanting to stop the momentum of the play as it rushes on towards the climactic deaths of the children; he adds that the incantation scene in some ways replaces this, since Creusa's painful death was anticipated there: see pp.134-5, above. Henry & Walker (1967) p.170 attribute the brevity to restraint on Seneca's behalf: this seems unlikely in view of his normal Silver Age exaggeration in the rest of the play.

[536] This is the longest Senecan soliloquy: Boyle (1997) p.131. Braund (2002) pp.183-6 discusses the novel psychological elements, which Seneca introduces here: she views it as a debate about selfhood and identity, since the children are not present, as they were in the corresponding Euripidean soliloquy.

[537] Trinacty (2007) pp.73-4 discusses the use of the verb *sequor* as signifying Medea's transformation into agent of vengeance in the play.

Jason and Creusa. However, although she revels in her success so far, she views the deaths of her enemies as only the beginning of her revenge. Addressing herself and her soul in the third person, which adds to the effects of her apparent madness, she uses this monologue to encourage herself on towards an even greater revenge. Indeed Medea appears possessed by her fury, as she steps outside herself to rebuke her soul as frenzied, and still in love, if satisfied with this revenge: *amas adhuc, furiose, si satis est tibi / caelebs Iason* (897-8). However, it should be noted that the Euripidean Medea addresses her heart in a moment of self-encouragement (1242),[538] but does not appear to be mad or outside herself.

It is Medea's anger that drives her onwards, and it is clear that this battles with the remnants of love that she still feels for Jason, and attempts to banish them from her altogether: Medea's affection towards Jason appears to be a source of irritation to her, since she knows that she should not be hindered by such a weakness and it should no longer exist, considering his ungrateful dismissal of her. She summons her anger to help her drive out all that is lawful (*fas*, 900),[539] as well as honour (*pudor*, 900), so that she can carry out an extraordinary (*haut usitatum*, 899) revenge attack, which she declares cannot be undertaken with pure hands (*purae manus*, 901). She views her previous deeds as relatively insignificant acts of *pietas* (905), which she must now far exceed: from her own declarations it is clear that her intentions are mighty and maleficent. She claims that her earlier crimes, committed for the sake of others, were merely the trivial and commonplace (*levia*; *vulgaris*, 906) acts of a girl and, rhetorically asking herself how great her capabilities could possibly have been as a mere girl (*quid manus poterant rudes / audere magnum, quid puellaris furor?*, 908-9),[540] she forcefully answers herself with the proud declaration:

> Medea nunc sum; crevit ingenium malis. [910][541]

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[538] Hine (2007) p.201.

[539] Fyfe (1983) p.85 notes this as the first time that Medea acknowledges her actions as morally wrong, and therefore views the murders as an act in which she cuts herself off, not only from Jason, but also the moral framework of society, and the human world.

[540] Trinacty (2007) pp.74-6 cites this passage as proof of Medea the artist, author of her own revenge.

[541] Fitch & McElduff (2002) pp.18-19 cite 910 as an example of leading Senecan figures asserting self-identity at decisive moments, driven by a desire for recognition by others, and related to the heroic ethos, pp.38-9. Nussbaum (1997) p.226 comments that this line shows that Medea identifies with her anger. Arcellaschi (1996) p.189 discerns the three stages of violence in the heroine as *Medea superest* (166), *Medea fiam* (171), and the fulfilment in *Medea nunc sum*. Henry & Walker (1967) pp.171-2, 175, 177, however, view Medea as merely asserting without demonstrating action, in order to affirm her identity: this view seems erroneous, since Medea's eventual actions cannot be denied and, indeed, Seneca no doubt purposely held back any action for the climactic scene.

In this celebrated line, Seneca underscores that his heroine has reached her zenith, finally becoming a woman and realising her complete self, with all the implications of evil that this brings.[542] Medea, as earlier in the play, demonstrates an overwhelming concern with her reputation, which she uses to encourage herself further: she has a mighty desire to punish those responsible for injuring her pride in a way that will suitably redress the balance, restoring her honour. This line displays an awareness of her existing reputation:[543] here she is realising that she has now become Medea, the infamous woman of myth, with a name that has many unfavourable associations; she also realises that she must act in a way that will live up to, and be deserving of, this name. Certainly Seneca has made a valiant effort to depict a Medea who exceeds all before her, particularly in the preceding overblown witch scene: indeed, his Medea's preoccupation with finding a suitably evil method of punishment is an apparently Senecan innovation.[544] However, it should be noted that Medea has returned to being an angry woman in this scene: there are no indications of the sorceress here, as she weighs up her options and her emotions battle internally. Nevertheless, she does display a despicably evil side, particularly when she rejoices in her earlier crimes against her family, the betrayal of her father and murder of her brother:

> iuvat, iuvat[545] rapuisse fraternum[546] caput,
>
> artus iuvat secuisse et arcano patrem
>
> spoliasse sacro... [911-13]

Trinacty (2007) pp.70-2 recognises the echoes of Hypsipyle's words of *Heroides* 6 (*Medeae Medea forem*, 151) in Medea's declarations; he contrasts the ineffectuality of Hypsipyle's statement next to Medea's threats which are, indeed, fulfilled. Tarrant (1995) pp.222-3 also recognises this echo and discerns a parallel in Medea's use of her name at *Metamorphoses* 7.40-1: *ut per me sospes sine me det lintea ventis / virque sit alterius, poenae Medea relinquar?*

[542] Dupont (1997) p.25 notes that Medea becomes her heroic, inhuman/superhuman self, through her act of revenge: indeed, her most notorious deed must be responsible for significantly increasing her reputation. Griffiths (2006) pp.97-8 views Medea as achieving definition through the infanticide, since this is her most extreme potential fulfilled. Fyfe (1983) p.84 suggests that Medea's final triumph is fulfilment through language of her own "self-myth".

[543] Braund (2002) pp.183-4 discusses this intertextuality: Medea realises that she has a mighty reputation that exists, according to her preceding texts. Macintosh (2000) p.3 observes that Medea is here realising her own status according to the mythical tradition.

[544] Hine (2007) p.201.

[545] Costa (1973) p.153 notes the repetition of *iuvat* as indication of her gloating. Benton (2003) pp.278-80 speaks of the "uncontrollable pleasure" Medea takes in her acts of revenge from this point onwards. Rambaux (1972) pp.1019-23 analyses the end of the play from 911 onward.

[546] Edgeworth (1990) p.152, n.4, listing Medea's several references to Absyrtus, observes that she never mentions her brother by name, suggesting that she is afraid of summoning his ghost. He notes, p.152, that after each mention of him, Medea quickly passes onto another subject, usually Jason's guilt, in an attempt to distract herself and the audience from her crime. See also Chapter 1, n.181.

As with Euripides' heroine, it is possible to consider Medea to be a worse figure in her role as a woman, than in that of a witch: a human who is capable of committing such deeds and, furthermore, relishing them, can be viewed as more appalling than a witch, for whom such behaviour is held to be more natural. Furthermore, it seems that Seneca intended to vilify his heroine here, since in some versions Medea was merely an aide in the murder of her brother, luring him to his death: however, here she informs us that she took a very active and physical part in his demise. This is possibly influenced by Ovid's account of her bloody fratricidal act, in his exile poetry.[547] Medea uses these early acts as the foundations to build upon the far more significant act of vengeance she wishes to carry out now. The knowledge that she was capable of such wickedness as a girl, gives her the confidence to go on and seek a new viler method of punishment.

However, unlike her Euripidean counterpart, the Senecan Medea even now remains uncertain of the target of her rage, which she addresses once more as if it is a separate entity (*ira*, 916).[548] She now, for the first time, explicitly has the idea of the *ultimum scelus* (923), the murder of her children; but, unlike Euripides' heroine, she hesitates to admit it, let alone advance towards this plan. Euripides' Medea shows a firm and heartless resolve at this stage:[549] she has a clear plan which she intends to carry out without delay (1236ff.), and now the chorus of Greek women, who have supported Medea throughout the play, find themselves horrified by her intentions (1251ff.). Seneca's Medea, on the other hand, has removed herself from this horrific decision by again stepping outside herself, and holding her mind responsible (*decrevit animus intus*, 918). Euripides' Medea does briefly struggle with her maternal emotions, but quickly leaves the scene to commit the murders of her sons, since she had settled upon this plan at a much earlier stage in the tragedy:[550] this means that the Euripidean Medea has had more time to think about her plan, but has still chosen to go ahead with it; meanwhile, Seneca's Medea acts more hastily upon her idea. The Senecan Medea's debate with herself here can be compared with the Euripidean version (1021ff.), although a significant difference is that much of

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[547] *Tristia* 3.9: see Chapter 1, pp.64-8.
[548] Costa (1973) p.153 discusses these frequent apostrophes, noting that they are a hallmark of the Silver Age. Hine (2007) p.200 observes the frequently changing vocatives and, therefore, addressees: this surely must be an indication of Medea's confused and wandering mind. Gill (1997) pp.217-18 neatly summarises the third person addresses, when Medea assumes the voice of different emotions within herself, as expressions of her inner conflict. See also Star, in n.364.
[549] It has been suggested that Euripides invented the version of the myth where Medea kills the children: Jouan (1986) p.4 and Segal (1996) p.19. Rambaux (1972) p.1019 remarks that Medea does not dare to confess the idea yet.
[550] See above pp.121-2.

the Euripidean Medea's speech is addressed to the children, whereas in Seneca they feature rarely and are not at all characterised.[551] However, the Senecan Medea's debate also importantly bears similarities to the Ovidian Procne's conflicting emotions before killing her son, where she weighs up maternal love against conjugal betrayal, and also Althaea's internal battle over whether to end her son's life in revenge for killing her brothers.[552] For Seneca's Medea, who has only just formulated the idea of killing her own sons to atone for their father's crimes (*vos pro paternis sceleribus poenas date*, 925), the debate with herself begins now. There are several opposing facets struggling for supremacy within her: it is not only a battle of love versus anger, nor reason versus emotion, but wife versus mother;[553] furthermore, this is a physical, as well as emotional, battle for Medea:

> cor pepulit horror, membra torpescunt gelu
>
> pectusque tremuit. ira discessit loco
>
> materque tota coniuge expulsa redit.[554] [926-8]

Similarly, Medea compares the conflicting emotions which are pulling her in different directions, with the winds causing a stormy sea in her heart. This simile is apt considering that Jason's sea voyage in the Argo originally instigated Medea's current circumstances:[555]

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[551] Hine (2007) p.204, notes 945-6 as a probable exception.

[552] *Metamorphoses* 6.619ff. and 8.475ff. respectively: Costa (1973) p.154; Hine (2007) p.201 also discusses the comparisons with the fragment of a monologue in Neophron's *Medea*.

Guastella (2001) pp.211-13 discusses the marital versus maternal battle, considering the parallel situations for Procne and Althaea, pp.212-14; Lateiner (2006) pp.194-5 briefly discusses their roles as mothers in the *Metamorphoses*. Guastella observes that the mother's role is a function linked to that of wife, particularly in Roman society, since both roles benefit the same man: thus the act of the mother killing her children destroys both connections to that man; this certainly seems part of Medea's motivation, which is not purely a revenge attack against infidelity: it is an act of compensation for her brother's murder and severs all ties with Jason, while punishing his faithlessness and oath-breaking. Importantly, Guastella notes, pp.215-16, that this motivation is absent from Euripides' tragedy: therefore, we can consider Seneca's Medea to be committing these horrific crimes for more valid reasons than her Greek counterpart.

Althaea's filicide (book 8) must also be a possible *contaminatio* episode (See Chapter 1, n.132) and, when taken with Procne's story, these neatly surround the Medea narrative in book 7; Seneca's allusions to both these myths in this tragedy support this. Gildenhard & Zissos (1999) pp.169-170 compare the myths of Althaea and Procne for their conflicts of allegiances and abandonment of *pietas*, themes which are equally to be found in Medea's myth. See also pp.131-2.

[553] Braund (2002) p.184 notes that Medea is at one moment a wronged and vengeful wife, and the next a loving mother. Star (2006) pp.233-6 views this conflict in terms of Medea's dual commands to her *dolor*, to pursue revenge and to act with *pietas*; he notes (p.244, n.60) that Medea is the only Senecan character who, urging herself to be consistent in crime, makes any attempt to act with Stoic virtue.

[554] Hine (2007) p.203 compares the circumstances of 928 with Ovid *Metamorphoses* 6.629f., describing Procne's dilemma. Garelli-François (1996) p.195 quotes 927-8 as evidence of the mother-wife conflict, which she perceives as deriving from the wider one of love and hate; Bernstein (2008) p.206, n.3, cites 928 to support his argument that the hesitation in assigning parental titles to prospective filicides indicates the gap between normative expectation of parental behaviour and actual practice. Hutchinson (1993) p.64 comments more generally on the powerful nature of 926-32.

...nunc huc ira, nunc illuc amor[556]

diducit? anceps aestus incertam rapit;

ut saeva rapidi bella cum venti gerunt,

utrimque fluctus maria discordes agunt

dubiumque fervet pelagus... [938-42]

This simile contains familiar imagery for a character caught in a dilemma, and particularly appears to have drawn inspiration from the Ovidian Althaea, once more, who uses a comparable description of her emotions pulling her in different directions:[557]

...utque carina

quam ventus ventoque rapit contrarius aestus

vim geminam sentit paretque incerta duobus. [*Metamorphoses* 8.470-2]

In these passages, Seneca effectively conveys Medea's psychological turmoil, and displays that his heroine, despite her previous scene of excessive witchcraft, remains a human with genuine maternal emotions towards her sons.[558] Indeed a little further on in the text (946-7), Medea seeks to embrace them lovingly, a natural motherly act. She attempts to make this choice of revenge easier by distancing herself from the children:[559] she reasons with herself that they should now be considered Creusa's offspring (*Creusa peperit*, 922; *liberi quondam mei*, 924);[560] she also later attempts to justify it with the vain excuse that she will lose them anyway, when she goes into exile (948ff.), although this is not a reason that the audience would readily accept from a mother.[561]

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[555] Pratt (1963) pp.214-16 discusses the wider imagery in the play, of fire and sea-storm. Segal (1983) pp.238, 240 comments on the "seething sea of her hatred and anger".

[556] 939 appears to contain echoes of a surviving line of the Ovidian Medea tragedy: see above, n.525.

[557] Costa (1973) p.154. Fantham (1975) pp.8-9 attributes Seneca's use of the word *aestus* in the play to Dido's jealous anger in Virgil's *Aeneid* 4.532 (*magnoque irarum fluctuat aestu*) and 4.564 (*variosque irarum concitat aestus*); she adds that Dido has provided inspiration for Seneca's proud women "overwhelmed by a tragic passion".

[558] However, Jouan (1986) p.8 finds Medea's rhetorical lines of hesitation unconvincing, although he does not explain this opinion.

[559] Hine (2007) p.203; he adds that Euripides' Medea does not attempt this.

[560] Guastella (2001) p.211.

[561] Roisman (2005) p.83 does not consider this as a loss, which could be a factor in driving Medea on towards her extreme actions, but only as an example of her evil nature, since the children were protected from exile.

The tragic heroine vacillates and, upon reconsideration, finds her choice of crime, which she refers to as an insane madness (*demens furor*, 930), abhorrent and beyond even her: *incognitum istud facinus ac dirum nefas / a me quoque absit* (931-2). Aside from being their mother, Medea realises their innocence (*crimine et culpa carent, / sunt innocentes*, 935-6), and thus displays that she does indeed have a conscience and recognises this as a terrible act. It is now that she is caught in this dilemma that the tragic nature of this play emerges. Although this is perhaps not viewed as a true predicament, since it is ultimately Medea's choice and she is in control,[562] Medea cannot be judged by ordinary mortal standards: the audience should keep in mind that, since she is a divine being with powers over all nature, the slur upon her pride, that Jason has caused by breaking his promises to her, is utterly intolerable and must be avenged in a suitably grand manner.

Nevertheless, Medea the mother and human does attempt to resist her divine will, in a futile act for which she should be admired: this revenge is not a simple decision, taken lightly. Ultimately, however, it is the recollection of the murder of her brother, another innocent victim disposed of along the way, which drives her towards this unspeakable act of infanticide: she believes that the sacrifice of her children will suitably atone for the betrayal of her father[563] and death of her brother (*fratri patrique quod sat est, peperi duos*, 957).[564] She is haunted by the guilt of her most treacherous act against her family, and it causes her such psychological distress that she appears to be driven insane by it. Again, as we saw her anger control her earlier in this monologue, we witness Medea being possessed by a strong emotion: however, the effects are more severe this time, since she acknowledges that she is controlled by other forces, when visions of Furies violently pursue her:[565]

> quonam ista tendit turba Furiarum impotens?
>
> quem quaerit aut quo flammeos ictus parat,

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[562] Rambaux (1972) p.1020 suggests that Medea could take the children away from Jason instead.
[563] Guastella (2001) pp.203-5 suggests that Medea sees her brother's murder as an injury on her father, and compares it with revenge attacks upon fathers in other texts: Atreus in Seneca's *Thyestes* and Tereus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The connection is a little tenuous, as Guastella himself concedes, since Absyrtus was not murdered in order to punish his father.
[564] See n.505 above on brothers' irreplaceability. Edgeworth (1990) pp.155-6 discerns a difference in the motivations for the infanticide: the desire for revenge, manifesting itself as her *dolor*, makes her plan the deed; the vision of her brother, which he describes as the externalisation of her inner guilt and interprets as her *furor*, causes her to carry it out.
[565] Edgeworth (1990) pp.153-4 notes the irony that Medea had summoned the Furies to her aid early on (13ff.) and now they pursue her, returning her to the role of victim: he views this as an indication of her guilt. Abrahamsen (1999) pp.118-21 observes that this pursuit by Furies is reminiscent of Orestes, as Medea reverts to an older, barbarian, system of blood vengeance in her act of infanticide.

aut cui cruentas agmen infernum faces

intentat?... [958-61][566]

Seneca indicates his heroine's unhealthy state of mind through her vivid imagination here, and the agitated questioning. She also imagines seeing a huge snake (*ingens anguis*, 961), a creature associated with the Furies, as well as Medea herself,[567] and she specifically names the Fury Megaera as being present. The Furies are significant here since their principal role was as avengers of family murders, and it is the spilling of her brother's blood that is tormenting Medea now, driving her to this crazed state: this is an evident change from the woman who was gloating over this murder only moments before, and thus this reinforces the notion that a frenzy has taken hold of Medea.[568] This turmoil and confusion increases, and Medea no longer appears to be herself, as the anguish grips her mind and she is controlled by this delirium, until she finally imagines seeing the ghost of her brother seeking revenge:[569]

...cuius umbra dispersis venit

incerta membris? frater est, poenas petit:

dabimus, sed omnes...

discedere a me, frater, ultrices deas

manesque ad imos ire securas iube. [963-5, 967-8]

The apparition of the ghost of Absyrtus appears to be a Senecan innovation, and this can be attributed to the Roman author responding to his Silver Age audience's taste for the ghoulish. Seneca may have developed the idea suggested by the Ovidian Althaea's desire to avenge her brothers' ghost in the *Metamorphoses*.[570] He is also possibly developing the idea from *Heroides* 12, where Medea offers

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[566] Costa (1973) p.156 discerns some similarity with the Virgilian Dido at *Aeneid* 4.469: *Eumenidum veluti demens videt agmina Pentheus.*

[567] Hine (2007) p. 205 notes the ironic reversal that Medea is now threatened by snakes, where she previously controlled them.

[568] Hine (2007) p.204 believes that Medea is choosing to treat her anger, and desire for revenge, as divinely motivated; however, it is evident that Medea is not at all in control of her mind, and therefore far from selecting her current state. Berry also believes (1996) pp.11-12 that Medea never appears out-of-control. Star (2006) pp.236-7 denies that madness controls Medea, since she goes on to command the Furies and the ghost.

[569] Edgeworth (1990) examines the ghost scene, especially observing Seneca's understanding of the "psychopathic personality": he notes that, p.154, Seneca identified Medea as the kind of person who does not believe that she deserves love and happiness, and so deprives herself of them.

[570] 8.476: *consanguineas ut sanguine leniat umbras.*

herself as a sacrificial victim to her brother's shade.[571] After having addressed her brother's shade, Medea sacrifices one of her sons to him, in the climax of this monologue, believing that she is being commanded to do so in order to avenge his murder (*victima manes tuos placamus ista*, 970-1);[572] Medea is thus punishing herself for her former crime, by destroying one of her own beloved sons.[573] Seneca is portraying her as thoroughly demented by this stage, and hence completely outside herself.[574] This depiction can be considered as removing responsibility for the crime from Medea: it is possible that Seneca is exonerating his tragic heroine, in thus displaying her as compelled by an external force.[575] The possibility of exculpating her also seems likely when we remember that there are indications that Seneca was depicting her in the role of divine agent of retribution.[576] Furthermore, Medea, through this atrocious act, fulfils her own role as a Fury or avenging goddess, which has been suggested sporadically throughout the play.[577]

However, we may not consider exoneration to be Seneca's intention once we have read the following, and final, scene: at the end of this monologue, Medea is suddenly recalled into the real world from her apparent trance by the sound of Jason and his men approaching to punish her for Creusa and Creon's murder. Her words and actions from here on again become those of a woman scorned. Firstly we should note that there is no indication of regret or remorse at the slaughter of the first son. Secondly, she advances with her plan to kill the second boy, without the slightest hesitation. Thirdly, and most

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[571] Boyle (2006) p.273, n.79, and Rambaux (1972) p.1023, suggest that this is a reworking of *Heroides* 12.160 (*inferias umbrae fratris habete mei*). See above, p.49.

[572] Visser (1986) p.158 judges Medea as the exceptional murdering mother, since she is the only one who does not murder her children as vengeance for her natal family; however, this Senecan idea suggests that she has the same motive for infanticide. Braden (1970) p.17 describes Senecan characters who "do not commit evil out of calculation for specific gain but because they feel they ought to".

[573] Edgeworth (1990) pp.151-2 describes Medea's obsessive guilt over her brother's death, tracing the many occasions on which she mentions it, causing her need to punish herself; he suggests that this is possibly the strongest motive for her infanticide. He notes, p.153, how, despite the silence of the ghost, Medea understands that he seeks revenge for his murder. Rambaux (1972) p.1021 mentions Medea's self-punishment: he notes that an important difference from Euripides is that Medea murders one of her sons precisely because she does love them, otherwise it would not be an act of self-punishment. Gill (1997) p.218 believes that Medea recasts the infanticide as self-punishment to resolve the conflict between her anger and motherhood; he notes, p.221, the influence of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7.

[574] Lawall (1979) p.425 sees the murder as being staged as a private matter between Medea and her past crime; however, this does not preclude her madness.

[575] Dupont (1997) pp.42-3 believes that Medea is possessed by herself: she is, in the sense that her anger controls her, although Dupont instead views it as her grief controlling her.

[576] See above pp.110-11, 124-5.

[577] For example at 37ff.; 157; 396.

appallingly, rather than feeling shame and disgust about her act, she ends her monologue by expressing a shockingly brazen desire to make it a public spectacle:

> nunc hoc age,[578] anime: non in occulto tibi est
> perdenda virtus; approba populo manum. [976-7]

However, despite having come out of her trance, she appears to remain plagued by this madness: after all, we do see her address her soul here as a separate entity, as if it is a sentient being, and thus step outside herself again. She has now been forced by her frenzy to cross the line, and there is no way back for her. We cannot be certain how Seneca intended her to be viewed, whether under the influence of a crazed mind or sane: we should bear both options in mind as we analyse the final scene, although the overwhelming evidence from the majority of the play is that Medea is to be considered mad.[579]

In the final scene,[580] Jason enters intent on destroying Medea in revenge for the murders of the royal family members, unaware at this stage of the death of one of his sons: in Euripides' version, Jason angrily comes to protect his children, ironically, from the murderous wishes of Creon's family (1293ff.); he is similarly unaware that they have been murdered, but in that version both of the boys are by now dead. That Euripides' Jason is a less sympathetic character than Seneca's Jason can also be seen at this point: when the chorus warn him that he has worse troubles to come, the foolish and arrogant Euripidean character makes an assumption that Medea wants to kill him (1306ff.). Seneca's Jason is not as arrogant, but is equally foolish: while he utters his futile threats, remaining unaware of the murdered son, Medea rants triumphantly, believing that the act of murdering her son has been one of purification and atonement that has helped her regain all that she has lost through assisting Jason, symbolically restoring both her virginity[581] and her betrayed family to her:

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[578] See n.453 above.
[579] Edgeworth (1990) p.155 makes the interesting suggestion that Seneca chose to present a Medea who is "both driven and deliberate", since she kills one child in madness, and the other while sane.
[580] Which Dupont (1997) p.51 interprets as a spectacle of paternal humanity versus maternal inhumanity.
[581] Hine (2007) p.206 notes that this can be viewed either as hyperbole or a genuine belief in her madness, that she has removed the taint of Jason, urging us to remember that "she is a specialist in the impossible". Segal (1983) p.242 notes the paradox of Medea restoring her virginity by killing her child. Braden (1970) pp.25-9 discusses the psychology involved here and in the incantation scene, noting the power of rhetoric to make itself real, even when impossible; furthermore, he considers, p.30, that Medea's speeches convince the universe to support her.

iam iam recepi sceptra germanum patrem,

spoliumque Colchi pecudis auratae tenent;

rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit. [982-84]

This is a reminder of the *Heroidean* Medea, who depicts herself as an innocent virgin in her argument against Jason.[582] Medea celebrates and thanks the gods for their assistance in restoring her to her former glory: Seneca depicts her as simultaneously liberated and relieved, but this reaction in a mother who has just slaughtered one of her sons is unnatural and repulsive to the audience. However, as we have seen already, Medea is no ordinary woman and, as a divine being, having her pride injured is a mighty offence against her: hence this restoration of her pride and glory is extremely satisfying to her.

Nevertheless, Medea is not totally given over to her divine side, and Seneca depicts the mother and woman in her still struggling with the deed she has committed, and the one she is about to commit, thereby showing that she is not an inherently evil witch:

quid nunc moraris, anime? quid dubitas? potens

iam cecidit ira? paenitet facti, pudet.

quid, misera, feci?... [988-90][583]

Thus Seneca allows the mother, with her natural maternal feelings, to re-emerge here: it seems that Medea does, after all, have ordinary human feelings of remorse for her horrific actions, and now wavers in continuing with her abhorrent revenge. Therefore Seneca is not determined to portray Medea as thoroughly evil: he is showing her as a woman with a sense of right and wrong. Of course, it is possible to consider her as thus further vilified since she chooses to continue with the infanticide, regardless of her awareness that it is wrong, but throughout this play Seneca has depicted the psychology and suffering of his heroine, and he took measures to present this as a difficult decision

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In discussing Lars von Trier's film, Joseph & Johnson (2008) p.123 note how Medea there symbolically restores her own virginity and forces her rival, the virginal Glauce, to trade places with her in her revenge. Guastella (2001) pp.216-17 concludes that her revenge "creates the illusion" that Medea has restored all her losses, which she equates with her dowry.

[582] *puellae simplicis*, 12.89-90: Arcellaschi (1996) p.187. See Chapter 1, p.43.

[583] Costa (1973) p.158 notes that these lines are the last to display a softer feeling.

for Medea.[584] This vacillation emphasises the strength of the different sides of her character: despite being a witch, with full divine powers, Medea the woman and mother nevertheless makes a valiant effort, deriving from her love, to overcome the associated powerful emotions, especially anger, which have driven her onwards to this revenge. This wavering offers Seneca the opportunity to employ his rhetorical training, as Medea poses various arguments to herself:[585] this would not have been possible if he had depicted Medea as completely one-dimensional. Furthermore, Medea continues to be portrayed as outside herself, and thus mad, addressing her soul once more, as well as referring to herself as *misera* because of her actions.

However, her hesitation and regret is only momentary, and Medea quickly resumes her plan, realising that resistance is pointless now that she has already committed (*feci*, 991) one irreversible and horrific act. Admitting that this is giving her great pleasure (*voluptas magna*, 991),[586] although she is unwilling (*invitam*, 991), she reiterates her wish to make this a spectacle, reminding us of gladiatorial games; however, this time she desires Jason specifically as her audience: *derat hoc unum mihi, / spectator iste* (992-3).[587] Furthermore, she heartlessly considers the murder of the first son to be worth nothing (*nil*, 993), since Jason was not a witness. Medea shows no further hesitation: henceforth she relishes every moment, and her aim is to make Jason suffer as much as possible. As she proudly announces the death of the first son to Jason, and informs him of the approaching death of the other, Jason is immediately reduced to the inferior position of suppliant: this is emphasised dramatically, with Medea, by now, being high up on the roof, physically looking down on Jason below. He begs her

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[584] Roisman (2005) p.85 admits this, while claiming that Seneca has rejected Euripides' presentation of Medea as a loving mother. Durham (1984) p.57 overlooks Medea's deliberation and misjudges the infanticides as having no heroic or moral meaning. This hesitation, along with her regret over the family betrayal, disproves Durham's opinion (p.56) that Medea has no regard for the guilt or innocence of her victims.

[585] Aptly, Braden (1970) p.13 comments that "the typical Senecan character is a trained rhetorician".

[586] However, Motto & Clark (1993) pp.247-8 claim that characters like Medea cannot have pleasure: indeed, it comes at a heavy price (the loss of her sons), and she is not able to rest (she must escape), but she does derive pleasure from this revenge once she resigns herself to the act, after the first son has been slaughtered.

[587] Hine (2007) p.207 comments on Medea's craving for an audience during the play. Benton (2003) p.280, n.13, compares this to the cruel and tyrannical staging of violent spectacles as a form of power in Rome, interpreting it as Seneca's comment on his society's barbaric elements; she supports her view by citing Seneca's tale of Caligula inviting a man to dinner so that he could watch his reaction as his son was killed (*de Ira* 2.33.3-4). More generally, Boyle (2006) p.210 notes that Senecan characters frequently engage in such theatrical role-playing; he discusses, pp.215-18, Medea's spectacle in detail, terming it Seneca's most spectacular finale; see also Boyle (1997) p.132; Macintosh (2000) pp.1-2 comments on Medea's role as "The Performer in Performance" (see also n.488 above). Bartsch (2006) p.260 discusses this visual act and Jason's suffering gaze.

not to kill the second child, and to take him instead, even finally conceding responsibility for "any crime": *si quod est crimen, meum est* (1004). Medea has been seeking Jason's acceptance of his portion of blame for the crimes she has committed for him throughout the play, and this also picks up the theme of blame and responsibility which is found in *Heroides* 12. Euripides' arrogant Jason places no fault with himself: he argues with Medea up to the end of the play, noting that the gods have witnessed her crimes; she counters with the point that the gods have witnessed his broken oaths, and in this way she can be compared with Seneca's Medea acting as a divine agent of retribution,[588] although it is not explicit in the earlier version.

The Senecan Jason's admission and pleading are in contrast to his bold words only moments before, when he was intent on killing Medea: while he now ceases to seek her death, Euripides' Jason is as determined to carry it out as before, on discovery of the boys' slaughter (1316), and angrily enters a battle of words with Medea. For Euripides' Jason, it is as much a matter of pride, as it is for Medea: as she points out to him, he did not show great concern for the children when he would have seen them go into exile (1401f.). In contrast, the Senecan Jason's former words have been displayed as empty threats, as he is now silenced and thus proved weak and ineffectual. The Senecan Medea has especially proved herself an active threat: she is not a passive woman, and will carry out her promises, seeing her own form of justice done. Just as with Creon, Medea has emerged the more active and manly in her interactions with Jason,[589] who is presented as a weaker version of Euripides' hero. Medea's strength of personality and powerful abilities, especially when amplified as they are in Seneca, have thus given men reason to fear and vilify her, since she has not only transgressed male boundaries, but surpassed them.[590] Furthermore, by destroying Jason's sons, as well as his current wife, she has symbolically castrated and emasculated him, simultaneously ending his male line and preventing him from reproducing it.[591] In this scene, Medea recognises Jason's weakness where his

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[588] See n.322 above.
[589] Rambaux (1972) pp.1024-7 discusses the reasons that Jason cannot be considered a true man with Medea around; he suggests that Jason needs his children, and the royal power of his new wife, in order to attempt to reassert his dominance.
[590] Interesting here is Guastella's idea, (2001) p.215, that Medea is the inversion of the ideal bride: Medea is the very antithesis of the perfect woman since, rather than uniting two families, she harms both her own and her husband's family. However, we should note that she remains very loyal to her husband until his rejection of her is definite: see n.330 above.
[591] Purkiss (2000) pp.35-6; she interestingly suggests that Medea realises that she has done the same to her father by killing Absyrtus, and so chooses this form of revenge on Jason. Durham (1984) p.55, comparing the tragic versions of Medea, is over-stating her case by claiming that Medea hates men:

children are concerned, and plays on this further: she cruelly declares that she would happily kill as many children as she had by him, even the unborn, with a characteristically Silver Age bloody detail:

> ...ut duos perimam, tamen
> nimium est dolori numerus angustus meo.
> in matre[592] si quod pignus etiamnunc latet,
> scrutabor ense viscera et ferro extraham.[593] [1010-13]

Medea is the ultimate woman scorned, and her bitterly sarcastic rebuke reminds us of the wrongs she suffered at her husband's hands: *i nunc, superbe, virginum thalamos pete, / relinque matres* (1007-8). She is relentless in cruelly torturing Jason here, and she takes immense pleasure in delaying the death of the second child, simply because it torments him, displaying no sign of feeling any pain herself.[594] The Euripidean heroine at least acknowledges that she suffers too (1362), although she callously declares her pain worthwhile. This method of taunting Jason is a Senecan addition: it is not possible in Euripides' version, since Medea there slaughters both the children together inside the house, from where we hear their cries (1271ff.). In this respect, then, Seneca has added an extra evil dimension to his Medea.[595] Furthermore, she announces her joy at taking her time with a biting comment on having her last day before exile:

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this view is based on the crimes and murders she commits/instigates, yet she clearly deeply regrets her betrayal of father and brother.

[592] Following Costa (1973) p.158, on 1012, in translating *matre* as "womb". Nussbaum (1997) pp.219-20 interprets this comment literally, as proof that Medea may be pregnant.

[593] Fitch & McElduff (2002) pp.36-7, and n.44, quote this as evidence of Medea's destructiveness affecting not only family relationships, but herself too, since she is killing off her maternal self.

Garelli-François (1996) p.195 cites this line as evidence of the violence in Medea's language, preceding her actions. Since Medea's concerns are selfish, rather than for her children, she contrasts Medea, pp.196-8, with Hecuba in the *Troades* and, more relevantly, Andromache, who protects her son precisely because he is her husband's: Garelli-François notes the echo of Andromache in *Troades* 811-12: *si quid hic cineris latet scrutabor ore?* Indeed, she instead detects parallels between Jason and Andromache, and Medea and Ulysses: see below, n.630. However, pp.202-3, Medea and Hecuba are drawn as parallels because both destroy with fire, although Hecuba only does so inadvertently by giving birth to Paris; Andromache can also be compared to Medea, since she sends her son to his death, when choosing her husband instead.

[594] Kragelund (1999) p.236 notes that the graphic, prolonged murders have been considered as evidence that Senecan tragedy was not intended for the stage. See also n.418 above.

[595] However, Henry & Walker (1967) pp.169-71 note the omission of bloody horror here; they attempt to defend Seneca from such accusations, believing Euripides to be worse in three specific areas: the character of Jason, the messenger scene, and the murder of the children. Roisman (2005) pp.85-6, with bias, interprets this as evidence of Medea's "sadistic ferocity".

perfruere lento scelere, ne propera, dolor:[596]

meus dies est; tempore accepto utimur. [1016-17]

Indeed Jason is correct in designating Medea a "dangerous woman" (*infesta*, 1018), because she will have her bloody and violent revenge: he was naive and foolish not to realise the kind of woman he was crossing before now. Medea has regained control and now has power over this situation: in response to his second request to slay him instead, Medea kills their second son, and she does so easily, with no hesitation and no sign of remorse afterwards.[597] There is no indication of her love, for either the children or Jason, in her callous and vicious behaviour.[598] The only indication we have of her love for Jason is her spiteful and sarcastic question directed at the ungrateful man *ingrate Iason: coniugem agnoscis tuam?* (1021).[599] This reminds us of the very reason that she is launching such a heartless revenge attack: Jason's abandonment of his rightful wife. While the Senecan Medea makes sly and spiteful comments, the Euripidean heroine is much more direct in explaining that her wounded pride would not allow her to go without revenge (1351).

In a final heartless act, Medea leaves the boys' bodies for Jason in this version: however, in Euripides tragedy, depriving Jason of the bodies is part of her cruel revenge (1377ff.). It is significant that Seneca chooses to portray Medea as leaving the bodies behind, and not follow the Euripidean model at this point:[600] in Euripides this can be seen as further evidence of Medea taking on the male role, by leading a rite which exclusively belonged to a male citizen, and thus it would seem that Seneca has

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[596] Star (2006) pp.238-9 cites 1016 as evidence of Medea's "superior performance of psychological control and revenge".

[597] It is noteworthy that Medea chooses a particularly male method to kill her sons, the sword: Visser (1986) p.160.

[598] However, Purkiss' view, (2000) p.45, that Seneca's Medea shows no pity, based on lines 1018-19, is taken out of context since it ignores the earlier internal debates she has had with herself.

[599] Macintosh (2000) p.3 perhaps reads more into 1021 than is intended, when she considers it as evidence that Medea is play-acting, aware of Euripides' version: it can be read on a much more straightforward level than as intertextuality. However, Bartsch (2006) p.257 notes that this is the Medea whom the audience recognises and, pp.261-2, that she needs to be recognisable to her audience in order to recognise herself. Fitch & McElduff (2002) p.19 discuss Medea's desire for recognition: see n.541 above; they also note, pp.30-1, her attachment to the position of wife, for the understandable reason that she has given up everything for that role.

In her discussion of the use of marital vocabulary, Abrahamsen (1999) pp.110-13 observes that *coniunx* is negative when Medea applies it to herself, a threat when she uses it of her rival, and more neutral when she employs it for Jason. She interprets Medea's application of it to herself here, p.121, as finally forcing Jason to acknowledge her status as his wife.

[600] Hine (2007) p.208 notes that this may have been a Senecan innovation. He adds that this is an obstacle to Jason pursuing her, but it seems irrelevant since she escapes by flying off into the sky: being caught seems an unlikely concern of Medea.

missed an opportunity to portray his heroine's power over the weak hero.[601] Furthermore, Seneca is thus excluding the tradition in which Medea buried the boys in the temple of Hera and established a cult to them, which also served as an act of atonement for the murders.[602] Therefore it appears that, at this point, Seneca means to emphasise his heroine as truly devoid of all feeling, simultaneously abandoning her role as mother and human.[603] She discards the boys' bodies without care, displaying no concern over their proper burial, and with no apparent sense of guilt or remorse over the crime: indeed she now seems beyond all mortal concerns. Meanwhile, we are reminded of Medea's divine nature again, as the play ends with this mighty woman, and sorceress, flying off in her serpent chariot.[604] The final despairing words of the play are those of the completely dejected Jason, who has more than paid the penalty for his faithlessness and broken oaths, that there can be no gods wherever Medea goes: *testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos* (1027).[605] Seneca has certainly shown us a Medea who has the ability to be ruthless and cruel, in the name of restoring her pride: the divine side of her has emerged the ultimate winner, as she has managed to shake off all weakness deriving from her human emotions of love and anger, in order to triumph over Jason. Thus the play has come full circle: in the opening, Medea invoked the gods to aid her and witness Jason's broken oaths; similarly at the end of Euripides' play, Medea warns Jason that the gods have witnessed his broken oaths.[606] It is

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[601] Hame (2008) pp.6-7 explores the implications of the Euripidean Medea's actions here: most importantly, she notes Medea's assumption of control, especially of the male role, in taking over the burial rites; she also notes that Medea is denying Jason his role as father, and thus we can view it as further emasculation of the hero. Hame discerns, pp.9-11, that Medea is an "aberration from the norm": once more she transgresses boundaries and behaves in a socially unacceptable way, threatening the male-dominated society. Segal (1996) pp.39-43, discussing the Euripidean Medea's denial of Jason's burial rights for his sons, notes that she has reaffirmed her role as a mother by killing them and insuring her sole possession of them forever.

[602] Holland (2008) discusses this in detail.

[603] This is perhaps Fitch & McElduff's meaning, (2002) p.26, when they describe Medea as simplifying herself and returning to "an earlier and cruder identity".

[604] Nussbaum (1997) p.222 imaginatively interprets this chariot as an allegory of the erotic soul. Hunter (1974) p.173 views this scene as evidence that, in Senecan tragedy, "the evil are regularly left in manic possession of what their wickedness has achieved". Visser (1986) p.159 observes that serpents are the symbol of the Erinyes, which is apt for Medea's role as avenging goddess. Dupont (1997) pp.26, 30, notes that Medea chooses to exclude herself from humanity: unlike an "ordinary" human, she prefers this to being condemned and remaining in the human world of suffering. Macintosh (2000) p.7 observes that she has shed every feature of her former human self here.

[605] Boyle (1988) pp.85-6 cites the final lines of *Medea* as evidence of Seneca's impressive "mastery of theatrical closure". Desy (2005) p.928, n.7 uses them as evidence that Medea is not a bringer of justice, but this misses the irony of Jason's folly here. Fitch & McElduff (2002) p.20 believe that the ambivalence of the final line suggests the interconnection between the gods' loss of power and Medea's powerfulness: however, perhaps we should understand that she joins the gods, rather than surpasses them.

[606] Boyle (2006) p.198, (1997) p.57 and (1988) p.81 observes that there is a verbal circle here: *di* is the first word of the play, and *deos* is the last; he also notes the cyclical structure of imagery in the play.

evident that they have answered Medea's call, and thus she appears to be on the side of justice;[607] furthermore, she now enters the realm of the divine, thereby proving the gods acceptance of her. The tragedy does not truly seem to be Medea's: here, as she leaves, she is the exultant winner, and it is Jason who appears to have lost everything, while she now celebrates in her glory.[608] This is what sets Medea apart from other tragic heroines: she is ultimately triumphant. Medea had attempted to function on the mortal plane in human society, but placing this restriction on her proved destructive; therefore, in some ways this can be seen as the tragedy of a figure trapped between the human and divine worlds,[609] until she eventually breaks out and finds her rightful place in the universe, finally undergoing her metamorphosis into a divine being.[610]

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[607] Indeed the gods answer her prayers alone in this play: Fyfe (1983) p.86. Boyle (2006) p.198 and (1988) p.92 notes that Medea triumphs while working with the divine forces of the cosmos. Foley (1989) p.82 views Euripides' Medea as an amoral deity, yet this seems contradictory with her acknowledgement that she is acting for justice (see n.322 above).

[608] Nussbaum (1997) p.219 perhaps overstates it as a "triumph of love"; she argues that Seneca's message is that anyone who loves immoderately could kill. The Stoic Seneca is using the most excessive example he can find, Medea (and she cannot be considered an ordinary mortal by any standards), to warn his audience of the dangers of immoderate emotions and passion.

[609] Arcellaschi (1996) p.190 considers Medea to be somewhere between human and divine, and thus always alone; Gessert (2004) pp.242-3 views Medea as a tragic figure trapped between existence and death, who therefore has becomes a *larva*, a disturbed spirit causing destruction and suffering.

Boedeker (1997) p.139, referring to Euripides' play, interestingly suggests that the Symplegades, the clashing rocks the Argonauts had to travel between, represent the uncrossable threshold between Jason and Medea's worlds: this could be geographical, cultural or divine/human.

[610] Zeitlin (2002) pp.107-9 seems incorrect in the inclusion of Medea in her theory that "functionally women are never an end in themselves, and nothing changes for them once they have lived out their dreams on stage": in her myth Medea achieves much, admittedly at first on Jason's behalf, but in her tragedy, male characters are weak and insignificant next to her, as she undergoes a remarkable transformation from human to divine through her own mighty actions, and emerges singularly triumphant. Zeitlin supports her argument with the view that Medea's function in the plot is to punish Jason as an agent of retribution: this is, indeed, part of her role, but we should not merely view her as defined by her relationship with Jason. It is possible to view any character in relation to another that they interact with, in order to support such an argument, and all tragedies contain male characters to whom we can relate the female protagonists, and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

Medea is never a straightforward character, which makes her such a figure of interest and fascination, perfect for literary treatment and the exploration of tensions. In this tragedy we witness many paradoxes and conflicts within her: for example, human versus divine; wife versus mother; *amor* versus *furor*; love versus hate; life versus death; control and power versus an unrestrained and wild nature; strength versus weakness; repellent versus sympathetic.[611] Medea is such an ambiguous creature that it is unsurprising that we ultimately seek to resolve an issue of polar opposites in her character.

The figure of Medea, as she is presented by Seneca, is undoubtedly a wicked one. However, Seneca has clearly chosen not to completely vilify her: in his portrayal of the legendary child-killer, he has included many aspects that seem intended to evoke sympathy from his audience.[612] We are presented with a Medea who has been placed in a very difficult situation, having been ostracised by all: Seneca has particularly underscored her status as an outsider, less in terms of her barbarism which is only occasionally mentioned, and more through the hostility which she endures from all.[613] Medea has been unfairly abandoned by the man she loves, for whom she has given up everything, and is left with no one, without a home or a family, and thus behaves as a woman scorned. Jason's reasons for abandoning Medea for another woman are also dubious, as the heroine suggests: Jason uses contradictory feeble excuses but, as Medea appears to realise, this is more about ambition for power than concern for his children. Seneca also presents Medea as a victim of injustice at the hands of Creon: he wishes to exile her on the pretext of her former crimes, which she only committed to aid Jason, and which the king was fully aware of when he first accepted the couple into Corinth. Seneca

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[611] On her many dual aspects see, for example, Nussbaum (1997) p.223; Garelli-François (1996) p.204; Segal (1983) p.238; and Dupont (1997).

[612] Therefore Roisman's conclusion, (2005) pp.86-8, that we do not sympathise with Medea because she is too far distanced from the audience by her savage and magic nature, seems incorrect. Rambaux (1972) p.1010 comments that, although our first reaction is to recoil in horror at Medea's behaviour, we then seek to understand it; he concludes, pp.1022-3, that Seneca's psychological analysis helps the audience understand how a woman could murder her sons. Costa (1973) p.9 notes that this play explores Medea's claim to sympathy. Hutchinson (1993) pp.634 labels her a "monster of vice", yet acknowledges the audience's admiration for her. Fitch & McElduff (2002) pp.38-9 describe the "fascinated repulsion" with which an audience responds to Medea.

[613] Benton (2003) emphasises Medea's isolation; her barbarian origins are less prominent than she suggests, although they do undoubtedly feature: Benton ignores the witch-side of Medea in her paper, but Seneca's wish to emphasise this seems the reason that the barbarian aspects are relatively minimal. She also records Peter Davis' valid observation, p.274, that Medea's isolation is evident in the structure of the play, since she is often on stage alone without the chorus: see nn.313, 359, 479, above.

portrays this king as a cowardly tyrant, whose arguments are weak, but Medea appears trapped, and the author thus seems to sympathise with his heroine.[614]

In this version, however, she is far from being a victim, despite these injustices. Seneca picks up where Ovid's *Heroides* 12 ended: the heroine has moved beyond the initial stage of shock and hurt, which she displayed in that text, to a realisation of the betrayal, which brings with it an anger of tremendous force. Emotions govern her and, combined with her concern to protect her pride, this anger causes her forceful wish to have a mighty revenge. Her powerful personality cannot allow Jason's oath-breaking offence against her, and she will not be discarded so disrespectfully: she has a reputation, of which she is very aware, and she must act to maintain and exceed it. This fierce nature makes her less pitiable in the audience's eyes since, when she is emphasising her own formidable nature, it is evident that she is more than capable of defending herself. Indeed, Seneca has given several indications in the tragedy that his heroine is to be considered in an avenging role: she is compared to a Fury, and certainly appears to share their attributes in her furious vengeful nature.[615] There are also many hints of her role as divine agent of retribution, punishing Jason for his transgressions of nature's boundaries with his sea voyage. Furthermore, she is certainly the one to emerge triumphant over him, making it appear that the gods are indeed on her side. Therefore, although she is quite the opposite of a victim, she is not being vilified in this respect, since Seneca portrays her as acting on behalf of the gods.

From Medea's behaviour, and especially her role as a Fury or avenger, it is evident that she is not a passive heroine at all. Indeed, she is not only active, but aggressive: Seneca leaves his audience with the impression of a most formidable woman, who has power over everything. Again this dictates that we cannot view her as a true victim: we know that when Medea threatens vengeance, she will certainly have it. Her mightiest powers are clearly derived from her divine ancestry, and especially her

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[614] Thus Rabinowitz's view, (1992) p.39, that the structure of tragedies often works to contain the destructive passion of the woman, and so the audience is placed on the side of the masculine protagonist, does not seem valid here.

[615] Nussbaum (1997) pp.224-5 discusses the comparison of Medea with the Furies: both are horrific justice bringers, who seek revenge in "foul" ways. She uses this to emphasise the dual role of Medea, between greatness and evil: the audience sympathises and feels Medea is justified in her vengeance, but is horrified and repelled by the form of it.

role as a sorceress.[616] Seneca embellishes this extensively to create a melodramatic portrait of a witch, including every feature that he could imagine: like his heroine, Seneca is determined to outdo himself here. This is where the author particularly shows the influence of the era in which he lived: this exaggerated, ghoulish and frightening figure is very much a product of the Silver Age, with its taste for the fantastic and macabre; and at this point Seneca is able to employ his rhetorical training, with exhaustive catalogues and overblown descriptions. The witch passage is the crowning glory of the text, and appears to be the section to which Seneca has devoted the most attention and effort. Therefore the overall effect of this passage is of such a magnitude that it is often the section which leaves a lasting impression on the reader: Seneca's Medea has thus often been wrongly judged as nothing more than an inherently evil sorceress,[617] which, on a cursory reading of the text, is possible to believe.[618] However, this is not an accurate judgement of her character, as presented by Seneca: opinions of this kind seem to have been biased by the sheer impact of the witchcraft scene. Although Seneca has chosen to make his Medea a witch rather than a barbarian in the text, it should be recognised that, for the vast majority of this play, Seneca's heroine is a woman scorned above all else. The vehemence of her anger is indeed mighty and beyond the moderation of an ordinary mortal but, until the sorceress scene and the nurse's description of her mistress which immediately precedes it, Medea is principally a woman; furthermore, she again returns to being a woman in the final scenes, at least superficially, until the very end when her serpent-drawn chariot arrives to assist her escape. There are allusions to her divine capabilities, from the outset of the play, but Seneca uses these to cause anticipation in his audience for the witch scene: he holds back so that the scene can have the

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[616] Janowitz (2001) p.86, discussing witchcraft and gender, remarks that women are over-represented as associated with magic, attributing it to male projections of all that they fear onto women. She summarises these female figures, pp.88-9, in terms familiar to anyone having read Seneca's *Medea*: isolated figures who threaten family and the general social fabric; however, it is not true that Medea has "no redeemable features". She considers Medea specifically as antisocial, destructive and threatening.

[617] Durham (1984) p.56 labels her a "sadistic beast" and considers her degraded. Lawall (1979) p.423 refers to Medea as the "arch symbol of human wickedness", when discussing a passage in the play preceding both the murders and the witch scene; it is likely that he has been biased by future events, although it is possible he has the murder of Pelias in mind. For an opposing view, which seems equally erroneous, Henry & Walker (1967) pp.176-7 believe that Medea has no real identity because of the continuous changes and response to circumstances: their argument and conclusion are unclear.

[618] For an example of such a reading, which seems rather superficial in ignoring the complexities and subtleties Seneca was exploring in her character, see Roisman (2005), especially p.82. Herington (1966) p.449 presents an over-simplified view of Senecan tragedies when he describes the plot movement as consisting of "The Cloud of Evil"; "The Defeat of Reason by Passion"; "The Explosion of that Evil": this can be traced in the *Medea*, but such a view omits other aspects of the play, and exaggerates her "Evil" by focusing on that alone.

maximum impact when reached, and therefore Medea appears predominantly as a woman scorned who greatly over-reacts because of the offence against her.

Furthermore, the Senecan Medea should not be viewed as a merely one-dimensional figure. From the nature of the text, which covers only a short space of time, it is to be expected that Medea cannot significantly develop as a character.[619] However, we do see a momentous change in her personality, from angry and hurt mortal into a truly formidable divine being: her immoderate anger and pride drive her on and create this metamorphosis.[620] However, there are also subtleties of character in her portrayal throughout the text: Medea does not always appear as an incessantly raving and evil being, displaying a gentler side on occasion.[621] She is affected by ordinary human emotions: indeed human feelings rule Medea and, in her, Seneca explores the Stoic concept of emotion versus reason. Anger, anguish and pride are the principal emotions dominating the heroine, but there are also indications of more honourable feelings within her. There is little love left for Jason by this stage, but we do glimpse moments of affection towards her former husband, which causes brief battles of *amor* versus *furor*, as she attempts to excuse his unfaithful behaviour so that she does not have to punish him. She also clearly does love her sons, despite finally killing them and, far from being portrayed as an easy step for Medea to take, as it would be if she were a truly evil figure, this decision also causes an internal struggle for Medea: she displays genuine maternal feelings towards her boys, and it is necessary for her to distance herself from them in order to carry out the murders. Seneca has also portrayed a Roman sense of duty in Medea, who has a deep concern for piety towards her family: she is haunted by the guilt of betraying her father and brother, and clearly regrets this; indeed it is the previous murder of her irreplaceable brother which finally leads to the slaughter of her sons. It is this need to punish herself, along with her role as divine avenger, which means that the Senecan Medea can be considered in some ways justified for killing her children. Throughout the tragedy we witness Medea suffering various overwhelming emotions which control her, and often these are genuine tender human feelings: therefore Medea is not presented as a one-dimensional evil figure.

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[619] Costa (1973) p.9 believes that Medea's character does not develop; however, Ahl (1986) p.31 seems more accurate: he views Senecan characters as not simply linear, consistent beings, but as behaving differently in various situations and contradicting themselves through their internal conflicts.
[620] See Arcellaschi's view of Medea's transformation (1996) pp.188-9; see also n.622 below.
[621] Trinacty (2007) p.76 rightly attributes this to the influence of Ovid's *Heroides* 12, viewing it as her elegiac side surfacing.

Emotions, then, are a prominent theme of this tragedy.[622] Although Seneca has portrayed Medea as wronged and, in part, justified for her behaviour, he emphasises here the potential of immoderate behaviour: in her over-reaction to the infidelity of Jason, it is the extent of her behaviour which is depicted as ultimately wrong, as is evident in the terrible outcome of the play, caused by her wounded pride. However, we should note that these emotions are depicted as a madness afflicting Medea: we repeatedly witness her raving and displaying crazed tendencies, appearing to be outside herself as she suffers. Since *furor* grips her, and she is portrayed as mad for a large part of the text, it is possible to view Seneca as, in part, exonerating her from responsibility for her actions:[623] Medea, incapable of reasoning since she is possessed, is not in control of herself at these times, and her susceptibility to her feelings is her only real weakness. However, by the end of the play she has shaken off this vulnerability since she has become divine, and transcended such mortal emotions.

Medea's reaction to her feelings is far from that of a weak woman: her strength of character, even as a mortal, is formidable, especially when compared with that of other characters in the play.[624] Seneca has depicted the men around her as particularly weak and ineffectual in order to emphasise Medea's power.[625] She easily outwits Jason and Creon, who foolishly underestimate her: despite awareness of her capabilities, they treat her as yet another passive woman, but should know that she is no ordinary mortal.[626] Medea employs characteristically feminine wiles, securing herself the time and situation which enable her to fulfil her revenge: this act of deceitful manipulation is not that of a witch, but of a

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[622] Arcellaschi (1996) p.184, in a study on Medea as violence itself, notes a combination of three emotions, *amor*, *ira* and *furor*, as the driving force behind her violence. Interestingly, p.186, he discerns that there are two murder victims for each: for love, Absyrtus and Pelias; for anger, her two sons; for fury, Creusa and Creon. He convincingly describes Medea, pp.189-90, as undergoing a metamorphosis in the text, under the influence of these emotions, which causes stages of violence in her until the transformation culminates in her apotheosis. Although he puts forward an interesting case in his conclusion, considering images of Medea on children's sarcophagi and the possible origins of Medea as a protectress of children, it seems to be pushing the view rather too far to consider her as an angel figure in this text.

[623] Roisman (2005) p.84 is correct that Seneca does "play up her derangement", but overlooks the possibility that this, in some measure, makes his Medea less monstrous than the cool and calm Euripidean version, who kills her children while sane.

[624] However, Marti (1945) p.230 suggests that Medea is weak.

[625] Schiesaro (1997) p.109 remarks that the other characters are so dull that the audience is perhaps meant to identify with Medea.

[626] Jouan (1986) p.2 comments that "Médée n'était pas une femme ordinaire", and Jason and Creon were "imprudent" to dismiss her, knowing her powers and past use of them.

woman. Ultimately Medea is a woman transgressing boundaries reserved for men[627] and has, therefore, been depicted as a frightening figure with power over all nature, because of the threat she poses to them. Men of the ancient world did not know how to deal with a woman who did not behave with proper decorum and keep to her allotted section of society: therefore, over time, Medea became an increasingly vilified character, and here we witness her converted into a true Silver Age witch as a result of that misunderstanding and fear.[628] However, even Seneca was not able to disguise his degree of admiration for her.[629] She is portrayed with the masculine attributes and strength that the unsympathetic male characters should have possessed:[630] she has the ability to plan and carry out horrific unthinkable deeds, which attacks their very maleness. Ultimately Medea thus emerges triumphant: in this, she differs from other tragic heroines, who do not exit the stage with a grand flourish of exultation. Although we must note that she has suffered the loss of her children, this was her choice and she seems more than satisfied with the outcome, as she apparently escapes any sense of tragedy.[631] Medea is therefore unique and we can view her as the true hero of this play.[632] Seneca's heroine completely dominates the tragedy,[633] and in this way it is rightfully given the title of *Medea*.

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[627] Hall (1989) p.203 refers to Euripides' Medea as the "paradigmatic 'transgressive' woman": this can equally be applied to her tragic Roman successor. Richlin (1992a) p.194, discussing Petronius' Oenothea, notes that she is "like all witches dangerous to virility", which is relevant for Medea.

[628] The comment of Archer *et al.*, (1994) p.xix, that woman in antiquity never really existed and was always an "unsettling construct of the male imagination" seems especially apt here.

[629] Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) pp.10-11, remarks that we sense Seneca's admiration for Medea.

[630] This seems an example of what Zeitlin describes, (2002) p.106, as masculinised women countering feminised males; see also Griffiths (2006) pp.62-3. Garelli-François's valuable argument, (1996) pp.198-9, about Jason's more feminine character, compares him to Andromache in the *Troades*, pleading for her child's life, and Medea with Ulysses, the cruel infanticide in that text; see also n.593, above. Hine (2007) p.119 notes that there is not much emphasis on Medea as a woman in the play: therefore Durham's view, (1984) p.55, that Medea's femaleness is unquestioned, cannot be correct, although the misogynist flavour she attributes to the legend is an undeniable feature.

[631] Bartsch (2006) p.266 notes that Medea's unbreakable spirit means that she "stands far above her own tragedy". It has been questioned whether Medea is truly triumphant: Hine (2007) pp.25-7. This inability to believe that Medea escapes unscathed seems to arise from a moral issue, whereby it is difficult to accept that such abhorrent behaviour can thus be rewarded.

[632] Relevant here is Hall's recognition, (1989) p.125, that the Euripidean Medea is in part modelled on a heroic type, which she considers to be exemplified by the figures of Prometheus, Ajax and Antigone. Dupont (1997) p.19 remarks that Medea distinguishes herself with a "black heroism", in her discussion of Medea's inhumanity. See also Foley in n.344, above. Contrastingly, Durham (1984) does not believe a female tragic hero is possible in a gendered value system.

[633] See Costa (1973) p.9 and Jouan (1986) p.6. Roisman (2005) p.72 labels Medea a "monumental heroine". Costa (1974b) pp.103, 109, observes that the plot of this play consists of a series of debates between Medea and other characters, as she makes her claims and declares her rights, and they challenge this; indeed, this play can be viewed as Medea dominating, with a long series of conflicts with one character after another, not only Jason, Creon and the nurse, but the chorus and even herself. Medea's conflicts are central and integral to this play, displaying her inability to function successfully in human society and conveying her lack of inner tranquillity.

CHAPTER 3: VALERIUS FLACCUS' MEDEA

Very little is known about the personal life of the author of the Roman epic *Argonautica*. From references in his work, we know that Valerius Flaccus was writing during the reign of the Flavians,[634] and was possibly one of the *quindecimviri sacris faciundis*, who had charge of the Sibylline books and supervised foreign cults.[635] We also know, from Quintilian's lament at the poet's passing, that Valerius had died by the end of the first century AD, firmly dating his writing within the Flavian era.[636] His entire legacy to us is an incomplete[637] Latin reworking of the Hellenistic epic *Argonautica*, by Apollonius of Rhodes. As well as deriving influence directly from this Greek epic, Valerius was greatly influenced by Virgil, whose epic poem, the *Aeneid*, undoubtedly provided great inspiration for all Latin epic writers who followed him.[638] However, instead of choosing to create another national epic with historic implications and controversies, Valerius chose a safer topic as the subject of his work:[639] the legendary mythological tale of Jason and the Argonauts including, of course, Medea.[640]

In this chapter I shall consider the character of Medea in Valerius' epic, the final substantial work of the Silver Age to deal with the character. I wish to discover if this final author was bound by the literary constraints of the Silver Age in depicting his heroine, especially following Seneca's vivid and forceful portrayal of Medea. Often Valerius' epic is not highly valued, partly since it is considered to

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[634] There are references to the Flavians in the opening of the epic (1.7-21: Vespasian's time in Britain, Titus' Jewish War, and Domitian's Temple), and allusions to events from the Flavian era at 3.208-9, 4.507-9 (the eruption of Vesuvius) and 6.162, 231-8 (allusions to the Sarmatian campaigns). See Zissos (2008) pp.xiv-xvii.

[635] The references suggesting that Valerius was a *quindecemvir* are perhaps less secure, and are found at 1.5-7 and 8.239-42: Mozley (1998) pp.vii-viii; Summers (1894) pp.1-3; Zissos (2008) pp.xiii-xiv also adds 3.362-458. Griffiths (2006) p.98 suggests that this role possibly meant that he had access to less well-known mythological traditions.

[636] In the *Institutio Oratoria* x.I.90, published between 93 and 95 A.D., Quintilian writes: ***multum in Valerio Flacco nuper amisimus.***

[637] It is generally agreed that the epic was unfinished at Valerius' death, rather than that part of it has since been lost: Martin (1938) pp.138-9; Mozley (1998) p.viii; Hershkowitz (1998) pp.1, 9-10, 15-16 discusses possible endings for the epic.

[638] Varro Atacinus, born during the Roman Republic, also produced a free translation of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, which is now lost but may have provided inspiration for Valerius' version: Summers (1894) p.17 notes that Varro's version was furnished with a learned commentary which may have provided Valerius with details for his text; he also considers, pp.26-33, the influence of Virgil on Valerius' epic.

[639] However, Taylor (1994) pp.231-3 suggests the novel idea that Jason and Medea represent Vespasian/Titus and Berenice, following the influence of Virgil's Aeneas and Dido as Augustus/Julius Caesar/Mark Antony and Cleopatra.

[640] This is not simply the tale of Jason and the Argonauts: Medea becomes the main point of interest and, indeed, eventually takes centre stage in this epic. Summers (1894) pp.55-6 lists several reasons why this theme would have been of interest to Valerius, including a growing fascination with magicians and their lore; he adds that it is remarkable that only Valerius' version is extant out of so many, according to Juvenal and Martial (on which, see Zissos (2004) pp.406-9).

lack originality in relation to its Hellenistic predecessor.[641] I intend here to examine the correspondences with, and variations from, his antecedents to show that he used a variety of sources to create his heroine, who was both similar in some respects to earlier Medeas, as well as a unique creation in other ways.[642] Variations from original texts are often revealing about an author's intentions: therefore, as well as considering the influence of the more recent, Silver Age authors who also wrote about the character of Medea,[643] this will also involve looking at Valerius' earlier epic predecessors.

Valerius deals with the early days of the heroine's mythology, when the young girl meets and falls in love with the hero Jason. Unfortunately the epic breaks off in the middle of book eight which, coincidentally, is in the middle of Medea's role in the epic, as she is fleeing her homeland with Jason and the Argonauts. We have no way of being certain how far Valerius would have carried the heroine's tale: we can only make estimates by judging from Apollonius' plot in the Hellenistic *Argonautica*.[644] Nor can we tell how Medea's character would have ultimately emerged, but we nevertheless have a substantial portion of the Medea and Jason legend: the books we have are certainly enough to be able to survey Valerius' characterisation of the young heroine and, from this, assess how he intended to depict her nature overall.

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[641] Mozley (1998) p.xiii starts from this unfortunate premise, and does not give Valerius' Medea a chance in respect to Apollonius' parallel heroine. However, Conte (1994) pp.489-91 recognises both Valerius' independence and debts. Summers (1894) is an early assessment, acknowledging both merits and faults of the epic; he considers, pp.18-25, the influence of Apollonius and he notes, p.20, that Valerius shuns any attempt to rival him. Garson (1964) p.268 observes that Valerius never simply copies Apollonius. Fantham (1996) p.168 is a more recent detractor of Valerius: she believes that the epithets and similes are unimaginative, the speeches lack power and personality, and his characters are weaker than the Greek original, faults which she attributes to "a return to Virgilian decorum". Kleywegt (2005) p.xv offers a balanced judgement: "the *Argonautica* falls short of a masterpiece of poetry, but is a very respectable poem in its own right".

[642] Hershkowitz (1998) pp.95-100 records the various inter-textual sources that make up Valerius' Medea. Her opinion, pp.188-9, that Valerius' characters are not mere imitation of those of Apollonius and Virgil, but new creations combining and reacting against their predecessors, seems especially valid. This is also the main point of Hull (1975). The interesting premise of Zissos (2002), discussing the Homeric allusions of the epic, is that Valerius' *Argonautica* is not a straightforward imitation of Apollonius' epic, nor a "Vergilian *Argonautica*", although we may sometimes be led to expect this by the author.

[643] Particularly valuable for its focus on the influence of Ovid and Seneca's respective Medeas on Valerius' heroine is Baldini Moscadi (2000).

[644] For the idea that the allusive passages predicting Medea's future deeds are programmatically foreshadowing how the epic would have ended, see Hershkowitz (1998) pp.9-31 and Mendell (1967) pp.136-8. However, since most of the events of her life are mentioned at some point in the epic, it is unlikely that they would all have been included. Martin (1938) pp.138-9 and Kleywegt (2005) pp.139-40 note that the plot appears to follow Apollonius' epic, so their belief that Valerius' version would have ended similarly, seems most likely. See also Zissos (2008) pp.xxvi-xxviii.

BACKGROUND

Although Medea's active role extends over the final four books of the epic,[645] this is not the first that the reader has heard of her. Just as in her previous literary incarnations, Medea's reputation precedes her: Valerius has not been able to resist writing of her future notorious deeds during his narration of Jason's voyage to Colchis, and there are several hints about her powers long before Medea even enters the text.[646] The very first reference to Medea is early in the first book of the *Argonautica*. After Pelias asks Jason to obtain the Golden Fleece, the author interjects to add that Pelias neglected to mention Medea and the serpent guarding the fleece:

> ...silet possessa dracone
> vellera, multifidas[647] regis quem filia linguas
> vibrantem ex adytis cantu dapibusque vocabat
> et dabat ex terno liventia mella veneno. [1.60-3][648]

The first depiction of a character is often important for discerning how the author intends to convey his creation. This early reference to Medea alludes to an event that will occur later in this epic, and Valerius has chosen to use imagery which evokes the magical side of his heroine's nature. Here we have several traditional elements of a sorceress, all within the space of a few lines: we learn of a strange and fearful creature under the control of Medea, through her spells and magic potions. From this first summary of Medea's nature we can expect that, when we do finally meet the heroine in book five, she will conform to Silver Age standards and be a true representative of sorcery. Furthermore, the inclusion of Medea at this early point in the tale of Jason and the Argonauts is not relevant to the progress of the *Argonautica*, and it seems that Valerius can hardly wait for his heroine's entry, so that he includes her before she should feature.[649]

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[645] 5.217 to 8.467, where the epic breaks off.
[646] Feeney (1993) p.317 refers to these hints as evidence of Valerius' "command of fated knowledge". Caviglia (2002) pp.4-5 notes that, unlike the uncertain characterisation of Jason (arguing for a possible "femminilizzazione" of the hero, p.10), Medea is portrayed with certainty, and negativity, from the outset.
[647] Hill (2008) p.202, discussing *Metamorphoses* 7.259 where *multifidas* is applied to torches (*faces*), believes that this word was possibly invented by Ovid. See Kleywegt (2005) pp.52-3 and Zissos (2008) pp.117-18.
[648] The Latin text used throughout is Kramer (1967).
[649] However, Valerius appears to miss one opportunity: Hypsipyle never mentions Medea, as she obsessively does in *Heroides* 6; this is undoubtedly because of the difficulties of portraying Hypsipyle with the necessary powers to see into the future. Bernstein (2008) p.51 discerns in Medea an inverted

Indeed, in a marked departure from Apollonius' *Argonautica*, we hear several predictions of Medea and her future deeds before she features as an actor in the Roman epic: Apollonius' text does contain prophecies of the future for Jason and the Argonauts, but the heroine is not mentioned or alluded to at this early stage.[650] Therefore, one of Valerius' innovations appears to be creating a sense of eager anticipation where his heroine is concerned, endowing her with a mighty presence before she even enters the epic.[651] This is an early sign of the Flavian author responding to the demands of the Silver Age audience, since his epic differs here from his Greek model. Valerius' early references to Medea in the first four books come from prophets and gods who can see the future and know the unpleasantness that it holds. These predictions remain vague for the characters within the tale, but Valerius knew that his audience would fully understand their implications, since the myth was well known. The seers either fall ominously silent on the topic, as Phineus does (*"iamque ultima nobis / promere fata nefas; sileam, precor"*, 4.623-4),[652] or else they allude to various elements involved in the horrid fulfilment of Jason and Medea's destiny, as the prophet Mopsus does:

> "...quem circum vellera Martem
> aspicio? quaenam aligeris secat anguibus auras
> caede madens? quos ense ferit? miser eripe parvos,
> Aesonide. cerno et thalamos ardere iugales." [1.223-6]

This vision of the future, written as a series of rhetorical questions, is the most explicit in the first four books of the *Argonautica* on the subject of Medea's murder of her children and Jason's new bride, before her supernatural escape. Whichever reaction the soothsayer gives, Valerius is bestowing his heroine Medea with an impressive build-up so that our expectations are of a formidable woman indeed. In literary terms, Valerius also places himself next to one of his great predecessors, Homer,

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parallel of Hypsipyle: both can be viewed as condemned, Medea for failure of *pietas* towards Aeetes, Hypsipyle for the service of it towards her father.

[650] For example, Idmon at 1.440ff. and Phineus at 2.401ff. Wijsman (1996) p.126 observes that Medea does not appear in Apollonius until book 3, while Valerius hints at "the fiendish heroine of tragedy" at several early points. Hershkowitz (1998) pp.29-31 recognises that there are relatively few references to the future in Apollonius, in comparison with those in Valerius.

[651] Zissos (2008) p.117 interprets these early references as anticipating Medea's later prominence, and subtly integrating her at an earlier stage.

[652] Feeney (1993) p.316 interestingly interprets this reference as Phineus informing the audience that he will not be retelling the Medea of Euripides, Ovid and Seneca: certainly we do not meet here the murderous creature from any of those authors. Manuwald (2009) discusses the prophecies, considering Phineus' predictions at length.

when he has Jupiter compare Medea to Helen, as a woman whose theft from her homeland will also play a significant part in a war between Greece and foreign lands:

> ...nec vellera tantum
> indignanda manent propiorque ex virgine rapta
> ille dolor...
> ...veniet Phrygia nam pastor ab Ida,
> qui gemitus irasque pares et mutua Grais
> dona ferat... [1.546-51]

Therefore the author is explicitly associating events in Jason and Medea's myth with those of Paris and Helen in the Trojan War: he has Jupiter declare that the latter bring "equal rages" (*iras pares*) to the Greeks, and this association helps establish both a worthy reputation for his work and a place for himself among the great epic poets. Furthermore, by having Jupiter foretell the events of the Trojan War in the immediately following lines, Valerius places Medea directly before Helen as the first "ravished maiden" (*virgine rapta*), thereby suggesting that his own epic precedes Homer's as a form of prequel, since the legendary events the Roman author narrates are clearly stated to be first chronologically as causing grievances between Greeks and foreign nations[653]. Overall, this implies that Valerius is promising both a great work and a mighty heroine.

Before we move to Medea's actual role in the epic, we must first briefly consider the background which Valerius sets for her. As well as the several allusions to Medea, mainly involving the future destiny which we never reach within the confines of the epic as we have it, we have comments on Medea's people and homeland. Geographically, it is evident that they are located on the other side of the world: there can be no doubt of this, since Jason and the Argonauts spend four books of the *Argonautica* reaching the land of Colchis, travelling via many weird and wonderful places on the way.

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[653] Zissos (2002), discussing the Homeric programme of Valerius' epic, convincingly argues that Valerius depicts Medea's "abduction" as part of a chain of events that eventually lead to the Trojan War, and thus sees the *Argonautica* as a foundation myth establishing Jason and Medea's role in human history, and as a prequel to Homer's epic. Similarly, Krevans (1997) p.77 notes that Herodotus includes Medea, with Helen, Io and Europa, as a pretext for Greco-Persian enmity (1.1-4). Barnes (1981) pp.363-4 also considers connections between Medea, Io and Europa, citing places in the text where Valerius compares his heroine with these two girls, and believes this is significant, since their abductions have also been considered as earlier causes of the Trojan War. A further connection is also made between Medea and Io at 7.111-3: see below p.187, nn.672, 735.

This physical distance shows that Colchis could not be further from the known, and civilised, world of the Greeks, and therefore implies that it is a strange land of uncivilised peoples.[654] Several times in the text this is explicitly stated: they are regarded as barbarians or savages, as Telamon designates them (*saevi Colchi*, 3.698). Even the Sun, father of Aeetes and grandfather of Medea, openly acknowledges that his descendants have been settled in a harsh and inhospitable land, referring to the river there as *barbarus Phasis* (1.517-18). Therefore this is the derogatory light in which the Greeks regarded Medea, her family, and her land: uncivilised foreigners or barbarians. This concept was handed down to the Romans who directly inherited these myths, and Valerius is not breaking with tradition in presenting Medea as a foreign princess descended from barbarian peoples of an uncivilised land.[655]

This barbarian background is combined with Medea's divine ancestry, which is kept prominent: she is the granddaughter of the Sun and niece of the sorceress Circe, and Valerius mentions these points, which add gravity and mystery to the princess, throughout the text.[656] For example, in an ecphrasis modelled on the first book of Virgil's *Aeneid* (1.441ff.), where Aeneas is viewing the scenes on Dido's temple to Juno at Carthage, Valerius illuminates Medea's family history and future in the temple of her grandfather Phoebus at Colchis, for Jason to read (5.410ff.). As we would expect, the future depictions here feature Medea's wicked deeds and are quite explicit in many of the details of the revenge she will wreak, including the poisonous robe, the palace in flames, and the serpent chariot (5.440-54). The author makes it clear that the Colchians were unable to identify the characters in these images, although they nevertheless found them repulsive:

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[654] Griffiths (2006) p.60 notes the suitability of the distant Colchis as Medea's homeland; see also Introduction, n.17.

[655] Hall (1989) traces the barbarian tradition to Greek tragedy: she presents the interesting idea, p.35, that Euripides was the first author to portray Medea as a barbarian. For her discussions relevant to Medea as a barbarian, see pp.125, 128, 188, 190-1, 201-3, 208, 222-3.

[656] Bernstein (2008) pp.10-12 discusses the function of divine descent in epic, noting its use for expressing moral and physical superiority. He suggests, p.63, that Medea's ancestry as female descendant of the Sun means she has an inherited inclination towards destructive love affairs; this, therefore, diminishes her responsibility in her actions, since they are partially pre-destined.

...haec tum miracula Colchis

struxerat Ignipotens nondum noscentibus, ille

quis labor, aligeris aut quae secet anguibus auras

caede madens:[657] odere tamen visusque reflectunt. [5.451-4]

However, Valerius' audience cannot fail to interpret these images as Medea's destiny being played out. Again, this is another opportunity exploited by Valerius to keep Medea in the forefront of readers' minds, although she is not currently playing an active part, and a chance to mention her lurid career. The reader has the sense that Valerius is always leading us towards the section containing Medea, and that she will be an important part of his epic: from these early hints we can see that, even during Jason's long voyage with the Argonauts, when his heroic actions should have been the focus, and at a time when she should have had no real part, Valerius allowed some space for Medea to intrude.[658] Indeed, as we shall see, Medea does become the prominent focus of the epic, as soon as she enters the main action.[659]

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[657] *aligeris...madens* is a very close repetition of 1.224-5 (p.165), with the change of *secat* to *secet*. Summers (1894) p.38 discerns an echo of Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.350, also describing Medea: *nisi pennatis serpentibus isset in auras*.

[658] Feeney (1993) p.328 speaks of Medea's "intrusive presence".

[659] Garson (1965) begins with the premise that the Medea section is generally agreed to be the crowning glory of Valerius' otherwise undervalued work. Hull (1975) p.1 believes that the portrait of Medea is Valerius is at his best: she describes this as showing merit and individuality, while containing the spirit of Virgil. Martin (1938) is full of praise for Valerius' heroine, considering her "the most vivid, attractive, and wholly feminine heroine in ancient literature". Certainly the Medea tale is the pinnacle of the epic. That this is where Valerius' interest truly is can be seen through the prominence of Medea, to Jason's detriment, so it is all the more unfortunate that the epic breaks off in the middle of this tale.

THE PORTRAYAL OF MEDEA

Through Valerius' technique of supplying background information and making ominous allusions, the reader has already formed an impression of Medea before meeting her: our expectations are of a formidable sorceress. Initially we are not disappointed for, as he is about to commence the Colchian section of the tale, Valerius makes a further anticipatory interjection about Medea, which accords with all that has gone before: immediately before she enters the text, the author announces her arrival by mentioning her madness (*furias*)[660] and unspeakable compacts (*infanda foedera*), labelling her a fearful maiden (*horrenda virgine,* 5.219-20).[661] However, the difference that we encounter here is in what immediately follows: Valerius goes on to explain that Medea's father, Aeetes, deserves to be abandoned and betrayed.[662] It is, of course, Medea who does this to Aeetes: therefore it appears that, in juxtaposing these two comments, Valerius is in some way exonerating his heroine from her future immoral actions. Furthermore, in terming her a *virgine*, Valerius emphasises her youth and thereby implies a certain innocence.[663]

Rather than fulfilling the potential which his first four books have led us to expect, Valerius instead continues in this vein, presenting his heroine as largely, if not wholly, innocent. Valerius achieves this by portraying her, in essence, as a child, following the characterisation Apollonius had favoured for

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[660] Hershkowitz (2004) p.31 notes the importance of madness in this epic, observing how the Roman author is much more specific about Medea's madness than Apollonius.

[661] Ripoll (2004) pp.188-9 considers 5.217-21 as a prologue marking the opening of the second part of the epic, to be compared with *Aeneid* 7.37ff., where Virgil begins the section of his epic focusing on war. However, he notes that Valerius' emphasis is instead on Medea, who is already characterised as a mighty character with tragic colouring: he attributes this "image terrifiante" to the influence of the Latin tragic depictions of Medea, noting the marked departure from the erotic and light tone of the equivalent passage in Apollonius (3.1-5). Similarly, Hershkowitz (2004) p.31 comments that madness shapes the second half of Valerius' epic, just as *furor* shapes the *horrida bella* of the second half of the *Aeneid* (*dicam horrida bella*, 7.41). This must have implications for the *horrenda virgine*, who is surely, and aptly, being compared to the force of war.

[662] *falli meriti meritique relinqui* (5.223). Bernstein (2008) pp.34-47 explores Aeetes' tyrannical behaviour in detail, perceiving an unfair difference between his treatment of his son and daughter; he discerns, pp.36-7, echoes of the interfamilial treachery of the recent civil war.

Davis (1989) pp.54-7 convincingly argues that, among other lines, 5.217-24 is evidence of Valerius presenting Jason as a pirate, and Medea as loot: she interestingly believes this imagery is derived from the presentation in Ovid *Heroides* 12, and Seneca's *Medea*, which themselves have been influenced by the portrayal of Ariadne in Catullus 64. Hershkowitz (1998) pp.236-8 links the pirate and loot imagery to the connection of Jason and Medea with Paris and Helen: see above, n.653.

[663] Hull (1975) p.1 does not believe that Valerius is ultimately portraying an innocent girl: however, Valerius seemingly places more emphasis on her sorceress elements than Apollonius in order to answer the demands of the Silver Age, not because of any greater horror for her deeds, since we can assume Apollonius would feel the same revulsion. Furthermore, Valerius keeps this to a minimum so that it is the girl who emerges and not the witch.

her in his *Argonautica*: Apollonius displayed a Hellenistic interest in children and young love, and this light-hearted handling has had an obvious influence on Valerius' Roman version of the epic. The emphasis is always on Medea's youth and innocence, and she is frequently referred to as a *virgo.* The maidenly heroine we first meet in book five seems far from capable of performing the unspeakable deeds that were alluded to in the preceding chapters. However, we can also discern the darker side of her character: Valerius ensures that he keeps this prominent in the readers' minds, with references scattered throughout the text. For example, even when we first meet Medea, the author successfully combines both sides of her character. She has been troubled by an unpleasant nightmare:

> dumque pii[664] petit ora patris, stetit arduus inter
> pontus, et ingenti circum stupefacta profundo,
> fratre tamen conante sequi. mox stare paventes
> viderat intenta pueros nece seque trementum
> spargere caede manus et lumina rumpere fletu. [5.336-40]

Dreams and visions are a typical attribute of Silver Age literature and often feature in order to predict future events, helping to create an eerie atmosphere. Valerius has, then, established a gloomy mood for the scene in which his heroine enters,[665] quite different to Apollonius' light-hearted approach. However, Apollonius' Medea similarly has a predictive dream which troubles her (3.615ff.), and Valerius' afraid and confused maiden also owes something to this Hellenistic version. As with her predecessor, the Roman Medea's nightmare clearly foreshadows the deeds the heroine will commit and adds an atmosphere of foreboding. However, Valerius, characteristically for the Silver Age, adds more horror; for, while in Apollonius Medea dreams only of events soon to happen in Colchis, the Roman heroine's dream alludes to her most notorious act, which comes much later in her life, in Corinth: the killing of her two children in revenge for Jason's betrayal. The Roman audience cannot fail to recognise the explicit references to her infamous myth, portending the eventual outcome of her fateful union with Jason. Meanwhile, to Medea this nightmare is confusing and upsetting, and she is

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[664] Wijsman (1996) p.170 observes that *pii* displays Medea's different view (as a dutiful Roman daughter) of Aeetes from that of the narrator in 223 (See n.662 above).
[665] Stover (2003) p.131 discusses the features of this dream in relation to it making Medea appear a foreigner in her own home, in order to illustrate that she is an intruder threatening Jason's heroic status. Bernstein (2008) pp.56-7 believes the dream displays Medea's affection for her father.

uncertain how to interpret it,[666] which helps to contribute to the image of her naivety. This is clearly underscored by her apprehension at the approach of some of the Greeks[667] when she is at the river cleansing herself from the potential evil of the dream.[668] Her fear can be seen in her exclamation to her nurse:

> "quae manus haec, certo ceu me petat agmine, mater,
> advenit haud armis, haud umquam cognita cultu?
> quaere fugam, precor, et tutos circumspice saltus." [5.353-5]

The manner in which Medea turns in panic to her elder to seek reassurance is endearing, and undoubtedly displays her lack of maturity. It does not seem possible that this frightened creature could turn out to be a powerful magician descended from the gods, who eventually will commit unspeakable deeds. In Apollonius, where Medea was originally portrayed as a fearful adolescent, there is no nurse figure for her to turn to in her troubles, but instead her sister Chalciope plays the role of the adult whose advice she seeks (3.645ff.).

This moment at the river leads to the first meeting of Medea and Jason, which is a scene highly reminiscent of book six of Homer's *Odyssey*.[669] There Nausicaa, a young and shy princess similarly motivated by a dream to go to the river, is shocked to glimpse Odysseus, who has arrived in her lands after his travels. Homer portrayed Nausicaa as a clear leader, uniquely standing out amongst her companions. Valerius likewise depicts his heroine as outshining her friends, using a simile in which he compares her to Proserpina overshadowing other deities:[670]

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[666] Spaltenstein (2004) pp.474-6 comments that Valerius plays ingeniously on the ambiguity of the visions which Medea is unable to interpret, while the readers fully understand. Caviglia (2002) p.13 remarks on the frightening clarity of the allusions.

[667] Hershkowitz (1998) pp.19-20 compares and contrasts the dreams in Apollonius and Valerius: she comments that the Roman Medea cannot be expected to understand the implications, as she has not yet met Jason and he was not in her dream. Therefore her interpretation, that Medea's fear of the hero approaching is a sign that she has made some connection to her nightmare, seems incorrect: furthermore, there is no indication of this in the text, and it merely shows her youthful apprehension.

[668] Hershkowitz (1998) p.20, n.64 notes that Apollonius 4.664ff., where Circe is purifying herself in the sea after a bloody nightmare, is a model for this scene.

[669] La Penna (1979) pp.238-9 describes how this scene condenses *Odyssey* book 6. He notes the bright atmosphere of this meeting, which contrasts with the dark and gloomy dream that preceded it.

[670] Fitch (1976) pp.122-3 discusses this simile, in balance with the one comparing Jason to the star Sirius. On Valerius' use of similes, see Caviglia (2002) and Manuwald's corresponding article (2002).

florea per verni qualis iuga duxit Hymetti
aut Sicula sub rupe choros hinc gressibus haerens
Pallados hinc carae Proserpina iuncta Dianae,
altior ac nulla comitum certante, prius quam
palluit et viso pulsus decor omnis Averno. [5.343-7]

This simile functions to illustrate the character of Medea in several ways. Firstly, Valerius has been inspired by Homer's Nausicaa in portraying the Colchian princess as superior to her peers: from this we are to understand that she is both physically and mentally greater. Incidentally, at this point it should be noted that it is necessary for Jason to have his image artificially enhanced by the goddess Juno:[671] possibly this can be read as an early sign indicating that Medea is the true hero of the Roman *Argonautica*, since she is portrayed as naturally superior here. However, we should remember that Athena also adds lustre to Odysseus' appearance in Homer's epic, as does Hera to Jason in Apollonius (3.919ff.). Secondly, this simile suggests that Medea compares with Proserpina, who outdoes other goddesses, both reminding the reader that Medea is of divine descent and of the tremendous power she eventually comes to have. Thirdly, Proserpina was Pluto's victim, carried off by him to his domain, the Underworld; similarly, Medea will be taken away by Jason to his homeland, and this comparison underscores that Valerius will portray his heroine as a victim in this, as Seneca's Medea attempts to depict herself when she uses the same comparison.[672] Finally, and most significantly, Proserpina is perhaps not the most obvious goddess to employ for illustrating a female character's striking qualities, especially when we consider that Homer describes Nausicaa as standing out like the Olympian goddess Artemis. However, the relevance is that Proserpina is a queen of the underworld, and this serves to remind us of Medea's darker side and hint at the infernal aspects of her nature and life: this function of the simile is confirmed by the following reference to Medea's role as priestess of

[671] Summers (1894) p.3 finds this inconsistent, since Juno does not think of making Medea fall for Jason until the next book. However, this can be read merely as Juno making the hero an impressive figure, and thereby assisting him in successfully gaining entry into the country; the comparison with Homer's scene appears to support this, since Nausicaa is not made to fall in love with Odysseus, only to be impressed by his appearance.

[672] At *Medea* 11-12; see Chapter 2, pp.91-2. Stover (2003) p.127 discerns in the use of Proserpina, who was raped by Pluto, the hint of sexual violence. Griffiths (2006) p.99 observes that this comparison emphasises Medea's role as victim; Bernstein (2008) pp.60-1 comments that Medea's parallels with Proserpina and Io (see below p.187) accentuate the pathos of her victimisation by the goddesses, and underscore that her actions have wider historical consequences. See n.653 above: on Medea compared with Helen as booty being carried off.

Hecate, an attendant of Proserpina.[673] This role seems an incongruous concept at this stage since, other than Valerius' portentous references, Medea seems too innocent to be associated with the underworld and sorcery. Valerius is successful in portraying his heroine as a child, simultaneously keeping prominent the memories of exactly who this child is and, more importantly, what she will become.

There are many more parallel elements between the meeting episode in Homer and that in Valerius. The unexpected sight of the hero in both cases frightens the maidens, although it is the heroines who are addressed since they stand out foremost in their crowd. One of the details that Valerius clearly derived directly from the scene is when Jason compares Medea to Diana and questions if she is actually divine:

> "si dea, si magni decus huc ades" inquit "Olympi,
> has ego credo faces, haec virginis ora Dianae,
> teque renodatam pharetris ac pace fruentem
> ad sua Caucaseae producunt flumina Nymphae.
> si domus in terris atque hinc tibi gentis origo,
> felix prole parens, olimque beatior ille,
> qui tulerit longis et te sibi iunxerit annis." [5.378-84][674]

Valerius is closely echoing Homer here for, in order to win the girl's favour, Odysseus compares Nausicaa to Diana's Greek counterpart, Artemis,[675] before declaring that, if she is a mere mortal, then

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[673] Hence Medea carries the twin torches: *...in vittis geminae cum lumine taedae* (5.348); Wijsman (1996) p.176 notes that *vittis* may suggest a sacrificial victim. On Medea's associations with Hecate, see Chapter 1, n.84. Hershkowitz (1998) p.96 recognises the "sinister twist" in the change of goddess from Diana to Proserpina; Wijsman (1996) pp.172-3 notes the tragic and sinister undertones of the "Death and the Maiden" motif; Caviglia (2002) p.15 acknowledges the suitability of the comparison.

[674] Stover (2003) pp.127-9, 132-3 interestingly observes the echoes here of Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4.320-6, where Salmacis flatters Hermaphroditus before raping him, viewing this as evidence of Medea threatening Jason's male status; see n.675 below. Wijsman (1996) p.191 notes that *producunt* is often connected with funerals; he discerns, p.192, an echo of *Aeneid* 4.28, where Dido says *primus qui me sibi iunxit* in *sibi iunxerit*, noting that it does not suggest a stable union.

[675] Apollonius' Jason also compares Medea with Artemis (3.876-86). Hershkowitz (1998) pp.95-7 discusses the Artemis/Diana comparison of Nausicaa/Medea, and notes echoes of *Aeneid* 1.329ff. and 1.498ff., where Aeneas compares Dido to the huntress goddess. Stover (2003) pp.126-7 believes that the echoes between the moment Aeneas first sees Dido (*obtutuque haeret defixus in uno*, 1.495) and Jason here encountering Medea (*haeret in una / defixus*, 5.376-7), is evidence that Medea's entrance threatens Jason's role as a hero, since in Virgil this is the moment that the "epic and its hero are confronted and threatened by amatory themes". Medea certainly does threaten Jason's heroic role and, although Stover makes a good argument, it seems he has overlooked some of the more obvious points later in the epic, in his detailed analysis.

her family and future husband are truly blessed. However, Valerius has cleverly used this famous scene from the *Odyssey* for ironic effect in his epic: the words of Jason sting when we hear him exclaim that Medea's family and future husband are most fortunate, because we know that he is the "lucky" man in question and that she will betray her family for him, and then in turn take bitter revenge on him for his infidelity.[676] Thus this use of Homer acts as yet another allusion to the future of Medea and Jason: it seems that we are not to forget who this seemingly harmless girl is.

In response to this flattery, the princesses of both Homer and Valerius agree to assist the hero in obtaining access to their father, the king: both girls send their respective hero off with someone to guide them on their way. Thus both heroines act as the key to gaining entry to their homeland.[677] Overall, Valerius' meeting scene is in many ways an abbreviated version of Homer's. However, although Nausicaa is impressed at the sight of Odysseus, Medea is rather dumbstruck by Jason initially:

> regina, attonito quamquam pavor ore silentem
> exanimet, mirata tamen paulumque reductis
> passibus in solo stupuit duce... [5.373-5]

This silent gazing at Jason seems natural behaviour for a young girl who has caught sight of a handsome man for the first time,[678] and it is noted that Jason is similarly impressed by Medea. However, there is no mention of love or infatuation, and nothing comes from this moment: Valerius gives us the impression that this could lead to something, especially in his reference to Medea as *regina*, meaning queen rather than princess, and serving as a reminder of Virgil's queen of Carthage, Dido, who fell for the foreign visitor to her shores, Aeneas. However, at this stage in the text, Medea does not fall for Jason:[679] she simply sends him off to the palace with a guide and then leaves the main

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[676] Garson (1969) p.363 aptly terms this a "grimly ironic twist"; Spaltenstein (2004) p.487 remarks on the tragic irony. Stover (2003) p.126 points out a further comparison between Homer and Valerius' heroines: although Medea does not realise it, she too is preparing for marriage by going to the river.

[677] This can be seen as symbolically representing the virgin giving her body to the man. The homeland is where she comes from and partly defines her, so she is thus handing herself over; see n.729 below.

[678] Caviglia (2002) p.12 identifies this gazing as a theme of the poem, recurring in the teichoscopia scene below: see pp.180-4.

[679] Mozley (1998) pp.xiii-xiv: however, he traces the gradual progression of the love in human terms and does not greatly credit the gods' involvement, which does appear to be principally responsible here. La Penna (1979) pp.238-9 acknowledges that there is no hint of love yet, since this is reserved for when Medea watches the battle from the walls: see pp180-4 below. Martin (1938) p.141 thus

action of the epic for a whole book, while Jason meets with Aeetes and takes part in the war against Perses.[680] However, Medea is never far from our author's mind, and even in the middle of war plans and lists of warriors, he makes tenuous links to Medea, so that she is not forgotten. For example, we learn that one warrior is drawn to the war precisely because of Medea's famous skills:[681]

> maximus hos inter Stygia venit arte Coastes;
> sollicitat nec Martis amor, sed fama Cytaeae
> virginis et paribus spirans Medea venenis. [6.155-7]

In Apollonius' epic, Medea's first glimpse of Jason is the moment that she falls in love with him, thanks to the scheming of the very human goddesses, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, who enlist the aid of Eros to shoot the girl with an arrow of love (3.275ff.). However, in Valerius' *Argonautica*, Medea's first encounter with Jason has been placed before the gods involve Medea herself, and the scene shows that the girl is merely impressed by the hero, and has not yet succumbed to any feelings for him: this both establishes a parallel to Homer's Nausicaa and suggests that, without divine intervention, Medea could have resisted Jason's charms altogether, and might not have ever fallen for him; in turn, this implies that the Roman Medea might not have betrayed her family, nor committed the chain of crimes which this love and betrayal initiated, if the gods had not interfered.[682]

As the tale progresses, Valerius continues to release Medea from much of the blame for the crimes she commits, and depicts her as mostly innocent in events as they unfold. This is principally achieved through his following the plot of Apollonius' epic, by including the involvement of the gods: the

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seems erroneous in interpreting this as "the first flame of love" and "fluttering of hearts", and perhaps is imposing the imagery from the first meeting of the couple in Apollonius, where Medea's soul flutters out after Jason (3.440).

[680] Butler (1909) pp.184-5 considers Jason's victory in this war for Aeetes to be ample justification for his resort to Medea's magic to gain the fleece, since the king denied him it although he had fulfilled his side of the bargain.

[681] Wijsman (2000) p.34 notes that this catalogue is framed by characters connected with Medea, lending the book and war "overtones of interest in Medea". During the list of warriors, we learn that Anausis of the Henochi was offended that Medea was betrothed to the king of Albania (6.42-7), and Valerius refers to her as *monstri*. Later Anausis loses his life in a battle with Medea's fiancé, Styrus, where he relishes the chance to win her hand (6.265-78); as he is dying Valerius takes the opportunity to mention Medea's powers, when he has Anausis claim that she will have no spells or herbs to cure Styrus' wounds.

[682] Hull (1975) p.10 suggests that *pudor* would have been stronger. However, her view, p.16, that Valerius does not thus excuse Medea seems erroneous. Ripoll (2004) pp.195-9 more accurately considers that the divine intervention partly justifies Medea: he believes Medea's culpability is lessened by it, but that her responsibility is not removed. Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) p.10, also questions if this divine interference exculpates Medea.

interference of Jason's protector goddess, Juno, takes the blame away from Medea,[683] who appears as her victim. Juno cruelly enlists the aid of Venus in order to make Medea fall deeply in love with Jason, so that she will assist him in his tasks: this means that the heroine cannot be viewed as wholly at fault, as she is subject to a power far beyond her control, and there is an inevitability about the outcome.[684] Instead of having Cupid shoot Medea with an arrow of love, as happened in the Hellenistic epic, Juno does the "dirty work" herself, when she employs not only Venus' aphrodisiac girdle, but also deceitful trickery, to manipulate the girl emotionally: she appears to Medea disguised as her sister Chalciope in order to gain her trust. The force of Juno's will is also displayed physically as she drags the girl off:[685]

> illa nihil contra; nec enim dea passa manumque
> implicat et rapidis mirantem passibus aufert.
> ducitur infelix ad moenia summa futuri
> nescia virgo mali et falsae commissa sorori. [6.488-91]

In this passage we find a possible reminiscence of Virgil's *Aeneid*, when Medea is designated as *infelix*: the epithet most often associated with the Augustan poet's "unhappy" Dido.[686] This allusion would not have been missed by a Roman audience, who would have been most familiar with the

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[683] Bernstein (2008) p.35 summarises this as the goddesses' (and Jason's) deception reducing the element of choice informing Medea's actions towards her father.

[684] Feeney (1993) p.327 notes that this differs from Ovid's Medea in the *Metamorphoses*, since the involvement of the gods is neither explicit nor certain there: see Chapter 1, pp.12-13. Bernstein (2008) p.31 remarks that Juno and Venus' interference is the most fully developed narrative of divine intervention in the epic. Manuwald's comment, (2009) p.587, that the "gods sometimes act to the disadvantage of the humans concerned" seems an understatement of their far-reaching effects on Medea's life.

[685] The premise of Salemme (1992) is Valerius' very different approach to making his heroine fall in love, from Apollonius' simple focus on Eros' arrows, noting the closer correspondences with Virgil's *Aeneid*. Salemme discusses in detail the physical contact of the goddesses, or "contagio d'amore", necessary to overcome Medea's will. He considers how the physical contact shows Medea's subjugation to the goddesses (p.9), and is only abandoned by them once Medea has stopped resisting love (p.21). It is noted (pp.5-6) that this girdle of love is an echo of Aphrodite's magic band, which Hera similarly uses to deceive Zeus in Homer's *Iliad* 14, although Valerius has transformed the light-hearted scene into a more serious and negative one.

[686] On *infelix* having been derived from Virgil's Dido, see Wijsman (2000) p.192. Bernstein (2008) p.35 notes that Medea is represented as a victim of the goddesses, on the model of *infelix Dido*; Griffiths (2006) p.98 remarks that Juno appears as a villain in this epic, as she had in the *Aeneid*, where she launched a similar attack upon Dido. Spaltenstein (2005) pp.144-5 considers the reference to be less a direct echo of Dido, and more a general reference to her as archetype of the unfortunate lover.

Hull (1975) pp.4-5 interestingly comments that, when Valerius uses this epithet to describe Medea, it expresses not only sympathy, but also ironic tones of foreboding, while *misera* is used to express pure pity; although this tone of foreboding is evident, the signs of "shrinking horror that borders on condemnation" are not apparent.

earlier Latin epic and this famous epithet. The reference lends an air of tragedy to the situation because of the unfortunate outcome for the queen of Carthage, similarly subject to the will of Venus. Although, as a widow and lover of Aeneas, Dido was not a "maiden", in this text *nescia virgo* reminds us once more of Medea's youth and innocence, and that she would therefore be even more impressionable and easily manipulated by the goddesses. Therefore, from this alone we can expect that Medea will not be able to resist the divine intervention and also that there will be an unhappy ending for her.

The tragic element[687] is further supplemented by Hecate's sympathetic comments: she looks upon her protégée with pity, knowing that the future holds unhappiness for her because she will end up deserted by her *mendaci viro* (6.501). Hecate promises to stay faithful to her (*neque te, mea cura, relinquam*, 6.499) and ensure that any injustice that she suffers will not go unpunished, clearly designating Medea as a victim:[688] this warning is the first time that there is reference to Medea's future evil deeds as a consequence of the direct action of the events here in Colchis.[689] The care and tenderness Hecate displays towards Medea reminds us of a nurse figure in tragedy, as well as underscoring the girl's helplessness in a predestined situation over which she can have no control. As a lesser goddess, Hecate makes no attempts to oppose Juno and Venus: all she can do is offer her support, and so Valerius makes it clear that Medea has no chance. Valerius aptly expresses Medea's helplessness through a simile comparing the development of her love to an increasing wind:

> ac velut ante comas ac summa cacumina silvae
> lenibus adludit flabris levis auster, at illum
> protinus immanem miserae sensere carinae,
> talis ad extremos agitur Medea furores. [6.664-7][690]

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[687] However, Mozley (1998) p.xiii believes that Medea is not tragic, but a mere "simple girl", which seems to reflect his unfortunate prejudiced view of Valerius' Medea in comparison with Apollonius' heroine: see n.641 above. He is correct, however, that the Roman Medea exhibits much tenderness.

[688] Strand (1972) pp.116-17 discusses 6.499, with reference to Medea in the role of victim.

[689] Venini (1989) p.274 comments that Hecate's speech is permeated with an awareness that this is the first in a chain of events; she sees in this a parallel to Virgil's Opis watching Camilla for Diana (*Aeneid* 11.841ff.). Dinter (2009) pp.554-6 observes this parallel, and other echoes of the *Aeneid*, in his discussion of the epitaphic quality of 6.497-502.

[690] Wijsman (2000) pp.254-5 discusses this simile in detail. Salemme (1992) p.11, n.15 considers it to have been borrowed from Apollonius 2.1100ff. Ovid and Seneca also employ wind imagery in similes describing Medea: *Metamorphoses* 7.79ff., Chapter 1, pp.17; *Medea* 938ff.: Chapter 2, pp.143-4.

As *furores* here illustrates, love is often depicted as a madness that grips a person, and this simile shows the strength of it. As the epic progresses, we see the love grow in Medea simultaneously with the *furor*, as it gradually conquers her reason.[691] In classical antiquity *furor* was considered an emotion to which women were particularly susceptible, since they were considered of a mentally weaker disposition than men, and so more easily influenced by such irrational passions.[692] A woman in love was held to be potentially dangerous, especially if matters did not go her way: the readers know that the combination of Medea's scorned love and her power as a sorceress will lead to a deadly madness. Juno, too, is fully aware of the potential combination within Medea, questioning the outcome if the savage fire of her magic should be combined with such blind passion (*quid si caecus amor saevusque accesserit ignis?* 6.454).[693] The very reason that the goddess chooses Medea as her victim is the girl's formidable powers: at this stage the princess still appears to be completely innocuous, so Juno's consideration of Medea's mighty powers as the only force capable of assisting Jason in his tasks seems incongruous:

> sola animo Medea subit, mens omnis in una
> virgine, nocturnis qua nulla potentior aris.
> illius adfatus sparsosque per avia sucos
> sidera fixa pavent et avi stupet orbita Solis.
> mutat agros fluviumque vias, suus alligat ignis
> cuncta, sopor[694] recolit fessos aetate parentes
> datque alias sine lege colus. hanc maxima Circe
> terrificis mirata modis, hanc advena Phrixus,
> quamvis Atracio lunam spumare veneno
> sciret et Haemoniis agitari cantibus umbras.[695] [6.439-48]

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[691] Hershkowitz (2004) pp.24-6 discusses the role of madness in epic, noting how it originated in tragedy and was transmitted to epic poetry after Virgil developed it in the *Aeneid*, thereby making tragic madness in epic a particularly Roman concept. She specifically discusses the madness of Valerius' Medea, pp.31-6, 56. She interestingly observes, pp.60-1, that Virgil's successors amplified Medea's madness with the Silver Age mannerism of expansion; however, her opinion, that with each transmutation into a new literary incarnation Medea's madness becomes more intensified, seems flawed, since it is difficult to consider Valerius' Medea suffering a greater madness than Seneca's heroine, who abandons herself to it fully.

[692] This is possibly why Medea falls completely under its spell, while Jason remains aloof and appears insensitive and cold: see below, pp.198-200, 202-3.

[693] Baldini Moscadi (2000) pp.281-2 notes these as elements of Medea's future *furor*: furthermore, she views this combination as part of the traditional image of Medea the magician, noting that Seneca's chorus originally defined her savage love, which in turn alludes to references in Ennius and Virgil.

[694] *suus...sopor* is problematic: see Wijsman (2000) p.177 and Shackleton-Bailey (1977) p.211.

This is the most explicit description we have of Medea's magic up to this point in the text and it is the moment where her magic capabilities are brought directly into the epic's plot, although it seems impossible that this girl could behave in such a magical and powerful manner.[696] In this passage, Valerius takes up the opportunity to employ the conventions of the Silver Age in giving an account that includes the traditional imagery of a witch: here, in a passage that surely owes much to his predecessors, Ovid and Seneca, we learn of Medea's ability to reverse nature, making even her mighty ancestors, the Sun and Circe, both afraid and subject to her will. Although Apollonius also includes descriptions of his heroine's similar abilities, he keeps it brief and does not relish elaborating the details at all.[697] On the other hand, it seems that for Valerius, considering the many hints he has given before this passage, this is the moment he has been waiting to reach: the chance to expound on such a popular topic, in order to satisfy Silver Age tastes. It is evident that he is merely employing contemporary conventions here, since in Apollonius there is no such description: there, when she decides to enlist Medea's aid, Hera simply notes that the maiden is an enchantress, without detailing any of her powers. Nevertheless, we are not actually seeing the Roman Medea in action as a sorceress, and Juno's thoughts about her are merely yet another report of her powers without any real evidence of it: although in the following line Valerius more explicitly combines the witch and the girl (*opibus magicis et virginitate tremendam*, 6.449),[698] he generally keeps this side of Medea to a minimum, instead choosing to emphasise the human side of the princess, while including the descriptions of a witch that will successfully conform and please his contemporary audience.

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[695] Lovatt (2006) p.77 believes that 6.439-54 indicates Medea's "atypicality, her unusual power and ferocity". Ogden (2001) p.141 cites 6.448 as evidence of Medea's necromantic skills; Dinter (2009) p.559 discerns echoes of Lucan's Erictho's necromancy: see Chapter 1, n.96. Baldini Moscadi (1999) and (2000) are important in discussing the influence of Erictho on Valerius' Medea.

[696] Williams (1978) pp.226, 259-60 notes that Valerius tends to treat horror only in a cursory manner. Baldini Moscadi (2000) pp.280-1 discusses 6.439-40 as evidence of the duplicity and ambiguity of Medea: there are two sides to her nature, but Valerius reconciles these, and places most emphasis on the girl rather than the witch. Baldini Moscadi also discusses 6.443-4, interestingly noting that *ignis* and *sopor* are reminders of Medea's future deeds: the fire of the bulls and the palace in Corinth, and the sleep that she induces in the dragon.

[697] For example, Argus describes her powers to his comrades briefly at 3.528ff.

[698] Baldini Moscadi (2000) p.282 discusses the combination of virgin and witch here. Her premise is the ambiguity of the character because of her virginity, on the one hand, and her magic powers, on the other. See also Wijsman (2000) p.179. Davis (1989) p.56 notes that Medea sums this up herself in her later self-designation as *virgo nocens* (8.426). Hull (1975) pp.18-22 also takes the "harmful virgin" phrase as the starting point for a discussion of Medea's ambiguous role.

Valerius' depiction of Medea's growing feelings of love for Jason is his greatest contribution to displaying her human side, and the focus on young love owes much to Apollonius,[699] since the Hellenistic author was particularly interested in the portrayal of youth. However, Valerius' depiction seems a more convincing one than his predecessor's since, in the Latin epic, we see the love develop, while the effects of Eros' arrow are instantaneous in the Hellenistic version (3.284ff.).[700] Valerius successfully portrays the psychology of a young girl in the first flush of love, subject to new unknown emotions pulling her in different directions. During the second half of book six of the Roman *Argonautica*, we see the princess's love progress from virtually nothing into an infatuation and finally reach a peak of madness. Although it is portrayed in this way, there is a tenderness to it which has been derived from Apollonius' portrayal.

Medea's first feelings for Jason are encouraged by Juno/Chalciope as they watch the men in battle from the city walls.[701] This scene is reminiscent of book three of the *Iliad*, where Helen identifies the Greek heroes for the Trojan king Priam, from the walls of Troy: here Valerius can be seen once more comparing his heroine to Helen, as an abductee and cause of war, while establishing his epic next to one of his great predecessors.[702] However, a closer model is to be found in Ovid's Scylla, adoringly

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[699] Garson (1965) pp.105-7 traces many of the correspondences.

[700] Garson (1965) pp.107-10 acknowledges that the gradual development of Medea's love is Valerius' innovation, and gives the author further credit by remarking that it is also more successful than Virgil's portrayal of Dido's love, since there the readers are left to fill in the gaps; this echoes Summers (1894) pp.24-5, who considers Valerius' depiction of Medea's love to be influenced by an Ovidian reading. Hull (1975) p.5 notes that the portrayal of the love story is a combination of Apollonius' and Virgil's influence. Martin (1938) pp.147-8 describes the humanity of Valerius' heroine, as he "gets into the heart", making his Medea appear more genuine.

[701] La Penna (1979) pp.238-9 interestingly believes that Valerius reserved the initial stages of the love for this scene so that he was able to add elements of the *Iliad*, namely war, into his epic, as well as aspects of the *Odyssey*. This is doubtless also inspired by Virgil's inclusion of war in the *Aeneid*. Stover (2003) begins from the premise of the importance in the interaction between the erotic and martial themes of the epic; Feeney (1993) p.326 believes that this set-piece battle is undermined because it is set up with the non-martial purpose of making the girl fall in love with the hero: on the amatory theme overcoming the martial one, see below, nn.805, 847. See also Zissos (2008) pp.xxx-xxxi, who similarly judges the war principally as a means for inciting Medea's sexual passion.

[702] *Iliad* 3.161ff. Zissos (2002) carries this further, in arguing that Valerius establishes Jason's abduction of Medea as the original cause of conflict for the Trojan War: see p.166, n.653 and pp.212-13. See also Taylor (1994) pp.220-1. Helen is visited by Aphrodite in the guise of an old woman, *Iliad* 3.383ff., just as Medea is visited by Juno in disguise as Chalciope: Hershkowitz (1998) pp.97-8 details the parallels with Helen, including the notion that she embodies a similar tension between innocence and danger.

watching Minos, an enemy of her father, from the royal tower:[703] from there Scylla similarly falls in love with the fighting hero for whom she will later betray her father, just as Medea does.

If we ignore the on-going divine involvement, in which Juno inflames the easily-influenced Medea more and more, Valerius depicts a convincing case of a young girl having developed a crush on a man for the first time, eagerly following him with her eyes:[704]

> quaque iterum tacito sparsit vaga lumina vultu
>
> aut fratris quaerens aut pacti coniugis arma,
>
> saevus ibi miserae solusque occurrit Iason.[705] [6.584-6]

No matter where she tries to look this man attracts her gaze, as if she cannot resist him: he is everywhere she turns her eyes, and Valerius has underscored this verbally by making *Iason* the ultimate word and, therefore, climax of this sentence.[706] Medea is hooked, and Juno, knowing that she is impressionable, easily draws her in further: when the girl, feigning ignorance, questions her "sister" about the hero, Juno manipulates her with words that will make her more eager to help him (6.587ff.).[707] Simultaneously the goddess enhances the appearance and actions of Jason (6.602ff.),

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[703] *Metamorphoses* 8.14ff.: La Penna (1979) p239. Salzman-Mitchell (2005) pp.109-11 discusses the teichoscopia in Ovid's Scylla episode, noting that these scenes are full of gender issues, since they allow the reader to see through the woman's eyes, as the soliloquies give an insight into her mind. Bernstein (2008) p.57 comments that Medea differs from Ovid's Scylla and Propertius' Tarpeia (4.4), since her love is for a man who acts as an ally of her father, and she only assists him once her father's deceit has been revealed, again underscoring Valerius' depiction of her innocence. See n.729 below.

[704] Lovatt (2006) pp.67-78 offers a detailed discussion of the teichoscopia and Medea's gaze here: she notes the combination of pleasure and fear/horror involved. Zissos (2003) pp.668-9 perhaps reads too much into the scene in his belief that this focalisation on Jason's single combats is intended to create a gladiatorial show effect.

[705] Spaltenstein (2005) p.172 notes that *saevus* suggests the misfortune that Jason will bring to Medea; Wijsman (2000) p.226 interprets *miserae* thus (in contrast with Spaltenstein, who views Medea as wretched in the present, not future).

[706] Lovatt (2006) p.70 remarks that 6.586, describing Jason meeting Medea's gaze, evokes a clash between heroes in battle. Hershkowitz (1998) p.123 notes that Jason is shown, and eroticised, through Medea's eyes. Lovatt, p.69, notes that the only hero about whom Medea asks in direct speech is Jason, underscoring her singular focus on him; observing that Medea displays no fear for other heroes' suffering, she characterises this as her "obsessive personal concern" for Jason (p.76).

[707] Ripoll (2004) p.197 notes that the goddesses employ a combination of persuasive words and supernatural means to overcome Medea's moral will, with the words taking the primary role. He observes, n.63, that there is no verbal element involved in the inspiration of passion for Apollonius' Medea and Virgil's Dido. He cites Medea's feigned ignorance in order to learn more about Jason, pp.197-8, as evidence that Medea is tricked by the goddesses, but not forced, interpreting this as displaying her as a true tragic heroine, simultaneously guilty and a victim.

making him impossible to resist for one who is as enamoured of him as Medea.[708] Now the crush is becoming more serious for Medea, reminding us of Dido's similar feelings for Aeneas in Virgil's epic: this comparison is perhaps underscored when Valerius again refers to the princess as a queen (*at regina*, 657).[709] Valerius signals the infatuation as Medea's delight in watching Jason gives way to concern for his safety (6.657ff.). Nevertheless, Valerius makes it clear that she has not totally lost her head, but that the cruel divine powers are too great to resist, since she has some suspicions that Chalciope is not her sister.[710] However, the author uses an effective metaphor containing the familiar imagery of the fire of love,[711] to inform us that Medea is drawn back to her present preoccupation: *saevae trahitur dulcedine flammae* (6.663).[712] This brief metaphor aptly conveys the allure of the flame, here representing love, while simultaneously expressing the danger it holds for Medea if she gets too close.

Valerius explores the psychological effects of the love that Medea feels, as he depicts its gradual increase,[713] which is an approach that must owe something to Ovid's elegiac handling of the heroine:[714] even in the early stages of the progression of this love, it begins to affect her physically, as well as emotionally.[715] Firstly her strength fails (*deficit*, 6.671), before her deep anxiety for Jason causes her to feel the blows from the weapons as she watches him in battle (*totiens saxis pulsatur et*

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[708] Dinter (2009) p.538 wryly comments that the Argo's expedition is fulfilled through Jason's divinely enhanced beauty, which leads to Medea's assistance.

[709] Lovatt (2006) pp.71-2 discusses the intertextual links and verbal echoes here, noting how Dido also falls in love through her gaze and as an audience of epic. She also connects Medea with Aeneas.

[710] Hershkowitz (1998) pp.258-62 gives a full discussion of the goddesses' disguises in order to trick Medea, and the princess's suspicion of it. Wijsman (2000) p.253 notes that this doubt adds to the story's credibility; contrastingly, see Spaltenstein (2005) p.190.

[711] Apollonius similarly uses this imagery: 3.285ff. describes how Eros's arrow burns Medea's heart like a flame; a simile follows, comparing an old working woman kindling the fire in her cottage with a small brand that sets the wood ablaze, with Medea's inflamed heart. In contrast, Valerius here goes on to the simile of increasing wind: see above, p.177.

[712] Wijsman (2000) p.253 discerns the oxymoron at 6.663. Lovatt (2006) p.70 views the flames of love as being identified with the flames of war, echoing other fire imagery in this section; she also connects the storm simile, 664-7, with love and war: see p.177 above.

[713] However, Butler (1909) pp.184-5 views the divine machinery as a weak excuse in Valerius' account and considers that this has not allowed psychological analysis of the heroine; he also believes that Valerius' Medea is a sorceress first and woman second.

[714] Duff (1968) p.356 acknowledges the debt to Virgil and Ovid in Valerius' descriptions of Medea's psychology, but credits him with his own distinct ability here.

[715] Lovatt (2006) p.70 perceives interesting parallels between the description of Jason's effects on Medea and that on his opponents, suggesting that Medea is therefore to be considered a victim of war. She notes that the intensity of Medea's gaze and feelings, emphasised by the physical verbs employed, make her identify so closely with the hero that it seems she is alongside him as a warrior in battle.

hastis, 6.685), and it causes her to shudder (*horruit*, 6.686).[716] By the end of book six, the love and its effects are sending Medea into a frenzy: the final lines of the book neatly sum this up with a simile comparing her to Bacchic revellers:

> ut fera Nyctelii paulum per sacra resistunt,
> mox rapuere deum iam iam in quodcumque paratae
> Thyiades, haut alio remeat Medea tumultu
> atque inter Graiumque acies patriasque phalangas
> semper inexpletis adgnoscit Iasona curis
> armaque quique cava superest de casside vultum. [6.755-60]

Bacchic or maenadic imagery was frequently employed in classical literature to display a woman's madness, often having been induced by love, as we have already witnessed in the earlier Silver Age treatments of Medea's madness.[717]

Throughout this section, as the love has grown from nothing to madness, all the emphasis has been on the character of Medea. Even when Valerius has written battle scenes, this has all been seen through the eyes of Medea: any focus on Jason has been from her viewpoint and loving gaze. This has two important consequences. Firstly it has the effect of making Medea appear as Valerius' main character, and subsequently suggests her as the true hero of his epic, relegating Jason to a secondary figure. We have already seen that Medea has been omnipresent, even when she was not part of the main action of the epic, during times when Jason should have been the focus: now that she is central to the plot she steals the show from him.[718] Secondly, this contributes to the depiction of love between Medea and

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[716] Lovatt (2006) pp.72-5 considers fear to be Medea's predominant emotion, which gives a female perspective on war; she notes, pp.77-8, that this femininity exposes Medea to the gaze of both internal and external audience.

[717] *Metamorphoses* 7.257-8 (Chapter 1, p.24). Seneca *Medea* 382ff., 806ff., 849 (Chapter 2, pp.112, 133, 136). Wijsman (2000) pp.284-6 discusses the Bacchic imagery here. Lovatt (2006) p.77 believes that Medea's love is depicted as a dangerous madness, containing parallels with Allecto's maddening of Amata in *Aeneid* 7, which leads to suicide and destruction of her city; however, to describe this young Medea as a monster seems to carry the comparison too far. Wijsman (2000) pp.284-6 discusses the Bacchic imagery here.

[718] Stover (2003) pp.141-3, however, considers Medea's tunnel vision on Jason as evidence that he is the real focus and, therefore, hero, especially as this scene is Valerius' innovation. However, Valerius could simply have portrayed Jason's action without Medea's gaze and feelings intruding on the scene, thereby "emasculating" him. Stover also makes a rather tenuous argument that, because Homer's *Iliad* and war were based around the amatory topic of Paris' rape of Helen, the connections here with *Iliad*

Jason as a one-sided affection: Valerius describes the earth-shattering effects it has on the heroine, but he never displays how Jason feels about her, other than cursorily: therefore it appears that she is suffering an unrequited love, and this helps to lend a tragic tone to the epic.[719]

The tragic slant continues and is further emphasised as we move into book seven:[720] here Medea begins to take on the role of a tragic heroine, as we see her wrangling with the painful effects of love, which clearly have her in a firm grip. Inspired by the portrayal in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Valerius has touchingly portrayed the girl as unaware of the meaning of her feelings: she is literally lovesick, but never having experienced this before renders her confused, restless and unable to sleep. However, this is in contrast to Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* who, although she has not experienced it before, perceives what must be happening to her (7.11ff.): when we compare these two portrayals Valerius' Medea is a much more childlike creature, more closely based on her Hellenistic model. Valerius includes the first of several monologues which, as a common feature of tragedy, are a further reminder of a sorrowful tragic figure.[721] Valerius employs this technique to illustrate the workings of his heroine's tormented mind, as Ovid had done in the *Metamorphoses*, where Medea similarly discussed her dilemma with herself at length. As in Apollonius' epic,[722] Valerius' soliloquy shows Medea addressing a series of questions to herself, illustrating her distress and youthful ignorance:[723]

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3 exonerate Jason and make him a more martial hero, like one of Homer's: see pp.141-4, especially n.47, although the argument is a little confusing here.

[719] Hershkowitz (2004) p.31 notes that the imagery used to describe the lovesick Medea's mental state is tragic, and that it is reinforced by the "vocabulary of madness".

[720] For a detailed discussion of the tragic influence in book 7, see Ripoll (2004), who considers the dual elements of terror and pity presented in Valerius' *Argonautica* through allusions to Latin tragic versions of Medea: he concludes, p.207, that Valerius' literary motivations were situated somewhere between a Virgilian epic and an Ovidian/Senecan tragedy.

[721] Ripoll (2004) pp.190-2 discusses the tragic quality which these monologues add to Medea, noting how Valerius has increased the amount and size of those in Apollonius, thereby increasing focalisation on the heroine. He acknowledges the debt to Medea's opening monologue in *Metamorphoses* 7 (see Chapter 1, pp.11-17), as well as tracing the comparisons with the opening monologue of Seneca's Medea (see Chapter 2, pp.89-96).

[722] Medea's ignorance of the cause of her torment is expressed in a soliloquy in Apollonius at 3.674ff.

[723] Hull (1975) pp.1-2 remarks that the series of questions shows her "complete incomprehension". La Penna (1979) pp.239-41 discusses Medea's monologue in detail, with reference to Flavian epic tendency towards the dramatic; he also notes the elegiac motif of weeping on a lover's tomb, at 7.205ff.

"nunc ego quo casu vel quo sic pervigil usque
ipsa volens errore trahor?[724] non haec mihi certe
nox erat ante tuos, iuvenis fortissime, vultus.
quos ego cur iterum demens iterumque recordor
tam magno discreta mari? quid in hospite solo
mens mihi?..." [7.9-14]

Finally in her desperation she desires to have the cause of her pain removed,[725] wishing at the end of her soliloquy that Jason would leave. In exhibiting these reactions to her feelings, Medea is far from a powerful witch, but remains an innocent girl. Valerius is portraying the effects of first love on a young girl in a very realistic and sensitive manner, displaying its effects as like an illness, and her reactions all seem very natural:[726] Medea remains a very human character. Valerius seems fond of his heroine, as he has portrayed her so far in a favourable light: she is conveyed as a likeable and tender creature, with normal human weaknesses and emotions.

As book seven continues, so does the increase in Medea's love and, simultaneously, her torment. Admiring Jason's looks, she considers that he has become more beautiful still:

visus et heu miserae tunc pulchrior hospes amanti
discedens: tales umeros, ea terga relinquit.
illa domum atque ipsos paulum procedere postes
optat[727] et ardentes tenet intra limina gressus. [7.107-10]

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[724] Ripoll (2004) p.203 notes that Valerius' use of the verbs *trahor* and *sequor* (see also 7.348 below, pp.190), to express Medea's passivity in suffering passion, has been borrowed from Ovid and Seneca: see, for example *Metamorphoses* 7.21, *Heroides* 12.209 (Chapter 1, pp.14, 55) and Seneca *Medea* 895 (Chapter 2, p.139). In this last question, Summers (1894) p.39 also discerns an echo of *Metamorphoses* 7.21-2: *quid in hospite regia virgo ureris...?*

[725] Ripoll (2004) p.191 notes that Medea's love is always presented as painful, which is in contrast with the moments of joy found in Apollonius' epic.

[726] However, Spaltenstein (2005) pp.218-20 considers Valerius to present Medea's love in the tradition of ancient texts, where love is not analysed in a natural way through its development, but principally for the psychological effects of the moral conflicts and suffering it causes; he also discusses Valerius' more dramatic tendencies than Virgil and Ovid.

[727] Martin (1938) pp.142-3 considers *illa...optat* remarkable: "could the silent compulsion of love be expressed more simply and with truer effect?" Spaltenstein (2005) pp.243-4 discusses the different possible meanings of the line.

Here, we can clearly see that the hero's beauty only serves to increase the suffering of the princess. The poet's interjection, *heu*, and application of the epithet *miserae* to Medea, reveals the pity he has for his heroine, tormented by this adoration and unfortunate situation.[728] Medea's natural desire is to follow Jason, but she resists this because she is a dutiful daughter: the disagreement between Jason and her father Aeetes means that she cannot follow her heart at will, and Valerius has her obey her duty and resist her feelings, again to show her in a good light.[729] This also contributes to the Roman aspect of this Medea: she has a filial duty to her father, which she is under obligation to fulfil, and this is foremost among her concerns about her illicit love for Jason.[730] It is in this consideration of her father that Valerius' Medea greatly diverges from one of her Roman models, and thus the author further underscores her dutiful nature: in a parallel situation, Ovid's Scylla seemingly easily betrays her father for the sake of her love for Minos, after only a very brief amount of hesitation (*Metamorphoses* 8.51ff.). Ovid appears to be portraying his heroine in a shameful light: Minos even rejects her out of disgust; Valerius, on the other hand, goes to great lengths in order to preserve his heroine's integrity, despite her disloyal act.[731]

We can now discern that Valerius has been exaggerating the suffering in love for effect, since the feelings of this young love are, in reality, trivial when compared with the choices Medea now has to make between her father and Jason: now she becomes a truly tragic heroine. The author has here

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[728] Virgil similarly displays pity for Dido (*Aeneid* 1.344, 718f.): Hull (1975) pp.3-4. Valerius' use of the authorial voice is noted as relatively rare: Dinter (2009) p.539, n.26.

[729] Graf (1997) pp.23-5 and Griffiths (2006) p.36 identify Medea's tale as the "Tarpeia type": see Chapter 1, n.60.

[730] Bernstein (2008) pp.25-6 notes that imperial epic reflects such contemporary social and political concerns as the limitations of paternal authority, specifically citing the relationship of Valerius' Medea and Aeetes in this context, and viewing the emphasis on this as differentiating the Roman epic from its Hellenistic predecessor; he fully discusses such kinship issues in Valerius' epic, pp.30-63. Martin (1938) pp.143-4 observes that Apollonius' Medea exhibits concern for her mother rather than her father, and considers the shift in Valerius to reflect the Roman attitude of child to father, or *paterfamilias*, contributing to the greater gravity of the sacrifice by Valerius' heroine.

Bernstein, pp.62-3, compares Aeetes' failure to arrange Medea's marriage with Latinus' success in marrying his daughter Lavinia off to Aeneas, in the second half of the *Aeneid*. See also Chapter 1, n.60 for a daughter's crime against her father, in choosing her own husband. More generally, Bernstein, p.8, observes that Virgil's *Aeneid* establishes *pietas* between generations as the dominant paradigm of behaviour for later Roman epic.

[731] It should also be noted that Ovid portrays his Medea with less regard for her father, whom she designates *pater saevus* (*Metamorphoses* 7.53): see Chapter 1, p.16. Bernstein (2008) pp.42-3 considers Medea's sympathetic perspective on her father who is, however, portrayed as a tyrant: he notes that, although the reader is aware of his nature, she learns of Aeetes' false promises to the Argonauts at the same time as they do, and she has ancestral, divine and ethical forces dividing her loyalties; Bernstein's emphasis, pp.34-47, especially brings out the unsympathetic character of Aeetes, who has therefore lost his claim to filial obedience: it seems that, not only a victim of the gods, Medea is also exonerated by being victim of her father's tyranny.

effectively depicted how she is torn in two different directions, as she is physically drawn towards Jason, wishing that the house would move towards him while keeping her feet within its confines, thus remaining loyal to her family household. To emphasise the lovesick girl's dilemma, in which her heart physically draws her towards Jason, but her head holds her back, Valerius compares her to another mythological heroine, Io, whose myth he had earlier depicted through Orpheus' narration (4.344ff.).[732] A probable influence here is Ovid who, in his *Metamorphoses*,[733] explains how Jupiter changed Io into a cow, to protect her from Juno's jealousy, after he had raped the girl (1.583ff.). However, this proved to be a futile act, since Juno nevertheless found ways to torment Io. In her new form, Io is forced to wander far and wide: in Valerius' version, Argus, the guard that Juno has sent to watch the girl/cow, is responsible for this (4.370ff.); in other versions a gad-fly drives her onwards; in Ovid's version it is the Juno-inspired Fury, Erinys, who terrorises Io and causes this wandering (1.725ff.). Rather than his own earlier account, Valerius uses this Ovidian version of the tale as inspiration for his simile, where we find Io fearfully hovering at the edge of the sea which she is compelled to cross, as a comparison to Medea anxiously lingering on the threshold:

> qualis ubi extremas Io vaga sentit harenas
> fertque refertque pedem, tumido quam cogit Erinys
> ire mari Phariaeque vocant trans aequora matres. [7.111-13]

It is significant that Erinys appears here, driving Io on, since we later find Medea similarly pursued by the Fury:[734] this doubtless explains Valerius' choice of Ovid's tale over his own version of the Io myth here, and it is also noteworthy that Juno is ultimately responsible for the torture of both Io and Medea. Furthermore, this simile is fitting since Medea can also be compared with Io as an "abducted" maiden, when Jason later carries her off from her family.[735]

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[732] Murgatroyd (2006) discusses this section.
[733] Murgatroyd (2006) p.29.
[734] See p.200 below. Hershkowitz (2004) pp.31-2 discusses this simile in terms of madness: rather than the gad-fly, Medea is stricken with love-sickness. See also Caviglia (2002) pp.17-18.
[735] Krevans (1997) p.77 considers Medea's connection with Io, in the role of a kidnapped maiden; he disregards Medea as victim, p.78, seeing the role instead inversed because of her part in her brother's murder, and interestingly considers her similarity to a founder hero figure. See n.653 above.

This tragic situation of a forbidden love thus drives Medea to distraction: she restlessly wanders between her family members, displaying affection for them (7.115ff.). In another simile, Valerius compares her to a sick pet dog:[736]

> sic adsueta toris et mensae dulcis erili
> aegra nova iam peste canis rabieque futura
> ante fugam totos lustrat queribunda penates. [7.124-6]

This is a particularly pathetic image used to illustrate her lovesickness and the effects of her divided loyalties. It leads to another soliloquy in which she chides herself for being *demens* (7.128ff.), showing some recognition of her folly, even at this early stage, while reminding us that her love is a form of madness: although still confused, gradually she is beginning to understand the implications of what she is feeling. Exhausted by her raging emotions, Medea falls asleep and is once more visited by distressing dreams (7.141ff.): her split affections are underscored here as she dreams that, on one side of her bed Jason begs her, while on the other is her father.[737] Valerius, throughout this torment of the innocent girl, evokes his readers' pity for the princess, despite here comparing her to Orestes driven by Furies to kill his mother Clytemnestra, and thereby subtly alluding to Medea's future betrayal of her family and the murderous atrocities she will commit against them.[738]

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[736] Hull (1975) p.6 defends this simile from its previous detractors, such as Summers (1894) p.60 and Duff (1968) p.359, who believe it is an example of bad taste. Butler (1909) p.196 begrudgingly notes the simile's "maudlin pathos" as rare "gross observation": he believes that Valerius' similes, individually, are worthy of greater poets, but "suffer from sheer accumulation". Spaltenstein (2005) pp.248-9 discusses the simile in detail, judging it as informal and emotional. Caviglia (2002) pp.18-19 believes the simile, while reducing the wide horizons of the Io simile to the domestic sphere, derives from high epic and accentuates Medea's passivity and sadness; he notes, however, the dog/bitch comparison's negative connotations for women.

Fitch (1976) p.115, n.9 notes that this comparison is a rare exception of frivolous subject matter in Valerius' similes: however, it is remarked that a Virgilian echo of Silvia's stag can be discerned in this (*Aeneid* 7.490ff.): for further on comparisons with Dido in this simile, see Salemme (1992) p.20, n.38. Fitch's detailed study of Valerius' similes considers his *Argonautica* a more serious epic than Apollonius', and illustrates this through the high-tone of the similes. Furthermore, Fitch interestingly remarks, pp.118-19, on their briefer length and higher frequency, than in either Apollonius or Virgil, contributing to the "nervous, intense atmosphere" of the epic.

[737] Bernstein (2008) p.57 notes that the image of a father kneeling before his daughter displays the epic's narrative of the inversion of familial authority. Perhaps, therefore, we can read Jason's similar position of suppliant as proof of a role reversal of hero and heroine.

[738] Hull (1975) p.6 notes that Dido is also compared to Orestes after suffering from a nightmare (*Aeneid* 4.465ff.). Hershkowitz (2004) pp.32-3 also recognises the borrowing from this Virgilian passage; she adds that this lends the comparison a sinister tone of guilt, shame and confusion. Ripoll (2004) p.204 perceives an echo of Seneca *Medea* 958-93 in the reference to the Furies: see Chapter 2, pp.145-6. He discusses, pp.206-7, how comparison with certain tragic figures, such as Orestes and Io, adds to the tragic dimension of this Medea, endowing her with the status of "victime tragique par excellence", as the tragic characteristics of the other heroes are combined in her.

Although we know Medea's resistance against the divine powers is futile, nevertheless the princess makes valiant attempts to overcome her desire and is not easily vanquished: clearly knowing right from wrong, she can only be commended for trying to overcome the strong influence of the mighty goddesses.[739] They pursue her throughout the text and are relentless in their mission, rendering Medea helpless and weak in the presence of the hero: they constantly harangue the girl in Valerius' *Argonautica*, and have far more work to do in order to convince her than they do in Apollonius' version.[740] Valerius seemingly portrayed the situation in this way in order to show his Roman Medea's far stronger moral sense.[741] Medea evidently has no choice in the progression of events for, at this moment, when it appears that Medea is wavering in her love and may succeed in overcoming her emotions with reason, Juno realises she must redouble her efforts. This time Juno enlists the direct assistance of Venus, who goes to Medea in the guise of her witch aunt, the sorceress Circe:[742] the goddesses again act in a particularly cruel way, contriving a situation in which one of them falsely gains the girl's confidence, by appearing as an older family member whom Medea respects and trusts.[743] Valerius depicts his heroine as desperately trying to remain on the dutiful and right course, and thus having a mighty strength of character for being able to resist at all. However, she is unfortunately a pawn in the games of the goddesses, who will ultimately have their way because of their greater power: Valerius has almost, if not wholly, absolved his heroine from any blame for this love, and in turn for the chain of terrible events it initiates.

While Medea is portrayed in a sympathetic light, the goddesses are depicted as cruel and manipulative,[744] and the young princess appears as their pitiable victim suffering at their will, and

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[739] As Hull (1975) p.16 recognises, Medea's *pudor* must be very strong to be able to resist, even temporarily, the goddess's powerful and highly manipulative "onslaught".

[740] Hershkowitz (1998) p.221. Hull (1975) p.7 describes Juno and Venus as more ruthless in Valerius than in Virgil. Bernstein (2008) p.56 suggests that the exclusion of the human persuasion of Medea by the "real" Chalciope, which occurs in Apollonius' epic, emphasises the power and hostility of Valerius' goddesses.

[741] Salemme (1992) pp.7-8 notes that, in Apollonius, the divine intervention begins and ends with Eros' arrow, adding that Valerius' inclusion of the goddesses is not mere epic technique, but a result of this first century AD Medea's keener Roman sense.

[742] Bernstein (2008) p.57 perceives Venus' disguise as Circe as an ironic reversal of Apollonius' version, since there Circe is the character who most explicitly condemns Medea for her betrayal.

[743] Bernstein (2008) pp.55-61 discusses the goddesses' deception of Medea; he notes, p.55, that the prolonged disguises as her relatives are one of Valerius' innovations, focusing attention on the familial nature of the Medea narrative; he comments on the ironic situation that the goddesses employ Medea's familial bonds to make her act against her family.

[744] On the nature of Valerius' Olympians, see Malamud and Maguire (1993) pp.201-2 for Juno; Hardie (1993) p.43, comparing Venus to a Fury; Hershkowitz (1998) pp.168-72, 179-82 specifically

against her own better judgement. Venus' power is such that, as soon as she has glimpsed the city, Medea's passion, described as a weakness (*languor*, 7.194), is renewed. Valerius makes it clear that there was no escape from this for his heroine: it is forced upon her, unbeknown to her, and she does not stand a chance against the duplicity of these goddesses. Once Venus appears to her as Circe, with her sorceress's attributes, we are also reminded again of Medea's darker associations. However, Valerius still keeps the magic aspect separate from his heroine for the time being, and only hints at it through these reminders. Indeed, here we see that Medea is merely an affectionate child as she endearingly rushes to kiss Circe (7.215ff.),[745] and seeks her aunt's magic to help remedy the burning fire of her heart (7.240ff.). Valerius depicts her with a particularly human touch, when the girl also displays something of the insolent and wilful teenager, resentfully refuting her aunt's suggestion that she should be forced into an unsuitable marriage to a Colchian:

> Illa deae contra iamdudum spernere voces.
> "non ita me immemorem magnae Perseidos"[746] inquit
> "cernis, ut infelix thalamos ego cogar in illos." [7.237-9]

This is an ironic comment indeed from the girl whose future marriage will indeed end in disaster, making *infelix* something of an understatement.[747] By the end of their encounter, however, Medea has withdrawn her scorn and respectfully concedes to her "aunt's" superior age and experience, once more:

> "testor cara tuas, Circe Titania, voces,
> te ducente sequor, tua me, grandaeva, fatigant
> consilia et monitis cedo minor"... [7.347-9]

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discusses Juno and Venus' behaviour in relation to Medea. Hardie (1989) pp.5-9 considers Valerius' imitation of previous epic authors in his portrayal of divine intervention, discerning a combination of influence from various episodes in both Apollonius and Virgil; Bernstein (2008) pp.55-6 discusses Valerius' comparisons and contrasts with his models.

[745] Hull (1975) p.5 and Salemme (1992) pp.15-16 discern here an echo of Dido welcoming Cupid in the similar situation in *Aeneid* 1.683ff.

[746] Stover (2009) discusses this episode in detail, in an attempt to identify the *magnae Perseidos* in 238 as Circe; other possibilities are Medea's grandmother Perse, and Hecate, who is referred to with this epithet, for example at *Metamorphoses* 7.74; see also Spaltenstein (2005) pp.276-7.

[747] Summers (1894) p.64, comments on this as a passage of poetic irony; Stover (2009) p.326 also notes the irony in Medea's assertion of independence.

Venus chooses a combination of manipulation and deceit as the method for winning the girl over, and the goddess, whom the poet designates as unjust (*iniquae*, 251), does not relent or demonstrate any measure of pity during their meeting, even when Medea collapses in tears (*conlapsa flebat*, 251). Instead, Venus makes it impossible for Medea to refuse to help Jason, fabricating the tale that he, on the point of suicide, specifically sent her to ask Medea herself to help him complete the tasks (7.257ff.). Selling it as an opportunity for Medea to let her magic skills shine,[748] like other famous heroines before her, and claiming that her arts have won her enough fame already,[749] Venus/Circe deceptively makes it appear that she is doing this in her niece's interests (7.280ff.). This is such an unlikely story that it emphasises Medea's youthful naivety, and desperate hope for Jason's love, when she not only believes it, but becomes frenzied from the shameful implications of it:

> Torserat illa gravi iamdudum lumina vultu[750]
> vix animos dextramque tenens, quin ipsa loquentis
> iret in ora deae: tanta pudor aestuat ira
> verba cavens; horror molles invaserat annos. [7.292-5]

Valerius portrays Medea as feeling shame so that he can show that his heroine retains some decency and resistance to the wrong course. Her crazed physical behaviour displays that the increasing madness of love is taking hold of her, and now she feels trapped and desperate, wishing for death as an escape:[751]

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[748] Discussing the reconciliation of the two sides of Medea's character, Johnston recognises that, in her youth, Medea plays the role of fairytale helper-maiden, while employing darker attributes: pp.5-6 of the introduction to Clauss and Johnston (1997). She considers the possibility that the darker elements were introduced into the princess's early life in an effort to reconcile the witch inconsistencies. Griffiths (2006) p.35 discusses the helper-maiden aspect of Medea's myth.

[749] Griffiths (2006) p.32 suggests that this scene possibly derives from an original version where Circe, not Medea, assisted Jason in capturing the fleece.

[750] Hull (1975) p.6 has traced a comparison with Dido's physical reactions here, since they both roll their eyes in stress (*Aeneid* 4.362ff.); see also Salemme (1992) pp.16-17, who also considers the correspondences between Medea's and Dido's reaction and Evans (1948), who discusses the concentration on facial expressions in epic.

[751] Hull (1975) p.21 notes that Medea is trapped by her magical powers into this difficult situation, forcing her into treachery.

nec quo ferre fugam nec quo se vertere posset

prensa videt; rupta condi tellure premique

iamdudum cupit ac diras evadere voces. [7. 297-9][752]

Medea is caught in a typically Ovidian dilemma, torn between betraying her father and following her heart, as many an Ovidian heroine has been portrayed, including Medea herself.[753] This is quite different from the heroine of Apollonius' Greek epic who, although she does struggle with the shame, puts up very little resistance.[754] This characterization of Medea, battling between her sense of *pudor* and her *amor* for Jason, instead owes much to a very Roman depiction of love:[755] it contains many similarities to Virgil's Dido and her love for Aeneas.[756] Both women display a vulnerability which endears them to the reader; both have fallen for a foreigner who has arrived on their shores, and whom they wish had not; both hesitate, as they struggle between their overwhelming feelings and duty; and both are driven into a frenzied, Bacchic state, as the *furor* of love takes hold of them.[757]

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[752] Hull (1975) p.6 notes that Dido similarly seeks death over shame (*Aeneid* 4.24ff.). Medea is referred to as *infelix*, Dido's characteristic epithet, at 7.296. Spaltenstein (2005) p.289 notes that the wish to be buried by the earth is traditional.

[753] At *Metamorphoses* 7.9ff. This excludes Scylla, who willingly betrays her father: see above, p.186. Baldini Moscadi (1999) pp.44-5 terms Medea's hesitation and changes of mind "il dramma del dubbio", briefly discussing the theatrical aspects, which she considers to have arisen because of the recent tragic Senecan Medea. The tragic aspects cannot be denied: Ripoll (2004). However, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* seems a greater influence, since Valerius' Medea is characterised by the dilemma and mental torture that Ovid frequently explored in females: Hershkowitz (1998) p.67 recognises that, in her vacillations especially, Valerius' Medea owes a debt to *Metamorphoses* 7; Feeney (1993) p.328 describes Medea's passion as frenzied, obsessive, and as having a "gradual Ovidian awakening".

[754] For the Greek Medea's sense of shame, see 3.645ff. and 681ff.: there, though, the sense seems to be less regret over betraying her family, and more girlish embarrassment. However, at 3.741ff. the combination of fear and shame is explicitly noted as a result of performing the deeds for Jason against her father's wishes.

[755] Hull (1975) pp.13-16 discusses the conflict, and the heroine's very Roman sense of duty, considering it to be inspired not only by Virgil's Dido, but also by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7. She believes the Roman Medea's shame to be more serious, pp.7-11, later (p.18) succinctly summarising that Valerius took Apollonius' love story and retold it with "a Roman sense of priorities"; see also Ripoll (2004) p.195 on Valerius' more virtuous heroine. Garson (1965) p.108 claims that, although *pudor* may be a Roman aspect of Valerius' Medea, the idea nonetheless originated in Apollonius: however, in the Greek version, it seems a more straightforward shame. See also n.754 above.

[756] Hershkowitz (1998) pp.99-100; she comments that many of the connections are derived from Virgil's use of Apollonius' Medea in his portrait of Dido; she also traces comparisons and contrasts between Dido and Valerius' Hypsipyle, pp.136-46. Hull (1975) pp.5-6 makes detailed comparisons between Valerius' Medea and Dido to show that this aids the reader's understanding of Valerius' heroine. She observes, p.7, that Medea's dilemma is more difficult than Dido's, since Medea's love for her living father is a "more pressing loyalty" than Dido's duty to her dead husband's memory.

[757] Hershkowitz (2004) p.32 considers Medea's madness here to be a response to Virgil's depiction of Dido's frenzied love for Aeneas, which is supported by the *furor* versus *pudor* conflict found in both characterisations, as well as the depiction of the relationships between heroine and hero.

Valerius' Medea knows that she should stay, and is not so naive that she does not realise the implications of her actions, but nevertheless cannot resist the divinely motivated passion that has taken hold of her. Valerius describes her emotional struggle as she sways from one decision to another:

> saepe suas misero promittere destinat artes
> denegat atque una potius decernit in hora[758]
> ac neque tam turpi cessuram semper amori
> proclamat neque opem ignoto viresque daturam. [7.317-20]

Medea has to make a very difficult decision, and yet we know that she has no choice because, ultimately, Juno will have her way: the girl herself feels conquered by a power beyond her control (*nescio quo penitus se numine vinci / sentit*, 7.323-4).[759] It is only at this point, as she gives in to divine will, that the many hints in the epic of her darker side become a reality. However, since her decision to turn to magic is so closely associated with the goddesses' power over her, Valerius has carefully ensured that his heroine is portrayed in the most innocent light possible, for it seems that Juno and Venus are responsible for the sorceress side of Medea coming to the forefront. Since the evidence so far has been that Medea is an innocent girl, it is necessary for the reader to suspend disbelief in order to imagine her having previously taken part in such activities as the collection of weird contents for her ingredients cabinet:

> utque procul magicis spirantia tecta venenis
> et saevae patuere fores oblataque contra
> omnia, quae ponto, quae manibus eruit imis
> et quae sanguineo lunae destrinxit ab ore. [7.327-30]

In this passage, then, we at last meet Medea's powers first hand, including the conventional imagery of a witch who draws down the moon,[760] thereby displaying her power over nature. However, even as she submits to the use of magic, she considers using it to end her own life rather than to betray her father with it. Medea is not a creature who can easily be conquered, either by the force of the

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[758] The text of 7.318 is problematic: Spaltenstein (2005) p.295.
[759] In considering the theme of divinely inspired passion, Ripoll (2004) p.203 detects a reminiscence of *Metamorphoses* 7.12 and *Heroides* 12.211 here (see Chapter 1, pp.11 and 55 respectively).
[760] On the "Thessalian Trick", see Hill (1973): Chapter 1, n.104.

goddesses or her passion: Valerius is portraying her as putting up such a strong fight that, although we know the outcome is inevitable, we wonder if it may just be possible for her reason to conquer passion. Medea's frenzied (*furentem*, 337) consideration of suicide creates another dilemma over which she soliloquises (7.338ff.). Ovid's Medea in the *Metamorphoses* (7.9ff.) is the most likely influence on the conversations that Valerius' Medea has with herself: there, similarly, we see the guilt-ridden Medea trying to convince herself that she should side with her father, and trying to understand why she cannot resist this stranger; and she is a similarly sympathetic and tragic figure whose tortured soul is conveyed through these debates and struggles between emotion and reason.[761] Apollonius' heroine similarly contemplates suicide as an escape, which leads to a soliloquy in which she debates her options (3.755ff.).[762] Ironically, among the questions Valerius' Medea addresses to herself, is the contemplation of the sadness of not seeing her brother grow up (*non dulces fratris pubescere malas?*, 7.340):[763] the audience recognises the irony in this comment, since Medea, of course, will later play a part in his murder, although here this is a vague hint only, and it remains difficult to imagine this endearing young princess as either a sorceress or a murderer.

However, divinely assisted emotion does eventually conquer the reason in Medea, as pity and concern for Jason lead to her decide to help him with her magic powers. Valerius now takes the opportunity to satisfy his contemporary audience's taste for the fantastic and gory, in a lengthy description of Medea's most powerful herb. I quote here merely a brief excerpt of the sixteen lines, which Valerius spends on this one plant alone:

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[761] Poortvliet's assessment, (2003) p.608, that she here undergoes "one of her many mood changes" seems an unfair and simplistic one, given the difficult dilemma Valerius portrays.

[762] Hull (1975) pp.11-12 discerns a difference from Apollonius' Medea (3.779-81), whose consideration of suicide is prompted by a wish to "avoid mockery and dishonour": she notes that Valerius' Medea's concern is more morally motivated, since she is not attempting to avoid the consequences, but the very action. Summers (1894) pp.22-3 judges Valerius' Medea to have a better and more realistic reason for suicide, since Apollonius' Medea suddenly considers it after she has already agreed to help Jason, whereas the Roman girl is still contemplating her decision at this point.

[763] Summers (1894) p.4 notes the inconsistency in Medea's comment, since her brother is represented as an adult elsewhere in the text, as when he leads the pursuit of the Argo at 8.259ff.; see also Spaltenstein (2005) p.300. Hershkowitz (1998) pp.15-16 notes the ironic foreshadowing of Absyrtus' death throughout the text.

...Prometheae florem de sanguine fibrae

Caucaseum promit nutritaque gramina poenis,

quae sacer ille nives inter tristesque pruinas

durat alitque cruor, cum viscere vultur adeso

tollitur e scopulis et rostro inrorat aperto. [7.356-60]

This passage contains many stock elements for describing the ingredients of a witch's spell, including blood, gore, unpleasant creatures, and extreme conditions of terrain and weather.[764] Apollonius similarly includes a lengthy description of the same charm of Prometheus (3.843ff.); however, although the passage is longer in the Greek version, it is far less macabre than that in the Latin text, which shows how the penchant of the Silver Age for the gruesome had taken the Roman *Argonautica* in a different direction from that of the Hellenistic version.[765] Doubtless, such passages as these have been inspired by the excessive descriptions found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Seneca's *Medea*, where the portrayal of Medea's actions are exaggerated in order to create dramatic effect: in those texts, as we have seen,[766] we are given long descriptions of every detail, including the herbs she uses and where they originate from, and the predilection for the macabre is clearly evident. However, uncharacteristically for a Silver Age writer, Valerius keeps the descriptions of magic fairly brief and unexaggerated, so that it is the girl who remains foremost in the readers' minds, and the sorceress is not too intrusive.[767] This becomes especially apparent when the Medea of the *Argonautica* is compared with Ovid's account of the heroine in the *Metamorphoses*. Although Medea only features for around 400 lines of Ovid's poem, more than half of this focuses on two of her deeds as a witch, the rejuvenation of Aeson and murder of Pelias, so that the poet is able to give a gruesome depiction of

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[764] Spaltenstein (2005) p.303 remarks that Valerius' purpose here is the suggestive and dramatic. On the depiction of horrid ingredients used by witch figures, see Janowitz (2001) p.90.

[765] Perhaps Garson (1965) pp.104-5 thinks of the length of Apollonius' descriptions when he claims that Valerius' images of magic are less elaborate. As Hull (1975) p.20 remarks, this description of the herb suits Valerius' text more than that of Apollonius because of the atmosphere. However, Hull's view that Valerius' Medea always has the aura of a sorceress in the text seems flawed, since she is clearly foremost a child, and the magical aspect is kept in the background for much of the epic. Ripoll (2004) pp.204-5 traces the echoes of Seneca in the portrayal of magic at 7.323-70, concluding that the darkness of Valerius's depiction is mid-way between that of Apollonius and the tragedian.

[766] See Chapter 1, p.26 on *Metamorphoses* 7.222ff. and Chapter 2, p.128 on *Medea* 717ff.

[767] Hull (1975) p.21 briefly compares Seneca's Medea with Valerius' heroine to illustrate the magnitude of the difference between the two, thereby displaying how Valerius has kept the sorceress aspect to a minimum. Williams (1978) pp.259-60 notes how Valerius employs allusive language to suggest, rather than describe the horror in the explicit manner of Ovid; Kleywegt (2005) p.xv comments that striving for novelty is not sought for its own sake in this epic; Zissos (2008) pp.xxxvii-xxxviii refers to this more Virgilian approach as Valerius' "classicizing restraint".

sorcery. This is far more typical of Silver Age poetry than Valerius' cursory portrayal of her magic powers.[768] Furthermore, Ovid's Medea bears more resemblance to our present-day concept of a witch than Valerius' young sorceress, since she uses horrible ingredients such as body parts of hideous creatures, and has a cauldron in which to make her potions. Also, Ovid's Medea is quite vile by nature, especially in manipulating Pelias' daughters to murder their father, believing that they will make him young again through her magic.[769]

Therefore, it is unsurprising to find that, once again, Valerius' Medea hesitates in taking the path of magic, a detail illustrating both her inherently decent nature and her youthful inexperience. As she is led through the city at night towards the first deed that will betray her father, Medea is fearful and reluctant:[770] Valerius uses an effective simile comparing her to a new fledgling wishing to stay with its mother (7.375ff.),[771] highlighting her youth and innocence, as well as the fear she experiences. The reader feels sympathy for the girl who exhibits a strong sense of shame, as she is driven to tears, asking Venus/Circe:

> "ipse rogat certe meque ipse implorat Iason?
> nullane culpa subest? labes non ulla pudoris,
> nullus amor, nec turpe viro servire precanti?" [7.385-7]

Medea appears hopeful that Circe will tell her this is not necessary or, failing that, will reassure her that she is not acting shamefully: the girl's keen sense of shame and duty has not departed. We, like the *infelix* Medea (7.371), know that her hopes will not be answered: again we are reminded of Virgil's *infelix* Dido, whose hopes were similarly dashed.[772] This set of desperate questions is met with an ominous silence from the goddess, matching the eerie atmosphere of the night: Valerius establishes a gloomy and foreboding mood for the prelude to the meeting of Medea and Jason:

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[768] For example, compare *Argonautica* 6.439ff. with the Aeson episode, *Metamorphoses* 7.179ff.
[769] Von Albrecht (1999) p.180.
[770] Baldini Moscadi (1999) considers this hesitation at length, in relation to Medea's comparison with Lucan's reluctant priestess Phemonoe: see n.776 below.
[771] For a discussion of this simile, see Salemme (1992) pp.18-20; Caviglia (2002) pp.22-3 discusses it in his consideration of bird imagery in the epic. Hough (1974) p.6 harshly judges Valerius as "unquestionably the most inept of epic poets" on the basis of his use of (bird) imagery.
[772] See pp.176-7 above.

et iam iam[773] magico per opaca silentia Colchis

coeperat ire sono, montanaque condere vultus

numina cumque suis averti collibus amnes.

iam stabulis gregibusque pavor strepitusque sepulcris

inciderat; stupet ipsa gravi nox tardior umbra;

iamque tremens longe sequitur Venus...[774] [7.389-94]

Medea's presence makes nature shrink back and causes panic: even the mighty goddess Venus, who up until this point had exerted a strong power over the girl, and had been the cause of her fear, now finds herself afraid of Medea's powerful presence.[775] It is appropriate that Valerius chooses to refer to her here with the more commanding epithet *Colchis*, designating her barbaric origins, and thereby suggesting a more imposing nature for the girl. This is the environment in which Medea, nevertheless still a terrified girl (*conterrita virgo*,[776] 7.397) despite exhibiting such mighty powers, meets with Jason in order to lend her magic aid to his tasks. This atmosphere is significant, for Valerius is thus signalling that the union of his hero and heroine is doomed, and he further underscores this by comparing their meeting to that of ghosts in the underworld (*qualesve profundum / per chaos occurrunt caecae sine vocibus umbrae*, 7.401-2).[777]

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[773] Spaltenstein (2005) p.312 notes that these words mark Medea's sudden change to a "magicienne terrifiante".

[774] Strand (1972) pp.119-20 discusses 7.394.

[775] Baldini Moscadi (2000) pp.283-4 discusses the transferral of the epithet *tremens* from Medea (7.372) to Venus (7.389). She notes how the sorceress's power over the divinities is reminiscent of Erictho in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* 6, and Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7, taking this as evidence of Valerius inserting Medea into the magic tradition. Spaltenstein (2005) p.314 notes the hyperbole of Venus' fear. Salemme (1992) pp.18-20 believes that Venus is afraid not of Medea's power, but because she is uncertain of Medea's reaction and the outcome of this plan: however, Valerius is clearly establishing an increasingly foreboding atmosphere where all of nature becomes afraid of Medea, and then Venus too succumbs; furthermore, it is unlikely that Venus would be concerned with the outcome, since she is not doing this for herself, but on behalf of Juno.

[776] Baldini Moscadi (1999) is an insightful paper devoted to the comparison of Medea with Lucan's reluctant prophetess, Phemonoe, who is described with the same phrase (*Bellum Civile* 5.161). She convincingly argues that this is an intentional borrowing, since there are several parallels between the two frightened girls: both are afraid and hesitant; reluctant to cross a threshold (Medea to go outside the palace, Phemonoe to go inside the temple); attempt to resist; are guilty of impiety (Medea towards her father, Phemonoe for her fake prophecy); are forced by gods to follow their fateful destiny; then suffer a madness of sorts. That Medea is still a terrified girl suggests that the view of Hull (1975) p.20, that Valerius abandons "his anxious, guilt-ridden Medea", is flawed.

[777] Hardie (1993) p.91 notes the irony of this simile, interestingly perceiving an allusion to Dido in the Underworld, after her suicide because of her doomed love affair with Aeneas.

Valerius has so far presented the love story completely from the point of view of his heroine. This helps to create the impression that the love is unreciprocated because it appears so one-sided, and hence makes the tale a more tragic one as we see the heroine reluctantly forced into this unfortunate situation for nothing. However, as the pair meet, we finally get some input from Jason. Initially, both are described as awe-struck (*attoniti*, 7.404) and are silent and motionless, compared to silent and still firs or cypresses; Valerius has clearly borrowed this tree simile from a comparable scene in Apollonius' version: at the first meeting of Medea and Jason in the Greek epic, he compares the couple to soundless oaks or pines (3.967ff.).[778] In both versions Jason speaks first and appears rather selfish in addressing the princess purely to obtain the magic assistance he desires. However, in Apollonius' version he does, at least, comfort and flatter Medea since he senses her fear and distress (3.975ff.). In the Latin epic, on the other hand, Jason supposedly discerns these emotions in the girl and is described as consoling her (*solatus est*, 7.412), yet he appears completely self-centred when he speaks, launching straight in to ask if she has come to help him. Furthermore, he is full of self-pity and ranting about his own hardships, while never giving a thought to the difficult dilemma that Medea finds herself in. Asking "*quid meritum*?" (7.421),[779] the reader can be forgiven for thinking "everything that comes his way", for we have seen the pitiful struggle of Medea, and the lengthy process that has brought her here against her will, and at this moment certainly feel that she deserves better than this insensitive man. This is scarcely the tender meeting of two young lovers and his whining is hardly the mark of a brave hero: in contrast to his heroine, Valerius is portraying Jason unsympathetically, which only increases the pity and admiration we feel for Medea. Valerius appears to have based much of the portrayal of the relationship on the similar uneasy one between Dido and Aeneas in Virgil: there the heroine's deep love and the hero's shallow nature, since his interest in the woman seems a temporary one purely motivated by selfish reasons, must surely serve as a model for Valerius' portrayal of Jason and Medea's relationship.

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[778] Fitch (1976) pp.116-17 discusses Valerius' use of Apollonius' tree simile in detail, focusing on the differences; he considers the change to cypress trees to be significant for their association with ill-omen, emphasising the fateful union of Medea and Jason. Hull (1975) pp.12-13 also discusses how Valerius has taken the motif from Apollonius and altered it to fit his epic's gloomier atmosphere. See also La Penna (1979) p.242 and Caviglia (2002) pp.24-5.

[779] On the theme of deserving and ingratitude, and the use of the terms *meritum* and *ingratus*, in Ovid see especially Chapter 1, p.38, n.157 and p.41, n.165.

At this stage, Apollonius' Medea appears younger and more susceptible to the convincing Greek Jason's requests and words of flattery: she appears overjoyed at his request for help, and is immediately won over (3.1008ff.). On the other hand, Valerius' Medea seems more sensible, as if she has not allowed herself to be swept off her feet and is becoming more mature before our eyes, although this can in part be attributed to the cold manner in which the Roman Jason has addressed her. The Roman Medea still has a sense of shame and is hesitant, while the Greek author describes his heroine as completely captivated by love, and forthcoming with aid and instructions. Valerius' heroine does, nevertheless, decide to give Jason the assistance requested, but only after firstly questioning why he has sought her out. Explaining her predicament (7.437ff.), she makes one last request to preserve her innocence, asking that he should seek another way if there is one, and return her to her father: "*me sine et insontem misero dimitte parenti*" (7.455). In contrast, Apollonius' Medea does not put up such a struggle, but completely surrenders herself to the task once she has decided upon it. However, *pudor* is constantly in the mind of the Roman Medea and she does not want her actions to cause her shame unless it is absolutely vital to Jason,[780] which is an idea only briefly touched on in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (7.72f. and 145f.).[781] Ovid's Medea is a much more decisive woman: naturally she suffers from the dilemma of choosing between her father and her love, but she quickly convinces herself that Jason is the better option (7.51ff.). In vain, and uniquely, Valerius' Medea has desperately clung onto her shame and modesty right up to the very last moment in which she could possibly save it: as she hands over the potion, Valerius makes it clear that she regrets it already:

> cum gemitu et multo iuveni medicamina fletu
> non secus ac patriam pariter famamque decusque
> obicit... [7.458-60]

Medea understands that in this action she is giving up everything valuable to her, including her principles.[782] Meanwhile, Jason insensitively grabs what is on offer, without a kind word of

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[780] Hull (1975) pp.8-11 discusses Medea's battle between *pudor* and *amor*. At this meeting with Jason, however, she views it more as straightforward embarrassment, which seems erroneous, as she seems to realise, when noting that Fury seizes Medea in place of *pudor*. See nn.682, 754-5 above.
[781] See Chapter 1, pp.17, 20. Hull (1975) pp.13-14 notes that *pudor* almost conquers *amor* in both versions: nevertheless Valerius' Medea puts up greater resistance because he is developing the idea he found in Ovid, as Hull recognises.
[782] Garson (1965) p.108. Spaltenstein (2005) p.328 notes that 7.458-60 display Medea as still suffering from her inner conflict.

reassurance. As in Apollonius (3.1068), Valerius explicitly tells us that Medea has now gone beyond the point of shame forever:

> Inde ubi facta nocens[783] et non revocabilis umquam
>
> cessit ab ore pudor propiorque implevit Erinys. [7.461-2]

Shame and the goddesses have departed and Fury now approaches Medea: we have seen her love build up into a frenzy but now, as she takes up the role of witch, a stronger emotion, fury, takes hold of her. Valerius had previously portrayed the goddesses as responsible for Medea's illicit behaviour, but now the Fury Erinys enters and takes their place: thus Medea is still not ultimately responsible for her actions. *Furor*, like *amor*, was considered a kind of madness, and the Furies were associated with vengeance: readers of the *Argonautica* would have been aware of the future vengeance that Medea will wreak on Jason for his betrayal. Therefore it is apt that the Fury Erinys should appear at this moment, since this is the significant point of no return for Medea, when she gives up everything for Jason and sets the wheels in motion for the horrific events which will occur from their fateful union.[784] She contrasts greatly with Seneca's heroine, since the epic Medea has only briefly been inspired by Erinys to perform her magic, while Seneca's Medea clearly gives herself up to her sorceress side and becomes truly formidable. Furthermore, the author of the tragedy does not shift the blame for the heroine's actions onto the gods, as explicitly as Valerius does.[785]

While in Apollonius' epic Medea remains the girl at this point, only giving instructions to help Jason in his tasks, Valerius' heroine becomes more active in assisting him: as well as giving Jason instructions, the Roman author portrays her performing magic for the first time, in order to protect Jason (7.463ff.).[786] Valerius does not over-indulge here, but keeps the tone of the magic low-key, merely reporting that Medea utters spells: the author appears to be presenting her change from human to divine as a gradual progress. Here, also, Medea appears to have grown up as she authoritatively commands Jason, which the imperatives *age* and *resume* indicate (467). She has moved from passive

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[783] Ripoll (2004) p.201 discerns an echo of Seneca *Medea* 280: *nocens sum facta* (see Chapter 2, pp.107-9); the echo in 246 (*sum nocens, fateor*) should also be noted. Ripoll observes the attribution of the epithet *nocens* to Medea in Ovid, Seneca and Valerius, pp.201-2.

[784] Hershkowitz (2004) p.34; she notes, pp.52-3, that the Furies' function is both to avenge and cause evil, which seems particularly applicable to Medea later in her myth. See Spaltenstein (2005) p.329.

[785] Although Seneca's Medea does appear as an agent of the gods: Chapter 2, pp.110-11, 124-5.

[786] Hull (1975) p.21 comments that Valerius' Medea would be less likely simply to give instructions because of the more magical atmosphere which the Roman author has established.

to active in order to help this stranger; however, she is not dutifully becoming active for the sake of her family or husband, as *pietas* demands, but for an enemy of her father.[787] When a female transgresses boundaries to perform male feats, this threatens the male position, and so causes concern. In classical antiquity, an active female nature was only acceptable if it was in the interests of the male to whom she owed her loyalty: hence Medea became a legendary figure to be feared and loathed by men because she committed many atrocities against the male members of her household, firstly betraying her father for an enemy, then taking part in the murder of her brother, and later killing her own sons for revenge on her unfaithful husband. However, in this version of Medea's life it should be remembered that the author has exonerated Medea as much as possible, in the ways that we have already seen: the meddling goddesses are portrayed as the true cause of Medea's inevitable actions, which she performs most unwillingly, and now Fury has taken hold of her in their place.

Ultimately Medea is presented as far more human than divine: she again displays her human weakness, when her insecurity about Jason's intentions, and what will become of her, is shown. These doubts and fears are reported by the author, and the character herself beseeches Jason on the matter in a long speech (7.477ff.). Furthermore, the Roman Medea continues to show an awareness of her wrongdoing, and not just concern that she will now lose Jason, for she says to the hero that her father will justly punish her: "*an me mox merita morituram patris ab ira / dissimulas?*" (7.484-5).[788] This is probably inspired by Ovid's Scylla who, recognising her unlawful betrayal of her father in an attempt to help the man she loves, notes that she deserves her parent's punishment ("*exige poenas, / Nise pater!*", *Metamorphoses* 8.125-6).[789] Furthermore, this line, mentioning Medea's deserved death at the hands of her father, echoes back to the "*quid meritum?*" of Jason, and highlights the couple's difference in character: while Medea, having betrayed her father for Jason, accepts her fate without complaint, Jason is full of self-pity and we cannot imagine that he would act on someone else's behalf, as she has. Even now Medea has a keen sense of duty and loyalty, although she has been forced to abandon it.

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[787] However, Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) p.9, views Medea's assistance as evidence of her adhering to womanly duties: this does not take into account of who exactly ought to receive her loyalty.
[788] Another reference to the *meritum* motif: see above, n.779.
[789] See pp.180-1, 186, 214 on the correspondences, and contrasts, with Ovid's Scylla.

Medea's human side is emphasised by her emotions, and kept more in the forefront than her sorceress side: this is achieved particularly through the depiction of the love she feels for Jason, and all its effects, such as extreme pain (*extremo percussa dolore*, 7.475). This section of the epic continues to be closely modelled on the Greek *Argonautica*, where Medea expresses similar concerns:[790] both heroines beg Jason to remember her when he has left for Greece, although Apollonius' Medea is more brief in her requests (3.1069ff.).[791] The Roman Medea exhibits pain and fear, and Valerius even captures the extremity of the love in her expression that she is happy to die for him: "*pro te lucem quoque laeta relinquam*" (7.487): Valerius is making her very melodramatically declare her devotion to him here, and for once she appears pathetic rather than brave. As for Jason's feelings for Medea, Apollonius explicitly tells us that his hero is overcome by love (3.1077f.), while Valerius informs us that his Jason has been bewitched by Medea (*tacitis nam cantibus illum / flexerat et simili iamdudum adflarat amore*, 7.488-9).[792] We can easily believe this: in the Hellenistic version, the scene is a much more tender one, and Jason is a more sympathetic hero whom we can imagine falling for Medea; on the other hand, the insensitive Roman Jason does not appear to have concern for anyone but himself and, from the evidence of his first speech to Medea, we would not expect him to have true feelings for her, but rather merely to be using her in order to get what he needs:[793] the Golden Fleece. In response to her appeal, he delivers a speech which appears false (7.490ff.), if we are to judge from the hints that Valerius has given us. His fulsome words and promises seem empty and faithless, and heavy irony pervades the passage,[794] as he addresses his designated *coniunx*:

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[790] Hershkowitz (1998) pp.251-2 has also discerned elements of Dido: she similarly feels guilt and fear of abandonment by Aeneas.

[791] Hull (1975) p.18 remarks that Valerius' Medea is indirect, in contrast to the forthright Medea of Apollonius (for example, at 3.1105-17), viewing this as a sign of her Roman concern with decorum.

[792] Ripoll's suggestion, (2004) pp.199-200, that Valerius has returned Jason to heroic status, seems to be based wholly on these brief words: he believes that this bewitchment partially absolves Jason, suggesting that the role of cynical manipulator has instead been transferred from Jason to the goddesses, especially Venus. However, Jason's heroic nature to which he refers does not seem apparent, and this supernatural influence is extremely cursory in comparison with the prolonged and repeated interference to which the goddesses must resort in order to conquer Medea's emotions.

[793] Garson's opinion, (1965) p.110, that Valerius' Jason is truly affectionate, while Apollonius' is not, and Hershkowitz's opinion, (1998) p.254, that Valerius' Jason is honourable towards Medea, while Apollonius' is insincere, seem incorrect: the Greek Jason appears more genuine than this arrogant Roman one. Davis (1989) p.56 aptly comments that Valerius' Jason "does and says what is expedient for him".

[794] Summers (1894) p.64 recognises this as a passage of poetic irony; Spaltenstein (2005) p.340 considers it black humour typical of Valerius. Ripoll (2004) pp.192-4 cites this oath as the main example of tragic irony through involuntary anticipation of future events by a character; he notes the influence of Ovid *Heroides* 12.83-8 (see Chapter 1, p.43), but perceives a more tragic dimension in this passage, which contains a summary of the tragic Medeas. He discerns, p.202, echoes of *Heroides* 12.212 (see Chapter 1, p.55), and lines of Seneca's *Medea*, in Jason's words *siquid...adicias*.

"umquam ego si meriti sim noctis et immemor huius,

si te sceptra, domum, si te liquisse parentes,

senseris et me tum non haec promissa tuentem,

...tum me tectis tua turbet in ipsis

flamma tuaeque artes; nullus succurrere contra

ingrato queat, et si quid tum saevius istis,

adicias meque in medio terrore relinquas." [7.501-3, 505-8][795]

Thus Jason foolishly condemns himself with his own false oaths.[796] In his words can be found many premonitions of the eventual unhappy ending of his marriage to Medea: we feel that he brings it on himself when he asks that, should he be proved an *ingrato*, then her flames, magic and anything else that she can summon, should cause him terror as punishment. Indeed it seems once more that Valerius is in some measure exonerating his heroine, by portraying Jason as at fault and deserving of what he will receive at her hands, because he literally does ask for it. Although we cannot condone her later extreme murderous actions, we cannot blame her for taking revenge against Jason. We gain the impression that Apollonius' Jason meant his words when he uttered them, but that Valerius' Jason always knew that he was falsely addressing Medea.[797] Valerius notes that the Fury hears his words (*audiit Furor*, 7.509-10): the author does not let us forget the horrible future that awaits these characters.[798]

Gradually Valerius reveals more of the witch in Medea: before she vanishes into the night, Valerius' princess exerts her powers over a strange creature, the serpent which guards the fleece. She briefly wakes it to display to Jason a warning of what is yet to come. It is a fearsome creature, which only a powerful magician could be expected to control, and is associated with fantastical foreign lands:

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[795] This again picks up the theme of *ingratus* and *meritum* found in Ovid: see n.779.
[796] Mossman (2009): see Chapter 1, n.80.
[797] However, Ripoll (2004) p.193, n.36, considers Jason's simple promise of marriage in Apollonius to be a less solemn oath.
[798] Ripoll (2004) p.194 believes that this *Furor* personified adds a tragic element to the elegiac theme of the vengeful lover; see also Spaltenstein (2005) p.342.

ille, quod haud alias, stetit et trepidantia torsit
sibila, seque metu postquam sua vellera circum
sustulit atque omnis spiris exhorruit arbor,
incipit inde sequi et vacuo furit ore per auras. [7.525-8]

The use of sibilants and the hard assonance here symbolises the strange hissing of the serpent, adding to its frightening impression. Jason is so scared that he is said to *stans frigidus* (7.530); Medea on the other hand is completely relaxed, knowing that she can easily put it to sleep again, and Valerius shows this by telling us she is *ridens* (7.531) , uncharacteristically for this usually troubled character.[799] The inclusion of this episode increases the impression of Medea's mighty powers, and it is now difficult to consider her a mere innocent girl, as we had up until very recently: it seems that the submission to the goddesses, and the surrendering of her shame, as she turned to her magic, also signified her passing from girlhood into adulthood. Similarly it should be noted that, now that Medea is using her magic powers, she is more often referred to as "the Colchian" than before, where she was more frequently "the maiden": this is more apt since her loss of youthfulness, and it signifies her more alien nature, hailing from a distant foreign land, and displaying that as a sorceress she is a strange barbarian.[800]

It is at this stage that I believe we discover the ultimate evidence that the real focus of the story, and true hero of the epic, is Medea. Earlier, Medea reassured Jason that he should not feel ashamed that she is behind his accomplishment: "*servatum pudeat nec virginis arte*" (7.482); however, in the closing passages of book seven we see Medea take the glory from Jason during his exploits. Having a woman assist in his heroic tasks reduces his glory, and this idea displays the view that women were considered weaker and less worthy than men, and should not be getting involved in important "male" matters. As we have seen in the early stages of the *Argonautica*, even when Jason should be the focus because he is performing deeds, Medea is never far from our minds, thanks to the author's frequent

[799] Hull (1975) p.18: she notes that Medea then leaves the scene in her normal gloomy mood, while Apollonius' Medea departs the parallel scene happily (3.1149-52). Thus Valerius has portrayed his Medea as more serious and sombre than Apollonius' more carefree girl. Hull, pp.21-2, comments on this difference: Apollonius' Medea generally has a happy disposition, with moments of despondency when concern for an immediate problem plagues her; Valerius' Medea is a much more tragic and sensitive creature, whose nature is more thoughtful and who carefully considers all the implications of her actions, so that she is always plagued by anxiety and misery. Spaltenstein (2005) p.348 interprets *ridens* as evidence of Medea's superiority.

[800] Baldini Moscadi (2000) p.284 suggests that this epithet designates her as a witch.

reminders of her. Furthermore, once she entered the epic she became the central focus, and the text has been written principally from her viewpoint: she is a much more three-dimensional character than the hero, because the author examines her mind and inner thoughts and struggles so that the reader truly learns about her nature, while Jason appears as much more of an action man, reacting to situations instantly without deliberation. Therefore, as Jason takes up the tasks set by Aeetes, it is no surprise to find that Medea is omnipresent:[801] Valerius takes up a little over one hundred lines[802] to describe Jason's exploits, and during that time Medea is mentioned on eight occasions, taking up a high proportion of the space that should have been dedicated to Jason.[803] These are not merely references to her being the power behind his abilities, nor to the magic assistance she has already lent him: Medea the sorceress becomes directly involved in the action, and steals Jason's final triumph against the earthborn warriors:

> qualis ubi attonitos maestae Phrygas annua Matris
> ira vel exsectos lacerat Bellona comatos,
> haud secus accensas subito Medea cohortes
> implicat et miseros agit in sua proelia fratres. [7.635-8]

Medea is compared to the war goddess Bellona, and as such can be compared to the goddesses of epic who watch wars from the sidelines, so that they can interfere to protect their favourites, as Homer portrays them in the *Iliad.* Admittedly, these goddesses do not necessarily detract from their heroes, although in the case of a weak warrior needing to be saved, it does not reflect well on his prowess.[804] Valerius makes it apparent that Jason could not have done this alone and needed Medea to survive:[805]

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[801] Ripoll (2004) pp.189-90 observes Medea's omnipresence in book 7 specifically, attributing this to the reduction of features from Apollonius' epic: secondary characters, episodes where Medea did not participate, and length of action. He notes that this focus on one character makes her appear like a dramatic protagonist, and recognises that the focalisation of Medea is caused by the emphasis of effects of events on her soul.

[802] 7.539-653. Summers (1894) p.65 observes brevity of narrative in the sections preceding Jason's labours, noting that Valerius does not give a clear account until the hero is actually performing the tasks. However, he does not acknowledge that even then we only have a brief section, nor that it is dominated instead by the heroine: this would undermine his view of Jason as the driving force behind the epic (see n.845 below).

[803] 7.549-50; 573-5; 583-6; 589-92; 596-8; 625; 631-2; 635-8.

[804] Such as Paris and Aphrodite in *Iliad* book 3. Hershkowitz (1998) pp.53-4 also views Medea as taking on the role of protecting goddess.

[805] Feeney (1993) p.327 observes the comparisons made between Jason and Hercules in the text, noting that they highlight the vast gulf between Hercules' accomplishments and Jason's tasks, completed for him by a woman.

it is noted that even Idas, who in a typically misogynistic manner had previously scorned receiving a woman's help, is now reluctantly glad that Medea is there to help:[806]

> horruit Argoae legio ratis, horruit audax
> qui modo virgineis servari cantibus Idas
> flebat et invito prospexit Colchida vultu. [7.573-5]

This effect is in contrast with that in Apollonius' *Argonautica*: there, because Medea had only given Jason instructions for him to act on, we see him performing these deeds himself. He is much more active, and she is more passive, in the Greek text.[807] There are occasional references to Medea's magic charms and instructions, but on the whole she is far less prominent than Valerius' heroine: in Apollonius' *Argonautica* Jason clearly emerges as the hero, with Medea merely an assistant. I believe that this partly owes to Valerius' desire to describe the witch but, since he is quite restrained in this, I think it is more a sign of his admiration for his heroine, whom he portrays as more of a hero than Jason.[808] It is also notable that, in the corresponding sequence, Ovid's Medea does not become as involved as Valerius' heroine at this stage, merely giving Jason access to her magic and the instructions for its application.[809]

If we are in any doubt that Medea is the real point of interest in the epic, we are made more certain by the opening of book eight which, immediately after Jason's tasks, returns to the plight of Medea and her difficult predicament, as if Jason's deeds had been a brief interlude that it was necessary to

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[806] Zissos (1999) pp.294-5 notes that this did not happen earlier in Valerius' text: he is probably referring back to Apollonius 3.558ff. Hershkowitz (1998) p.53 discusses the role of Idas in both the Roman and Greek *Argonautica*.

[807] However, Griffiths (2006) pp.89-90 notes the views that Apollonius' Medea is the hero; Clauss (1997) pp.149-50, argues against these views.

[808] However, Garson (1970) p.182 comments that, in his tasks, Jason "is a hero in the truest sense of the word": he does not appear to have taken account of Medea's role here. Similarly, his opinion (1964) p.267 and (1965) p.110, that Jason is more heroic and less dependent on Medea in Valerius' than Apollonius' epic, seems erroneous.

Although Hershkowitz (1998) pp.51-7 acknowledges Jason's debt to Medea's magic, in both the Greek and Roman texts, she undervalues the role of Medea in Valerius. She rather considers it a joint effort which does not detract from Jason's heroic status; however, when we compare it with Apollonius' account, especially considering the unflattering portrayal of Jason elsewhere in the Latin text, the Roman Medea does undermine Jason. Hershkowitz's opinion, pp.60-4 and 123-5, that the Jason of Apollonius is less heroic and relies more on Medea, thus seems incorrect. She interestingly reviews earlier variants of the myth, where Medea was less involved or altogether redundant: Valerius seems to work towards the very opposite of this, by making his Medea so proactive. I should add that it is from Medea's role in the action that I make the judgement that Jason is less heroic, and not from Jason's very acceptance of female aid, an assumption that Hershkowitz suggests is made (pp.187-8).

[809] Chapter 1, pp.19-21.

include, although not of much interest to the author.[810] After her performance of magic spells, Medea the sorceress reverts to the young and fearful girl, full of painful emotions: in this touching scene taken from Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4.11ff.), alone in her room, Medea sorrowfully says farewell to her girlhood:

> ultima virgineis tunc flens dedit oscula vittis,
>
> quosque fugit complexa toros crinemque genasque
>
> ante peranti carpsit vestigia somni. [8.6-8][811]

As well as mourning what she is about to leave behind, including her loss of innocence, she is full of guilt and fear at having betrayed her father. Her high sense of filial duty, and regret that she has committed a crime against her family, causes her to launch into another soliloquy, worthy of a tragic heroine:

> "o mihi si profugae genitor nunc ille supremos
>
> amplexus, Aeeta, dares fletusque videres
>
> ecce meos. ne crede, pater, non carior ille est,
>
> quem sequimur;[812] tumidis utinam simul obruar undis." [8.10-13][813]

This imaginary and touching address to her father displays the affection she holds for him: she explicitly declares that she cares more for Aeetes than Jason, which emphasises that her actions have

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[810] La Penna (1979) p.243 notes that the division between books seven and eight of Valerius follows the division between books three and four of Apollonius: he remarks that the significant difference is that Valerius does not include Apollonius' preamble, and launches immediately onto the scene of Medea, agitated by fear and fury, which is inspired instead by *Aeneid* 4.

[811] Spaltenstein (2005) pp.385-6 considers whether these lines refer to the virgin headband being exchanged for the marriage one, or whether it is her headband as Hecate's priestess. He also notes the textual problems of 8.8.

[812] Summers (1894) p.56 cites *ne crede...sequimur* as particular evidence of the Roman spirit of Valerius' epic, in the relationship between the princess and her father; he also quotes it as an example of the natural and characteristic speeches which Valerius gives her, p.61.

[813] Spaltenstein (2005) p.387 has observed that Apollonius' Medea wishes that Jason would die before reaching Colchis, while Valerius' heroine wishes that she could die at sea (with Jason), perceiving an echo of *Heroides* 12.119-20. (*meritas subeamus in alto...poenas*: see Chapter 2, pp.45-6).

Butler (1909) p.200 cites 8.13 as evidence that Valerius has drawn Medea movingly and sentimentally, but that her speeches lack the force and passion in Apollonius' version. Garson (1970) p.185, n.2, cites 8.12-13 as an example of Medea's simple and disjointed sentences: he believes that the style displays "girlish incoherence of thought" as she suddenly seeks death. Duff's opinion, (1968) pp.352-3, that the speeches show real emotion and illuminate her mental conflict, seems more accurate.

been against her will.[814] Again, too, she wishes for death because this is such a difficult situation for her, and she sees that as an easier method of escape. There is irony in her following words of hope that the king be happier in his other offspring since, as we know, she will be responsible in part for her brother's death. The author never lets us forget the future for Medea: a little further on, he also tells us that she takes up the drugs that Jason should not have spurned (*numquam spernenda marito*, 8.16).[815] As the audience knows well, he will regret his faithless oaths and ignorance of her true force.

Nevertheless, in this passage Valerius is showing that, despite her disloyal actions, Medea is still a sweet-natured and loving girl. When she goes to Jason, in another atmospheric night-time rendezvous, her role of innocent victim is emphasised by Valerius' effective simile comparing her to a frightened dove:[816]

> ecce autem pavidae virgo de more columbae,
> quae super ingenti circumdata praepetis umbra
> in quemcumque tremens hominem cadit, haut secus illa
> acta timore gravi mediam se misit... [8.32-5]

This is conventional imagery[817] which, while it designates Medea as innocent prey, highlights Jason as her predatory pursuer: this further underscores the concept that he is heartlessly using her in order to obtain the fleece, without having true feelings for her. His following comforting and flattering words therefore appear empty and meaningless, especially when it is clear that he intended all along to request that she should obtain the fleece: he appears completely self-centred, calculating and

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[814] Spaltenstein (2005) p.387 notes that Medea addresses her mother in Apollonius, but Valerius places more importance on her father: this should be attributed to the Roman nature of the latter epic.
[815] Spaltenstein (2005) pp.387-8 understands it as Medea who should not have been spurned. Ripoll (2004) pp.201-3 observes the indirect anticipation of the future crimes of Medea in these items which she takes with her; he detects reminiscences of Seneca and Ovid in the foreshadowing of the epic.
[816] Davis (1989) p.56 rightly believes that Valerius' concern was to portray Medea as victim, rather than witch. See also Caviglia (2002) pp.25-6, who emphasises Medea's fear.
[817] For example, see Horace *Odes* 1.37.17-20, where the simile is used to describe Octavian's pursuit of the fleeing Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium; or *Metamorphoses* 1.506, where Apollo compares Daphne's flight from his lust to a dove fleeing an eagle. See further in Spaltenstein (2005) pp.392-3, who notes the danger of Jason underscored here. In his love poetry, Ovid frequently employs imagery of the hunter and the hunted to depict the pursuit of the beloved by the lover: Leach (1964) pp.144-6 discusses this imagery in the *Ars Amatoria*, and Parry (1964) pp.270-5 in the *Metamorphoses*. Mozley (1998) p.xvii and Martin (1938) p.140 consider this an example of the beauty of Valerius' similes.

manipulative.[818] He also appears a fool: when Medea bares her soul to him, explaining that she is giving up everything for him, she warns that the gods and stars are witnesses to their pact, but Jason does not take heed and seriously underestimates her.

It is in this suitable night-time atmosphere that Medea does as Jason wishes[819] and puts to sleep the tremendous serpent which guards the fleece. Jason is afraid of it again, and in awe of Medea for having control over such a beast (*tantus subiit tum virginis horror*, 8.67): Medea explains that the dragon only responds to her, touchingly reminding us of a dog and its master:

> "ipsius en oculos et lumina torva draconis
> aspicis; ille suis haec vibrat fulgura cristis:
> me patiens contra solam videt ac vocat ultro,
> ceu solet, et blanda poscit me pabula lingua". [8.60-3]

In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, Medea exerts a similar power over the serpent, but there is no relationship depicted there between the witch and the dragon. This poignant scene is Valerius' innovation in order to display the more human side of his Medea: she may fearfully summon sleep upon the beast with powerful spells and drugs (8.70ff.), just as her Greek counterpart did (4.145ff.), but the Roman author has painted a uniquely tender elegiac scene between the young girl and her betrayed childhood pet.[820] Valerius increases the pathos of the scene as Medea, full of pity and guilt,[821] runs to embrace the sleeping creature and speaks to him of shared fond moments they have had:

> "non ego te sera talem sub nocte videbam
> sacra ferens epulasque tibi, nec talis hianti
> mella dabam ac nostris nutribam fida venenis." [8.95-7]

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[818] Hershkowitz (1998) p.57 describes him as "oozing with smarm", worthy of Apollonius' hero. However, Martin (1938) pp.146-7 believes that Jason, in contrast with Aeneas, is not cold-blooded, but he does rightly denote him as "selfish and calculating", recognising that the fleece is his priority.

[819] As Stover (2003) p.146, n.57, has acknowledged, despite slightly undermining his own argument, if Jason was truly heroic he would have fought the beast himself, as Pindar's Jason did (*Pythian Odes* 4.247-49). Zissos (1999) pp.290-1 notes that Medea appears to offer Jason a choice of how to obtain the fleece from their varied literary history.

[820] See La Penna (1979) pp.243-4. Although Medea's pet is, of course, a mythological beast, interesting here is the general discussion of the relationship between Roman children and their pets in Bradley (1998), especially pp.523-45. In light of Bradley, Griffiths (2006) pp.98-9 interprets the sentimentality displayed here as contributing to Medea's particularly Roman nature.

[821] Garson (1965) p.108, n.1 believes that Valerius added this scene to illustrate Medea's remorse.

The reader feels pity not only for the dragon, but also for Medea, seeing that she has a generous heart, and knowing that she has been forced into this unfortunate position of betraying and deserting all that she holds dear. In vain, and naively, she hopes that this is her last crime: "*iamque omne nefas, iam, spero, peregi*" (8.108). However, there is irony in this line, since we know that this is trivial in comparison with her future crimes:[822] this makes the scene touching, if not slightly amusing, adding a little light relief to the otherwise tragic tone.[823] Medea's warmth and affection is also evident since her mother, realising too late why her daughter's behaviour has been strange recently, laments her departure (8.140ff.): it is clear from her speech that they too had a close relationship and that she will miss her deeply.[824]

Medea's mother foresees a grim future for her daughter, as a stranger in a foreign land (*quis locus Inachias inter tibi, barbara, natas?*, 8.148), and this prediction reaches fulfilment sooner than she might have expected: as soon as we return to Medea, we discover her as an isolated figure aboard the Argo, sitting weeping and physically separated from the crew. This occurs before she has even reached Greece and, unsurprisingly, she doubts her future: *sola tamen nec coniugii secura futuri* (8.206). Valerius emphasises his heroine's isolation by placing *sola* in the most prominent position, as the very first word of the line: indeed this anticipates her future among the Greeks in Corinth, especially as we have seen her in Seneca's portrayal, emphasised as separate and excluded from Corinthian society, as a foreigner.[825] Medea is portrayed as a pitiful figure, who evokes the sympathy of coasts, lakes and rivers as she passes by (8.209ff.): furthermore, we are made to understand that she must indeed be a sorrowful and dejected sight, since eventually the Argonauts also exhibit this feeling of sympathy, so that they agree to her sailing away with them. Valerius informs us that they are genuinely pleased to hear that Jason is taking Medea as his bride (*ultro omnes laeti instigant meritamque fatentur*, 8.223). Although Venus and Cupid approve, assisting with the wedding

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[822] Ripoll (2004) p.202 believes the tragic irony to be reinforced by an echo of Seneca *Medea* 122 (*adeone credit omne consumptum nefas*: Chapter 2, p.100). Summers (1894) p.64 and Spaltenstein (2005) p.409 also observe the irony.
[823] Hutchinson (1993) pp.70-1 discusses this scene.
[824] Garson (1965) pp.110-11 considers the genuine pathos of her mother's speech. La Penna (1979) pp.244-5 comments that Valerius here displays the dramatic talent of a true poet; Spaltenstein (2005) p.416 observes the theatrical pathos typical of Valerius.
[825] See Chapter 2, especially pp.96-8.

preparations (8.232ff.), we are reminded by the author that this will be a disastrous union:[826] referring to Jason's future Greek wife coming to an unpleasant end at the hands of Medea, he tells us that the crown given to Medea will burn upon another bride (*arsuras alia cum virgine gemmas*, 8.236). The bad omens that Mopsus reads in the sacrifices elaborate further on the mismatch of the couple:

> sed neque se pingues tum candida flamma per auras
> explicuit, nec tura videt concordia Mopsus,
> promissam nec stare fidem, breve tempus amorum.
> odit utrumque simul, simul et miseratur utrumque
> et tibi tum nullos optavit, barbara, natos. [8.247-51]

Furthermore, the forebodings for this marriage continue: as the proceedings begin, Medea's brother Absyrtus and the Colchians burst onto the scene, in pursuit of both their stolen belongings and revenge against the Greeks. This doomed marriage between Jason and Medea comes at an earlier stage in Valerius' *Argonautica* than in its Greek predecessor. Apollonius places the wedding near the end of his epic,[827] as a marriage in haste to prevent the king Alcinous returning Medea to her father (4.1114ff.): this occurs after the murder of Absyrtus, which Medea cruelly plans (4.410ff.), but which never happens in the Roman epic. However, instead of being rudely interrupted, the Hellenistic Jason and Medea's marriage is completed before they depart for their journey home which, although beset by hardships, nevertheless ends happily when they reach Greece and, simultaneously, the end of the epic. Furthermore, it is stated that their love is mutual in the Hellenistic version (4.1165ff.), whereas there is no evidence that the Roman Medea's feelings for Jason are reciprocated, and there is no mention of love in the Latin epic's account of the wedding: it merely seems that for Valerius the marriage is a sinister allusion to future doom.

For Medea, left behind (*deserta virgine*, 8.308) while Jason goes off to defend the Greeks, this causes yet another difficult situation, so that she once more considers suicide: even at this late stage she continues to exhibit her sense of *pudor*, since she is distraught knowing that either her lover or brother

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[826] Bernstein (2008) p.60 remarks that the dissolution of this marriage is predictable in its origins. He notes, p.59, that the divine intervention has placed Medea's transition from daughter to wife in the context of madness and betrayal.

[827] Although unlikely, this early marriage could possibly be evidence that Valerius' epic was intended to end where it does, and unhappily.

must die. Essentially it continues to be the human side of Medea that Valerius emphasises. The author here interjects to address his heroine directly about her tragic situation, and the shame which must now return to her, increasing the impression of his personal feelings of concern for the girl:

> at tibi quae scelerum facies, Medea, tuorum?
> quisve pudor Colchos iterum fratremque videnti
> quidquid et abscisum vasto iam tuta profundo
> credideras?... [8.312-15]

As so often before, we here view the situation through Medea's eyes, rather than Jason's. Furthermore, although this leads to a battle scene, again Valerius keeps Medea a prominent focus: here this is maintained by her previous fiancé Styrus, who has come to reclaim his dowry and his pride (8.328ff.). The bitter words of Styrus increase the impression that Medea is the true heroine of the epic, as he claims that her magic powers save Jason, thereby undermining the Greek hero's achievements:

> "atque iterum Aesonides, iterum defenditur arte,
> qua solet? haut illi cantus et futile murmur
> proderit..." [8.353-5].

With the Colchians bearing down upon them, the Greeks have a sudden change of heart about Medea, referring to her with disdain as a foreigner (*externa virgine*, 8.387), and thus illustrating that she is merely an outsider to them, who served as a tool for obtaining the fleece. It seems that Jason's crew are as ungrateful as he has so far appeared. In a line echoing Virgil's description of Helen as the Fury of her country, Valerius establishes Medea explicitly as the precursor to Helen, as the first Erinys causing conflict between Europe (the Greeks) and Asia (the foreign and barbaric Colchians): *nec Marte cruento / Europam atque Asiam prima haec committat Erinys* (8.395-6).[828] Unknowingly referring to Paris, the Greeks go on to explain that this war should be left for a later ravisher, as

[828] *Aeneid* 2.573: *Troiae et patriae communis Erinys*. Barnes (1981) p.369 and Spaltenstein (2005) pp.466-7 note the comparison. Hershkowitz (2004) pp.56-7 discusses Fury imagery as being especially applied to women, as with the image of the maenad, on which see n.717 above.

Mopsus had earlier predicted. Again this is an example of Valerius establishing his own epic in the line of Homer's and Virgil's works and, indeed, as a precursor to those legendary tales of war.[829]

Jason now confronts a choice between his crew and Medea (8.400ff.) and, after some hesitation and wavering, unsurprisingly the weak and faithless hero ultimately chooses the wishes of the Argonauts: judging from his attitude towards Medea so far, combined with the brief amount of soul-searching that he undergoes,[830] we feel that this is no real dilemma for him. Furthermore, it seems characteristic for him, since we have seen Jason abandon a woman once already: in book two he had left Hypsipyle while she was pregnant, so we should not be surprised that he does it again here.[831] The choice to hide this decision from the girl only serves to highlight further his un-heroic status: this is a most cowardly action on the part of Jason and the Argonauts. However, Medea reads the signs and suspects:

> Sed miser ut vanos, veros ita saepe timores
> versat amor fallique sinit nec virginis annos.[832]
> ac prior ipsa dolos et quamlibet intima sensit
> non fidi iam signa viri nimiumque silentes
> una omnes... [8.408-12]

This intuition and loss of naivety displays how Valerius' heroine is gradually maturing. Furthermore, although we might expect her to rush in foolishly to confront this situation, instead she cleverly tackles Jason alone: Valerius is portraying Medea as becoming more clever and manipulative, although still sympathetic, since she is clearly receiving unjust treatment at the hands of the Argonauts. It should be noted that Apollonius' Medea also ensures that she speaks to Jason alone when she hears the Argonauts' wishes: however, it was not kept a secret from her and, furthermore, she bursts into sobs as she begins to implore him (4.355ff.). The Roman Medea, on the other hand, maintains her composure as she shows strength of character in confronting him with a new commanding presence: here she is behaving more like Ovid's stronger Medea in the *Metamorphoses*,

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[829] Zissos (2002): see nn.653, 702 above.
[830] It should be noted, however, that there is possibly some text missing here, which could account for his snap decision. Duff (1968) p.355 aptly terms Jason's weakness as "pusillanimous ingratitude".
[831] 2.393-427. Martin (1938) pp.145-6 notes that Jason has thus displayed his qualities as a philanderer. However, the view that Jason is a great hero who reciprocates Medea's affections seems flawed: there is no evidence in the text of the "almost complete devotion" that Martin discerns.
[832] Spaltenstein (2005) p.469 notes the elegiac tone of 8.408-9.

who imagines threatening Jason during her original ponderings over whether she should betray her father for him (*Metamorphoses* 7.42ff.). During her speech, Valerius' Medea employs several clever rhetorical techniques to persuade Jason that his choice is an error: she promptly reminds Jason of his oath to her, not the crew (8.422ff.), and sarcastically flatters him as an added reminder, calling him *fidissime coniunx* (8.419);[833] she questions his bravery in order to play on his male pride and spur him on to prove it, asking what he is afraid of and if the enemy is too great for him (8.427ff.), thereby showing her increasing ability to manipulate; she recalls the powers she has employed for his sake (8.435ff.), reminding him of the debt of gratitude that she deserves (*merui*, 8.431)[834] and that he should realise her advice is the wiser course; finally, in contrast with her Hellenistic predecessor, the Roman Medea scorns the idea of being Jason's suppliant (8.441ff.). Apollonius' Medea similarly questions how Jason can be ungrateful when she has done so much for him, and abandoned all that is dear to her: however, her approach is different, as she gradually builds up from begging and sobbing into a crescendo of anger and curses. On the other hand, the tone of cool and justified anger is present throughout the Latin Medea's speech, as if it were pre-meditated because she has been keeping the anger within until the suitable moment to vent it. In this speech, Valerius may instead owe more to that which Ovid's Scylla delivers to Minos (*Metamorphoses* 8.104ff.): she similarly attempts to dissuade the hero, and becomes angry and frenzied, as well as reminding him of his ingratitude towards her for the act in which she sacrificed everything for him.[835]

Valerius' Medea appears to have undergone a gradual transformation, having been forced to grow up by the hardships she faces thanks to the ungrateful Jason: she is understandably irate, and his silence inflames her further, leaving her furious (*furiata mente*, 8.445) as the rage takes hold of her:[836]

> ...qualem Ogygias cum tollit in arces
> Bacchus et Aoniis inlidit Thyada truncis,
> talis erat talemque iugis se virgo ferebat
> cuncta pavens... [8.446-9]

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[833] Hershkowitz (1998) p.252 observes that Medea is like Dido in detecting her lover's plans to abandon her: she most interestingly remarks, n.25, that while Medea uses *fidissime* to reinforce Jason's bond to her, Dido contrastingly uses *perfide* against Aeneas in her speech (*Aeneid* 4.305).
[834] Again picking up the theme of deserving and ingratitude: see above, n.779.
[835] On Scylla, see n.789 above.
[836] Spaltenstein (2005) p.474 notes that *furiata mente* echoes *Aeneid* 2.407. Garson (1965) p.107 recognises that both the Greek and the Roman Medea build up into a frenzy in this parallel speech: however, there seems less similarity in the speeches than he emphasises.

The use of Bacchic imagery is popular for illustrating a woman's madness, as we have seen already in the depiction of Medea falling in love:[837] Valerius may well have been directly inspired by Seneca's recent and similar description of his tragic Medea as a *cruenta maenas* (*Medea* 849).[838] This simile is effective for expressing Medea's fury: it suggests boundlessness, and we can now imagine her committing some of her notorious crimes. Furthermore she is compared to wild beasts in her angry lamenting, which we also witness in other Silver Age accounts of furious women:[839]

> ...tunc tota querellis
> egeritur questuque dies, eademque sub astris
> sola movet, maestis veluti nox illa sonaret
> plena lupis quaterentque truces ieiuna leones
> ora vel orbatae traherent suspiria vaccae. [8.453-7]

This imagery lends an eerie atmosphere to the scene, creating the impression of danger through the strange sounds emanating in the night, as Medea sits under the stars, brooding and crying out.[840] Although no longer an innocent young girl, she nevertheless evokes pity: this is a sad and sorrowful picture painted by Valerius, and he tells us that she has lost her royal pride and brilliance (8.458ff.). Medea has not deserved this tragic downfall and the reader can imagine that the newly calculating sorceress will do something momentous after being thus treated by Jason: the text now seems to be leading rapidly towards the fateful and infamous events of Medea's life.

The text here becomes fragmentary and breaks off, with Jason attempting in vain to console Medea: this is a different ending from Apollonius' epic, where they reach Greece safely, and I believe that the

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[837] Hershkowitz (2004) p.36 observes that the maenad is used as a central image of female madness in both epic and tragedy. She describes the ambiguous characteristics of the maenad, p.37, noting its suitability for characters like Dido whose madness comes both from within, and from external forces: therefore it can equally be applied to a figure of contradictions such as Medea. Ripoll (2004) pp.203-4 considers the echoes of the Senecan Medea in Valerius' use of Bacchic imagery; Spaltenstein (2005) p.475 acknowledges Dido (*Aeneid* 4.301ff.) as the source here. See above, p.183, and n.717.

[838] Chapter 2, pp.136-7. Baldini Moscadi (2000) p.285. Hershkowitz (2004) pp.35-6 also recognises this, and traces both depictions back to Dido's reaction on learning of Aeneas' departure, Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.300ff.

[839] Most relevant here are Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.182ff. (Chapter 1, p.24) and Seneca *Medea* 800ff., 862ff. (Chapter 2, pp.132-4, 137).

[840] Baldini Moscadi (2000) pp.285-6 considers how the sounds add to the atmosphere by creating the effect of chanting a spell, and notes how Erictho imitates the sounds of nature in her magic, as she similarly emits dreadful animal sounds while performing her necromancy, at *Bellum Civile* 6.685ff. See above, nn.695, 775, on the influence of Erictho. Caviglia (2002) pp.28-9 considers this simile.

Roman epic is incomplete and would have ended in a similar way. With Medea's increasing anger and advancing maturity it seems probable that she would have committed some mighty deed: the murder of her brother is missing from the Latin text, since the war between the Colchians and Greeks does not reach its end, and I believe that it would have been this horrific part of her destiny that the text would have come to next since, in general, Valerius has followed Apollonius' plot.[841] One possible explanation that we should perhaps consider for the incomplete state of the text is that Valerius was so fond of his heroine that he could not bear to go on and vilify her by writing about any murderous crimes committed at her hands. Of course, this is mere conjecture but, judging by his apparent favouritism towards her throughout the text, it seems one possibility among the other more usual reasons for an unfinished work.

[841] See n.644 above. Summers (1894) pp.5-7 believes that the text was incomplete and would have differed in its ending from Apollonius' *Argonautica*; however, he does believe that Absyrtus' murder would have been included.

CONCLUSION

Since the epic breaks off incomplete, we cannot be certain how Valerius would have developed his heroine beyond the extant portion. However, we can make several judgements based on his handling of her in the text as it stands. One overriding impression is that Valerius Flaccus was fond of his heroine: this arises from his portrayal of her including much sympathy, understanding and admiration. Therefore the character of Medea emerges as a likeable and tender creature, deserving our pity in her plight. Furthermore, this results in a considerable emphasis on her innocence: Valerius takes several measures to depict Medea essentially as not to blame for the crimes she commits in her life. To underscore her innocence and thereby make her appear more faultless, Valerius portrays a youthful and naive maiden for the most part, and is much inspired by the childlike portrait found in Apollonius' *Argonautica*:[842] it is only near the end of his epic, as we have it, that the author displays Medea becoming more clever and mature, and this has been a very gradual process indeed.

However, in general, Valerius' Medea is a far more serious and thoughtful heroine than Apollonius' more childlike and happy girl. It is clear that the author does not hold Medea responsible for betraying her father: her love of Jason appears completely initiated by the interfering goddesses, and even then he depicts Medea's long and painful struggle to resist this divinely inspired affection. However, it is inevitable that Medea will not be able to overcome this, and it only increases our admiration for her, all the more, to see the innocent victim of the cruel goddesses putting up a futile fight in the name of *pudor*. She demonstrates a strength of spirit in her determination that reason should overcome emotion for the sake of filial loyalty and duty, and the girl's growing love is presented as an internal struggle between *amor* and *pudor*. In her desire to follow the right course, Valerius has displayed his heroine's inherent decency and she cannot be considered a weak or bad character.[843] Her Greek counterpart has an awareness of the shame attached to her actions, but she is not portrayed as putting up much resistance to this love: this keen sense of *pudor* and *pietas*, particularly towards her father, contributes to making Valerius' Medea a Roman heroine. This exhibits the influence of Virgil's Dido in Valerius' portrayal of his princess since she, too, was similarly torn between duty and love. Valerius has

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[842] Mozley's opinion, (1998) p.xiv, that Apollonius' Medea is a "strange foreign woman, fiery and ruthless and barbaric" seems flawed, since it is the childlike nature that characterises the Greek girl and so influences this "gentle-souled" Roman version.

[843] Or, as La Penna puts it, (1979) p.246, Medea is neither sinisterly evil nor rebellious.

portrayed Medea as a proper Roman girl, endowed with "good" attributes. He very reluctantly allows her to become "bad", and excuses her when she does.

A further way in which Valerius exonerates her is by making the people she betrays appear most unsympathetic: Valerius explicitly tells us that Aeetes deserves all that he gets, and draws him as a foolish and greedy king; Jason is depicted as a self-centred and insensitive man, who also acts foolishly in underestimating Medea, and treating her unfairly by using her to gain the Golden Fleece, without returning her true affections. The heartless hero is again Valerius' innovation, since Apollonius tells us that his Jason does feel love for Medea. Ultimately Valerius evokes much pathos for the girl, whose suffering and hardships are for this thankless, and faithless, undeserving man. Furthermore, he poignantly portrays her emotional battles: the psychology of the girl is on display as we see her struggle, being pulled in several directions. Valerius appears to owe much to Ovid's elegiac influence for such portrayals, especially when we see Medea debating her personal dilemmas.[844] These scenes, particularly the monologues, also add tragic tones to the epic, evoking much sympathy for the heroine. Valerius' apparent affection towards her also elicits the same reaction in his readers, who cannot help but feel some measure of pity and admiration for Medea, even though we are aware of her evil capabilities: Valerius has depicted such a convincing case of innocence that we cannot believe that this is the Medea responsible for those notorious deeds.

The fondness that Valerius has for Medea seems to derive from his interest in the character, which Ovid also displayed in his many handlings of her myth. This fascination with Medea results in her becoming the real focus of the epic: before her entry into the poem, Valerius mentions his heroine several times, or alludes to her, in irrelevant places, so that we get the sense that the Argonauts' journey is leading towards her all along, and not Jason's glorious mission. Medea's omnipresence is unique to the Roman epic. Once she does come onto the scene, she steals the show:[845] the author writes his Medea section of the epic principally from the heroine's viewpoint, which accounts for much of the sympathy we feel for her, as well as increasing the impression that her love for Jason is

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[844] Feeney (1993) p.328 notes how this becomes a very Ovidian epic, with a very Ovidian heroine. This contrasts with Fantham's rather simplistic summary of the epic, (1996) p.168, as unoriginally Virgilian: see n.851 below.

[845] Hershkowitz (1998) p.10 similarly notes that Medea's story overpowers that of the Argo. For an opposing view, Summers (1894) pp.61-2 believes Jason is the "moving spirit of the enterprise".

unreciprocated.[846] Valerius' *Argonautica* emerges as Medea's story: the tale of her love and her adventure.[847] Jason is side-lined as Medea essentially completes his tasks for him, and wins the Golden Fleece by becoming proactive: this is a marked departure from Apollonius' Medea who remains much more passive, only giving Jason instructions to help him, and it thus displays how Valerius appears to have a different aim for his epic: to make Medea the true hero.

Finally, then, now that this study has displayed that Medea has certainly been drawn with sympathy and admiration, we can answer the question of whether she is here depicted as an evil, Silver Age witch. It is possible, of course, to lay less or more emphasis upon Medea's witch-like aspects for the sake of argument, which explains why opinions differ on the matter.[848] However, Valerius has mainly followed the childlike and endearing depiction to be found in his Hellenistic predecessor, Apollonius,[849] and the prevailing image is not that of a witch.[850] Nevertheless, Valerius has also responded to the tastes of the time for the more macabre and gruesome, in the manner of his Silver Age predecessors, Ovid and Seneca, while not focusing on that aspect predominantly. I believe that one of the greatest successes of this often unpopular epic is the author's reconciliation of the witch aspects of Medea with the sweet girl that he principally presents to us. Valerius' emphasis is on the human side of his heroine, and certainly not the sorceress or barbarian in her: it is the endearing young girl that emerges from his text, although we cannot tell how Medea would have ultimately transpired.

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[846] Lovatt's conclusion, (2006) pp.77-8, considers the heroine's internal contradictions of being simultaneously powerful and powerless, to be summarised in her gaze, which is characterised as both masculine and feminine.

[847] Feeney's interesting premise (1993) pp.319-28 is relevant here: he perceives a generic struggle in the epic between the martial theme and the dominating love story which threatens to overwhelm it, with its tragic and elegiac elements. Similarly, Ripoll (2004) p.192, n.33, and p.194, comments that Valerius appears to favour the tragic point of view over the epic one, and thereby increases sympathy for the heroine.

[848] For example, Baldini Moscadi (2000) appears to have taken the magical passages out of context, and so placed too much emphasis on this aspect: on balance with the whole text, Medea is predominantly a girl who only later develops into a more mature woman, turning to her magic reluctantly. However, her summary (p.286), that the elegiac dimension of Valerius' heroine has altered her traditional character, while not making her lose her magical aspects, is valid. Her opinion, (1999) p.43, seems to differ from (2000), since she there rightly claims that Valerius' Medea remains a child while, almost despite her will, performing the role of magician. In (2000) she discerns an ambiguity and duplicity in the character which cannot be denied, although it is reconciled.

[849] Although Garson (1965) p.104 judges overall that "however much he takes from others, the final product is something new and distinctive", he considers Valerius' characterisation of Medea to be so indebted to Apollonius that it lacks originality: however, there are many influences which combine to make Valerius' Medea unique.

[850] However, we should remember that the text is probably incomplete, and so it is possible, although unlikely, that Valerius' Medea became a complete witch by the end of the epic.

Considering the literary constraints of the time, this is something of a success in itself:[851] nevertheless, Valerius also satisfies the Silver Age audience. He achieves this, in part, by frequent allusions to Medea's literary tradition which, because of the notoriety of her actions, could not be completely ignored by the Hellenistic Apollonius either, although he was not bound by the same limitations of taste. Often it appears that Valerius cannot resist dropping these hints in here and there, even at inappropriate places: references to her future deeds, vague or otherwise, pervade the text and we are not allowed to forget that this is indeed the notorious Medea of myth.[852] However, Valerius generally keeps these allusions as vague hints and displays very little of the actual witch in Medea: in comparison with Ovid and Seneca's portrayals, he has kept this to a relative minimum. Where we do find descriptions of Medea's magic powers, it is often in a second-hand report, so that it is kept as distant from her as possible: indeed, it is often very difficult to imagine the girl of the epic as a formidable witch. Of course, as the story advances, Medea has more and more need to resort to her powers but, for a very long time, Valerius has her resist this action, and she succumbs only very gradually, and is not held responsible for it. There is an ambiguity to the character, since Medea has two sides to her personality, but Valerius appears to have successfully reconciled these two aspects by illustrating a gradual process of maturing from girl into woman,[853] and sorceress, which is brought about by the harsh realities of life inflicted upon her by unjust outside influences: Medea is only very reluctantly corrupted. Even in the Silver Age, Valerius could not, after all, portray the true heroine of his epic as inherently evil.

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[851] Fantham (1996) p.168 views Valerius' Medea as less sinister and his Jason as less weak: the former point seems correct, but not the latter. Furthermore, she attributes this not to innovation, but to a slavish return to Virgilian influence: however, Valerius was influenced by several sources, and his Medea was born from a combination of these.

[852] Garson (1965) pp.108-10 rightly considers these repeated allusions to the later events of Medea's life as the leitmotif of this section of the epic, and discusses the irony they create.

[853] However, some, such as Mozley (1998) p.xiv, consider the dual aspects to be unconvincing. Hull (1975) p.19-22 compares Valerius' reconciliation of the elements with the incongruity of them in Apollonius' version; she attributes Valerius' success to an interweaving of elements, and the fear and horror of the atmosphere in the Roman epic.

VIRGO TO VIRAGO: MEDEA IN THE SILVER AGE
CONCLUSION

Having separately examined each of the extant Silver Age accounts of Medea in detail, particularly to discover whether the heroine is always ultimately portrayed as a villain, or whether she can be drawn at all sympathetically in this period, I wish now to consider what conclusions can be drawn from a comparison of the three Latin authors' versions of the infamous mythological heroine. In this final section, I shall look at whether any common elements and themes have emerged across the Silver Age accounts of Medea, as written by Ovid, Seneca and Valerius Flaccus, and what significance these similarities might have.

Firstly, it should be noted that, as is befitting Medea's complex and ambiguous character, there is no one consistent image of this figure, even within the relatively short period of the Silver Age.[854] This is, in part, determined by the different genres employed to portray her: for example, in her self-written defensive elegiac epistle in the *Heroides*, she cannot be expected to appear in the same light as she does in Senecan tragedy, when committing atrocious acts. Furthermore, we have met a range of Medeas, across a wide span of her life, during which she plays several roles: she has been the young princess, priestess, daughter, sister, enamoured teenage girl and helper-maiden, right through to the other woman, wife, mother, foreigner, murderess, sorceress and goddess. Therefore Medea strongly resists being categorised in any one way. However, that does not mean that she is a completely inconsistent figure: through the various accounts, we have a whole picture which allows us to examine and learn about this character's inner-workings and motivations and, with this understanding, it is possible to reconcile her many aspects and view her as a single figure, although she does consist of many apparent contradictions. Indeed, if it is necessary to pigeonhole her, this is perhaps her unifying facet: authors portray her as a contradictory figure and always employ some degree of exploration of her ambiguities, seeking to reconcile them into a single understandable character.[855] This is particularly evident in these Latin accounts, since Silver Age poets were especially influenced by their

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[854] Griffiths (2006) p.12 notes that no 'pure' form of the Medea myth exists.

[855] Similarly, Griffiths (2006) pp.78-80, in discussing Euripides' Medea, suggests that her only consistency is her very inconsistency; she notes, p.119, that Medea's complexity as a figure throughout the ages is reflected in us, and we should accept her and not try to categorise her. McDonald (1997) p.303 observes her complexity since she overflows constricting categories. Archer, *et al.* (1994) p.xviii aptly comment that women who failed to fulfil given roles were questioned and feared, ultimately because they could not be ordered by male control.

rhetorical training: therefore a widely diverse character, such as Medea, was an especially suitable subject for treatment, because she gave authors the opportunity to use their skills in argument, to explore and reconcile the many extremes which made up her character.

The style of the period also accounts for another feature common to the presentation of Medea during the Silver Age: her sorceress side is extensively embellished, with the authors employing techniques of exaggeration and horror to depict Medea the witch. The Silver Age, in its striving for excess and attempt to outdo all that had previously gone before it, had a fondness for the gruesome and fantastic, meaning that such details were especially emphasised.[856] Medea the witch was, therefore, a fitting topic for the era. This becomes especially apparent when we compare the earlier extant Greek accounts of Medea which served as models for these texts, Euripides' tragedy, *Medea*, and Apollonius of Rhodes' epic, *Argonautica*: the former principally presents Medea as a woman, and the latter portrays her as a young sorceress, but without elaborating on the details. Ovid's account, in the innovative *Metamorphoses*, incorporated every imaginable fantastic and gory detail, and must have provided inspiration for the poets who followed him: when we reach Seneca's account it seems surprising that he was able to achieve an even more excessive depiction of a vile witch than his recent predecessor, yet he did this through amplification of such details as those supplied by Ovid. It is notable that even Valerius devoted sections of his epic, which otherwise focused on Medea's youthful innocence, to the sorceress's darker side.[857] This suggests that it was effectively a prerequisite of the period to include such details wherever possible, and especially when portraying the infamous figure of Medea. In the Silver Age Medea, we have a complete image of a witch with a full range of stereotypical grim and almighty attributes: she draws down the moon; reverses all nature; has power over the gods; associates with horrific and fantastic creatures; concocts potions from vile and bloody ingredients; uses weird herbs from far-flung places; and chants magic spells.[858]

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[856] However, Ogden (2008) pp.50, 75-6 traces these characteristics back to the Golden Age: he sees the Gothic cruelty and morbidity of Horace's Canidia in *Satire* 1.8 as particularly Roman traits, which continued in later Latin depictions of witches; he suggests that they derived from the more bloodthirsty Roman culture, influenced by the sights of the arena. Rabinowitz (1998) p.77 believes magic and witches emerge in Latin literature as a function of Alexandrising, and describes them as "at the outset derivative productions".

[857] Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) pp.5-6, believes that, when Medea appears in her helper-maiden role, her use of magic suggests that the wicked woman is always latent in the character.

[858] Ogden (2008) p.45 acknowledges that Medea, as well as Circe, is held as the archetype of the Roman witch, listing the typical witch powers and traits. In (2001) pp.142-3, he notes that the

However, although each of the Silver Age authors seized this opportunity to embellish the details of the sorceress Medea, this aspect only accounts for relatively small sections of the texts. We should not place too much emphasis on the witch side of Medea since, for the majority of these texts, she appears as a girl or woman.[859] Indeed, Medea's most despicable act was not one involving magic: the murder of her own sons, in revenge for Jason's faithlessness, has probably earned Medea her greatest notoriety. This horrific crime actually takes place only in one extant Silver Age account: Seneca's tragedy. However, it features in the other works of the era through the technique of ironic foreshadowing and allusion: there are reminders of the infanticide throughout Valerius and Ovid, with particular emphasis on this act in Ovid's brief elegiac references to Medea, which are found scattered through his love and exile poetry; we also have ironic hints about children and childbirth in Seneca, before the crime is committed. Similarly, although perhaps not as prominent, there are allusions to her brother's murder: the level of her involvement in this varies, with Ovid explicitly making Medea guilty of fratricide in *Tristia* 3.9. However, whether directly causing Absyrtus' death or not, Medea's part in this event haunts both the heroine and the texts, and the apparition of his ghost in Seneca, driving her on to avenge his murder, especially illustrates this. Medea was unable to escape her mythological and literary past, and her awareness of her own reputation is a feature common to these accounts. The reader, too, is always conscious of where the events of the texts are leading, which lends the works a sense of tragic inevitability, since we are not allowed to forget the identity and acts of this heroine: furthermore, because of our knowledge of the myth, these texts are pervaded with irony, which derives from the allusions and foreshadowing. These future events also hang over the Latin versions of the myth in a threatening and menacing manner, since the authors seem unable to ignore Medea's later actions:[860] this is apparent, even when Medea appears predominantly as an innocent girl, in Valerius' account. There is both a sense of inevitability and potential about Medea in these Silver Age accounts.

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thumbnail sketch of the witch's commonplace skills was a popular topos of Latin poetry and, more generally, p.265, so was the theme of the wicked witch.

[859] Janowitz (2001) p.89, labelling the figure of Medea a "full-blown fantasy of femininity gone wrong", notes that she is presented in a way which makes her path seem the natural one of a woman.

[860] This perhaps owes much to the Hellenistic age: Griffiths (2006) pp.19-20 identifies learned self-consciousness as a feature of that era's poetry and notes that, in Apollonius, the constant reminders of Medea's future create an ominous mood.

Clearly laden with an awareness of its predecessors, the challenge of this period of literature seems to have been to defy and outdo previous ages.[861] With the Silver Age Medea, we not only witness this in the excessive style of the literature, but also in the character's continual attempts to avoid her own reputation. Although we know this resistance is futile, the authors of the period devote much time to depicting the heroine making a valiant effort to take her life on a different course from that predestined by her existing myth. For example, we see this in Seneca's heroine, as she considers the form her vengeance should take and desperately tries to avoid the infanticide, but it is especially evident in the accounts of the young Medea, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Valerius' *Argonautica*, before she has been led down the path of wrongdoing. The youthful princess has a clear moral sense, as she struggles between her head and heart, illustrating the common themes of reason versus emotion, and *pudor* versus *amor*: she knows that she should stay loyal to her father and homeland, but is pulled away by her love for Jason, which is depicted as a madness plaguing her. The poets portray her inner turmoil, as she holds debates with herself over her dilemma, in which the authors demonstrate their rhetorical skills: they display a girl who is clearly distraught and torn by the decision she must make. Of course, the love that she feels has been divinely inspired and so it is impossible for her to resist her feelings:[862] nevertheless, she displays an extraordinary moral strength, especially in Valerius' epic, where it is made explicit that the gods are responsible, yet she very nearly does overcome their powers.

This moral concern with duty, or *pietas*, towards her father, family and homeland, is the quality which makes the Medea of these accounts a particularly Roman heroine. In comparison with the young Medea of Apollonius' Hellenistic epic, the girl in Ovid and, even more so, Valerius has a far keener sense of shame and decorum, and puts up greater resistance to this forbidden passion. Seemingly, they have derived some inspiration from the *Aeneid* of Virgil, where his heroine Dido is torn between her royal duties as queen, and her love for the foreigner Aeneas:[863] the Silver Age poets have responded to their Golden Age predecessor by similarly depicting a royal princess, struggling between *pudor* and *amor*, or her filial duty and the love for a stranger who has recently arrived in her land. Both heroines,

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[861] Williams (1978) summarises the Silver Age writers' desire for novelty, especially pp.3-4, 149-50, 197, 259-61, 293, 304-5

[862] Johnston, in the introduction to Clauss & Johnston (1997) p.10 discusses whether this exculpates Medea.

[863] However, it should be noted that Fantham (1996) p.156 designates the distraught woman as a favourite Roman theme, which she traces back further, to Ariadne in Catullus 64.

of course, fail to resist their divinely inspired passion for the heartless heroes, who are merely using them to advance their missions, with devastating consequences: however, while for Dido this leads to suicide, for Medea, who seriously contemplates her death, but resists this escape route, the eventual consequences are far-reaching, and the destruction which she causes is to everyone around her, not to herself. The focus on the love story gives these accounts an elegiac aspect, while the inevitability of disaster lends all versions overtones of tragedy.

The emphasis on Medea's resistance of her love for Jason, in the early stages of her life, suggests that it is at this point that the inevitable tragic events will be set in motion, if she submits to her passion. There is a sense of "if only", as the audience wills the young and innocent girl to be strong and overcome her passion with reason. However, Medea does, as we know, follow the wrong course, committing many atrocities against her family and homeland.[864] Medea is a most loyal wife to Jason, since these acts of betrayal are committed for his benefit:[865] indeed, she seems to go beyond her wifely duty in giving everything up for him and, in these Silver Age accounts, she never forgets this, nor does she allow us to ignore it. Medea is obsessed with the crimes she has committed for Jason, since they were her point of no return, and she repeatedly recalls them in different ways, throughout the texts. Notably, they literally haunt her and drive her mad in Seneca's play, with the apparition of her brother's ghost,[866] and in the *Heroides* she berates Jason relentlessly for the many services she has done him, and his ungratefulness in betraying her for another woman. Culpability is a central theme of these texts, as she understandably attempts to hold Jason responsible for the wicked crimes she has committed: however, she is also admirably honest in acknowledging her role in these deeds. Words such as *meritum*, *ingratus* and *promissus* are employed throughout the texts, reminding us that Medea

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[864] Visser's premise (1986) is relevant here: she compares the inverted parallels of Medea (destroying families) and the Sabine women (uniting them), considering a wife's competing loyalties between natal and conjugal families. She notes that a woman brought her father and brothers into her husband's family, displacing herself from her home and everything familiar by the very act of marrying into another household, and thereby becoming a "foreigner". These are themes which are important, and greatly amplified, in the Medea legend, and suggest that the myth is essentially a symbolic exploration of marriage for a woman.

[865] McDonald (1997) p.301 terms her the "model housewife", until she is crossed.

[866] Bremmer (1997) pp.99-100 notes the magnitude of Medea's murder of her brother: as a relationship which was normally close, with the sister's dependence on her brother, this act of Medea's can be viewed as permanently severing all ties with, and declaring independence from, her family. Therefore, with this particular deed, she gave up absolutely everything for Jason.

has left behind her family, home, and throne, for this faithless man, who owes her much,[867] but instead has ungratefully broken his oaths to her, and has now betrayed and abandoned her, or will do so very soon.

Medea is presented in the Silver Age accounts as an extremely emotional figure, as women were generally held to be throughout the Classical period. In each of these texts the heroine is plagued by a *furor*, which often affects her physically, as well as mentally: in the early stages of her life, this is depicted as the madness of love, but later on it develops into a frenzied state of anger.[868] In all cases, familiar imagery is employed to portray the *furor*: the passion is a flame or fire burning Medea,[869] who is compared to a crazed maenad revelling at Bacchic rites,[870] which neatly expresses the heroine's frenzied and boundless state. This suggests that she knows no limits to her emotions, and is therefore out of control. Although such imagery is typical of a female in heightened emotion, in Medea it is also combined with her purported wild and savage personality, attributed to her barbarian origins, references to which are scattered throughout the literature: therefore she is often presented, on these occasions, as a frightening creature capable of mighty deeds. Again, this indicates to us that the texts are leading towards the dreadful events of her myth, of which we are already aware. Although Medea's distress about Jason's mistreatment of her is understandable, the level of her reaction to it, and the methods she employs for her vengeance, are not at all rational to the audience. However, it is important to realise that Medea is not simply an overly angry and proud woman scorned: although these characteristics explain her reaction, they do not account for the magnitude of it. Emphasis is placed on Jason's oaths, and we should understand that it is the breaking of these solemn promises to

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[867] Goldhill (2004) p.50, discussing Athenian society, notes that the relationship between a married couple was often depicted as a tie of duty, obligation and respect: Medea repeatedly reminds Jason of the duty he owes her, but fails to deliver.

[868] This, too, can be viewed as a Roman quality of Medea's: Hershkowitz (2004) pp.24-6 notes that tragic madness is an especially Virgilian development, believing that it is transmitted both to Roman epic and Senecan tragedy through the lens of the *Aeneid*. Ripoll (2004) pp.203-4 notes that *furor* is common to all these accounts, in his consideration of Seneca and Ovid's tragic influence on Valerius.

[869] Goldhill (2004) p.49 summarises *eros*, rather than love, as "a sickness, a burning and destructive fire, which is not wanted by the sufferer at all", and a "debilitating disease" which destroys in tragedy: Medea certainly seems to suffer such symptoms.

[870] Hershkowitz (2004) pp.35-7 discusses the use of maenadic imagery, especially in Valerius' depiction of Medea, tracing it back to Virgil's Dido and Catullus' Ariadne. She interestingly notes, p.37, how a maenad is characterised, which seems especially relevant for Medea: a combination of opposites, feminine and masculine qualities, strength and ferocity, inversion of social norms, driven by irrational forces from outside and within, extremes, and ability to change as an individual. Bernstein (2008) p.59, discussing Valerius' heroine, notes the aptness of such comparisons, since Medea's tragedy will contain violent acts against her relatives, as Bacchus took revenge on his family.

the gods which ultimately leads to her horrific revenge attack of infanticide: Medea is not merely protecting her pride, but working with the gods, as an agent of justice.[871] This also explains her occasional depiction as a Fury: it is not simply to express her fierce nature, but also because she acts as an avenging figure.[872] Furthermore, the Silver Age accounts highlight that Medea is of divine descent and has mighty powers: therefore Jason's offence is seriously misguided, since it is one against a demi-god and, as such, will be punished proportionately.

Therefore, Medea's wicked acts can be considered as ultimately attributable to Jason, whether through his heartlessness, cowardice or foolishness, and she is thereby exonerated for her criminal actions, at least in part. Indeed, Jason is portrayed in an unsympathetic light in all his dealings with Medea, in these works. He is presented as coldly using the innocent young girl, in order to gain the Golden Fleece, and advance his mission: in Valerius' epic it is especially evident that he has no genuine feelings of love for Medea, when compared with Apollonius' version of the hero. Having falsely manipulated and used Medea for her magic powers,[873] and therefore having caused her to commit many atrocious deeds, she is thus forced to give up her family, throne, and homeland for Jason; in taking her away to a foreign country, the Silver Age poets also employ the motif of Medea as the passive prize, carried off by a foreign pirate.[874] Later, Jason cruelly abandons Medea and their sons for a Greek princess, in Corinth, a foreign and unwelcoming land to Medea. Her isolation is often displayed physically in these texts, in order to underscore the harsh situation which she endures; this is especially evident in Seneca's play, when compared with its Greek model: in the Euripidean version, the chorus of Greek women support Medea, until they discover the horrific nature of her revenge, while in the Latin play, the chorus are openly hostile towards her throughout. In Seneca's tragedy, Medea, threatened with exile by the father of Jason's new wife, confronts the hero after her abandonment, and he exhibits an insensitive and arrogant attitude, and foolishly underestimates her in treating her as a mere mortal to be cast aside easily. With his oaths and false promises, Jason is

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[871] Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) p261, with reference to Euripides' *Medea*, summarises such vengeful female action as appearing wrong, but having a "certain sort of rightness".
[872] Hershkowitz (2004) pp.52-3, 56 discusses the role of Furies in depictions of madness.
[873] Dickie (2000) p.564 notes that a real man would not need magic to attain his ends.
[874] Such depictions of the "foreign robber" support the argument of Visser, (1986) p.151, that a man before marriage is a foreigner taking the bride away, in turn making her a foreigner: this is especially marked in the Medea legend. Griffiths (2006) p.36 notes, however, that rather than Medea as trophy of the quest, she wins the prize for the hero; therefore, her suggestion, p.37, that male bias relegated Medea to the role of helper-maiden, seems contradictory. She interestingly relates Medea as a trophy to be won/victim of love to the folktale "Tarpeia" pattern: see Chapter 1, n.60.

presented as having brought his misfortune upon himself. Furthermore, Jason has committed other wrongs in the texts: in Hypsipyle's letter in the *Heroides*, we learn that he has previously abandoned another woman, pregnant with his children at the time, making him appear something of a serial philanderer;[875] and in Seneca he has offended the gods by embarking on the first ever sea voyage, and therefore transgressing the boundaries of nature. The Silver Age authors seem to suggest that the hero deserves everything he gets. Considering this characterisation of Jason, we can see that Medea is clearly presented as a victim of injustice, mainly with Jason acting in the role of that injustice, but also with other characters mistreating her, such as Creon and the gods.

To return to the principal question, of whether Medea must be vilified or can ever be presented sympathetically, the answer should now be evident: for the Silver Age authors, Medea can be and, indeed, often is a sympathetic figure. From this concluding summary of common elements in Ovid, Seneca and Valerius Flaccus' portrayals of Medea, there can be no doubt that they have all considered the heroine with some measure of understanding, offering versions of events from her point of view. Medea's letter in the *Heroides* especially gives her the opportunity to tell her side of the story, and there she laments the unfair mistreatment that she has endured at Jason's hands, from the time of meeting him through to her abandonment. Through this consideration of her point of view, the Silver Age poets help Medea defy her traditional reputation. Given the period's focus on exaggeration and excessiveness, this is all the more remarkable, since they could easily have chosen to vilify her completely: perhaps the Ovidian letter can be credited with providing the inspiration for Valerius and, at times, Seneca to consider Medea, similarly, from her side of events. The authors' apparent level of sympathy, of course, varies according to genre, and can itself differ within individual works, depending on which aspects of Medea are being portrayed: for example, in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid looks at Medea at specific points in her life so, while at first she appears as a pitiable character, she ends up a quite evil creature. However, although she is presented as villainous on occasions, these authors have devoted much effort to explaining and, at least in part, justifying her criminal behaviour.[876]

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[875] McDonald (1997) p.297 amusingly refers to Medea as the philanderer's nightmare.
[876] It is perhaps relevant here that Zeitlin (2002) p.107 suggests that the feminine in tragedy is "a model of both weakness and strength", with "negative and positive aspects for self and society".

This prevalent element of sympathy for Medea, which is found in each account, must owe much to the authors' admiration for, and fascination with, such a character. The texts display this through the characterisation of Medea: although she is presented as a victim, she is rarely to be considered passive, often taking bold action, even as an innocent young girl, and therefore she appears as a strong figure. Such transgressive behaviour in a woman was condemned in the ancient world, through the consequences of such actions being shown as dangerous and destructive, as Medea's indeed are.[877] Nevertheless, when Medea is compared to the male characters around her,[878] whom the authors have portrayed as weak, especially Jason, it seems clear that the poets have depicted her, on the whole, in a favourable light. Indeed, Ovid, Seneca and Valerius Flaccus have made Medea the real focus of their works, even at times when we might have expected Jason's heroic behaviour to be predominant:[879] Medea not only gives Jason the means to perform the tasks, or performs them for him, but she dominates these texts and seizes his glory.[880] Even Jason's ex-lover, Hypsipyle, is obsessed with Medea, and her letter focuses on her love rival, so it is unsurprising that Medea completely takes centre-stage once she enters these works, thereby making Jason appear relatively insignificant. Indeed, the focus on Medea and her success suggests that she, rather than Jason, should be considered the real hero of this myth.[881] Furthermore, we should remember that, in Seneca, Medea is also presented as

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[877] Hall (1989) pp.201-3 observes that, when relations between the sexes did not follow the (Greek) norm of male dominance, they were often represented as belonging in other cultures; she also labels Medea the paradigmatic transgressive woman.

[878] Griffiths (2006) pp.62-3 comments that Medea's (masculine) strength is most often revealed in relation to men. In discussing Euripides' play, pp.75-6, she interestingly suggests that the combination of masculine and feminine is indicative of Medea's divinity. Krevans (1997) p.81 notes that gender inversion is a part of most foundation stories containing Medea.

[879] Mackie (2001) p.10 remarks that the help Jason receives from others diminishes his heroism. Segal's observation, (2002) p.1, that women with magical powers threaten masculine authority throughout ancient literature, is fitting here.

[880] Therefore, at least in the case of Medea, theories suggesting that female characters only exist in reference to their male counterparts seem erroneous: see, for example, Zeitlin's view in Chapter 2, n.610; also Cooper (1996) p.19 and (1992) p.151 suggests that a man's character is being judged wherever a woman is mentioned. It seems wrong to view Medea as secondary to Jason, since he is relatively insignificant in the texts: we are unable to consider Medea without Jason, but we are equally unable to discuss Jason without Medea, since the heroine and her deeds greatly overshadow him. Therefore we could view this theory in reverse, as Jason being defined solely by Medea's acts and only existing, heroically, in relation to her. We should not under-appreciate the individual merit of strong characters like Medea. Furthermore, the application of such theories is perhaps an example of what Nikolaidis (1997) pp.22, 28, 87 warns against: placing modern (feminist) theories anachronistically onto ancient literature.

[881] This argument is perhaps supported by the view of Mackie (2001) that, in the origins of the myth, Jason was originally the one with (healing) powers, as his name suggests, but that this dangerous activity was inappropriate for a hero, so Medea, the foreigner, gradually took over this aspect of his heroism. Krevans (1997) p.80, although discussing Pindar's version of the myth, makes a comment apt for the Silver Age versions of Medea, that she has a "persistent unwillingness to play a proper heroine's role".

working in conjunction with the gods and, after successfully planning and carrying out her actions,[882] finally emerges as a triumphant figure over Jason,[883] as she escapes her own tragedy. The prominence of the heroine, particularly at the hero's expense, is testimony to the Silver Age writers' fascination with her: Medea eclipses Jason in these Silver Age accounts and, therefore, the overwhelming impression is that she should be considered the true hero of their versions of the myth.[884]

[882] Griffiths (2006) p.69 interestingly notes that the name "Medea" is connected with the Greek verb meaning "to contemplate, plot, plan", suggesting that her strategic abilities single her out for the special attention she receives; Ogden (2008) p27 similarly observes that her name signifies intelligence. McDonald (1997) p.304 views her as all the more heroic because she carried out the murder of her children, as a woman and, specifically, their mother.

[883] She also establishes, through the act of infanticide, her independence from her husband and patriarchy: McDonald (1997) p.303.

[884] Griffiths (2006) p.67 acknowledges that the figure of Medea can be considered a hero in her own right.

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