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## Medea in Latin Literature: Victim or Assassin?

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Bard

# **Medea In Latin Literature: Victim or Assassin?**

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
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# Introduction

In this project I have undertaken the task of exploring the different ways in which Medea as a literary and mythological figure is conceptualized by different writers in different points in time and cultures. To quote Jo-Marrie Claassen's 2001 article, "The name of a mythical figure, then can represent a particular characteristic that an author wishes to emphasise, but it can also encapsulate a separate story which is carried into the new literary situation" (p.11)<sup>1</sup>. Medea as a mythological figure has a very rich and complex literary tradition. I'm particularly interested in the different masks and personas that Medea acquires throughout the literary traditions of Greece and Rome. Medea is generally viewed and understood in the context Euripides' play as child-killer and a punisher of those who have crossed her. But there is more to Medea than meets the eye, as I have shown in the chapters that follow.

My first chapter focuses on the ways Medea's myth evolves not only through time but also within literary genres. I start my exploration of this figure in Ancient Greece with Hesiod at 700 BCE and work my way down towards Rome in the second century CE. This chapter is a very large scale over-view and introduction to myth the of Medea and its transmission among different cultures. I am, for the most part, identifying the different innovations each writer brings to their reimagining of Medea and how it affects our understanding of the work as well as Medea herself.

My second chapter focuses intently on Ovid's conceptualization of Medea as either a victim of circumstance or as perpetrator of violence. The first section focuses specifically on Letter XII of the *Heroides* and the way in which Ovid steps into the persona of Medea. As

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<sup>1</sup> Claassen, 2001 p. 11-64



Medea, Ovid endeavors alter and guide our memories of the way in which she wishes to be remembered not only by Jason but also others. The second focuses on Book VII of the *Metamorphoses* and the way in which he creates a variety of different Medea, each having her own purpose at different points of the narrative. The third section focuses on *Tristia* 3.8 and Ovid's invocation of Medea's chariot as a means to escape from exile. In this poem, I explore the way in which Ovid views Medea as the ideal kind of exile because of her ability to constantly be on the move, which is in direct contrast to his own experience as an exile.

# **Chapter One. Medea as Myth: An Introduction to Ancient Traditions**

## Early Medea Myths

Myth play a large and important part in the formation and the foundation of the societies scattered throughout the Greek mainland and the surrounding islands on the Mediterranean. But why were these myths so important to these different societies and why were later poets so intrigued by these unbelievable stories? This question is impossible to answer because we do not have access to everything that was produced and performed throughout all of Greek antiquity. What does exist, and may give us a glimpse into ancient perception of these myths, are the multiple versions and reiterations of these stories by writers, tragedians, orators, and bards. It is through these different interpretations of various myths that we are able to begin piecing together the ways in which these stories were understood and conceptualized by different authors throughout time.

The first step in understanding the ways in which different myths were understood and perceived by various authors and society at large, is by defining what a myth is. Our word for myth comes from the Greek word μῦθος, meaning “word, speech, conversation, and narrative”(LSJ). The essence of a myth is something that is spoken and conveyed through narrative to a person or a group of people. According to Sue Blundell in her book *Women in Ancient Greece*, Greek myths “were invented by human beings who lived in particular societies at particular points in time; as time went on, and circumstances changed, the narratives were freely adapted and embellished to suit the particular preoccupations of their audiences” (p. 14). Myths are not stagnant stories that have no element of change, that are re-told in the same fashion repeatedly. They are dynamic and elaborate retellings of a story or a set of stories that are in a constant state of flux because the needs of society are constantly changing and shifting.

These myths serve as a way to analyze and explore the complexity of human behavior and action in a way that is impossible in their current environment.

In Greece myths were utilized as a means of recalling and reimagining the past in order to make sense of the current system of society and culture. As John Gould states in his 1980 article, writers of myth were preoccupied with creating a world where the Greeks could manifest their fears and anxieties “which the norms of law and custom are intended to control and even suppress” (p. 55), without having to confront any of them directly in the world in which they live<sup>2</sup>. By creating such stories, writers and oral poets were able to construct figures that had no place in society, but could arise if the system were to fail in some way. One major anxiety that many myths confront is the power that is sometimes allocated to women. In Greek society women had little to no power and were for the most part completely ignored. In myth, some women were given some agency or power over their bodies and their political and personal identities. One figure in myth that continues to be subject to change, interpretation, and manifests itself in the exploration of men’s anxieties over female power is Medea.

The origins of the Medea myth are hard to pin down. Her narrative is intertwined with another very early myth, that of Jason and the Argonauts. There seems to have been a variety of different stories circulating throughout Greece concerning Jason and his famous expedition in search of the golden fleece<sup>3</sup>. It is hard to decipher how extensively she is mentioned or talked about because of the fragmentary nature of the texts that exist. In some of the myths she may have had a very prominent role in the narrative, while in others she is either mentioned as

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<sup>2</sup> Gould, 1980 p. 38-59.

<sup>3</sup> My concern here is not the myth of the *Argonautica* as a whole, but with the appearance of Medea in myth. For more information on the different *Argonautica* myths see Braswell, 1988.

helping Jason or she does not appear in the text at all<sup>4</sup>. Medea's function in these myths is hard to interpret because there is not enough of the fragments that survive that gives her any kind of fixed role within the narrative. It is not until Hesiod at around 700 BCE. that we are given a clearer and less fragmentary account of who Medea is and the role that she plays in this narrative. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, we are told:

Κούρην δ' Αἰήταο διοτρεφέος βασιλῆος  
 Αἰσονίδης βουλῆσι θεῶν αἰειγενετῶν  
 ἦγε παρ' Αἰήτεω, τελέσας στονόεντας ἀέθλους,  
 τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπέτελλε μέγας βασιλεύς ὑπερήνωρ,  
 ὕβριστῆς Πελῆος καὶ ἀτάσθαλος ὄβριμοεργός·

And the son of Aeson, by the will of the gods  
 everlasting, carried away from Aeetes the daughter  
 of that king cherished by Zeus, after performing  
 many tasks causing groans, which the great overbearing  
 king, insolent and wicked Pelias, commanded.  
 (ll.992-996)<sup>5</sup>.

Hesiod does not outright name either Jason or Medea, but identifies them by way of their fathers. In Hesiod's imagining of the myth, Jason takes Medea as if she is a prize won because of the grueling tasks forced upon him by Pelias. In what Hesiod has told us, there is no way of knowing whether Medea was given willingly or just simply taken by Jason against her will. All that we are told for certain is that Medea was supposed to be taken by Jason because the gods willed it so, thus Jason must comply. We are given no other indication as to why Jason had to complete these difficult tasks or what it has to do with Pelias. But a person hearing this tale in ancient Greece, who was also familiar with the early epic sagas, would likely have known that

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<sup>4</sup> Take for example the *Corinthiaca* of Eumelus, which was an epic poem concerning the history of Corinth and talks about Medea as its ruler; the *Nostoi* knew of her rejuvenation of Aeson; the *Naupactia*, a catalogue/genealogy poem, has Medea joining Jason and the Argonauts with the golden fleece while her father was distracted. See further Hunter, 1989 p. 12-21; Braswell, 1988 p. 6-23; Drager, 2006 p. 546-549.

<sup>5</sup> All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Jason was trying to gain the golden fleece that Aeetes held in his possession, and that it was Pelias who had ordered him to go find and take the fleece in order for Jason to regain his rightful place on the throne.

Hesiod then informs us that Jason reaches Iolcus, his home, after a difficult and challenging journey with Medea. Once he reaches home he marries Medea, “καί ῥ’ ἦ γε δμηθεῖς ὑπ’ Ἰήσονι, ποιμένι λαῶν, / Μήδειον τέκε παῖδα” (And then having been overpowered by Jason, shepherd of the people, she brought into the world a child Medeios Il.1000-1001). It is only in this moment of procreation that we are given Jason’s name directly, but we are still not told the name of the mother. The only moment that we are given a glimpse of her name is through the name of her son, Medeios, which is the masculine form of Medea. Hesiod finishes his telling of Medea and Jason’s story with their son being raised by the centaur Chiron in the mountains.

Since Hesiod’s *Theogony* is an epic more concerned with cataloguing the genealogies of different deities, monsters, and mortal men, he sees no reason in further discussing this particular myth. He is not inclined to tell us anything that is outside of the cosmogony he is constructing and only speaks of the relevant details that link back to the larger universe he is constructing. He is only concerned with looking at the male descendants of gods, goddesses and mortals; the mothers of these offspring are only important as the vessels that must carry these children and bear them into the world. He only mentions Medea and Jason because of Medea’s divine lineage and the semi-divine nature of the son she will bear Jason. There is also some ambiguity over whether or not Medea is a mortal woman or a goddess in this particular description of her, a question that will later become an important part of the way in which she perceives herself and is perceived by others. Hesiod views Medea as the offspring of a divine father, the wife of Jason

and the mother of a semi-divine child. In all three of these roles she holds no real agency or control over her life, which is something that is to be prevalent in many of the earlier reiterations of her myth. It is not until Pindar and, later, Euripides that we get a more complete picture of Medea and Jason and the roles that they play within the world of myth<sup>6</sup>.

### The Archaic and Classical Medea

Pindar was a famous Greek lyric poet of the Archaic period, in the late sixth to early fifth century BCE. He is known for formulating choral odes on behalf of the champions of the Nemean, Olympic, Pythian, or Isthmian games. In *Pythian IV*, Pindar is commissioned to commemorate the victory of Arkesilas IV, the king of Kyrene in 462 BCE. In the ode, the king's victory is not the main focus of the poem; rather, it seems to exist only on the periphery of the narrative as a justification for the real subject of the tale. In this particular ode, Pindar is more concerned with showing that the Euphemids were divinely chosen to become the ruling class of Kyrene and that their rule is divinely sanctioned and just. He goes about proving this to be true by telling us the myth of Jason and the Argonauts in such a way that it is subtly revealing Euphemus' divine mission.

Since a large part of the ode has to do with justifying Arkesilas' right to the throne, it might seem odd that the first person who goes about legitimizing his reign is a female figure. As we saw above, in some of the myths prior to Pindar, Medea had no real voice or agency over any of the narrative, but in this ode we see this female figure in a completely new light. Medea is no longer just the wife of Jason and a mother to their children; in this ode she is given a far more interesting and important role in the narrative: that of an oracle. Pindar starts out the ode, as is typical, by invoking the Muses to aid him in his commemoration of the Pythian victor. Yet Pindar does not praise outright any of his actual skill out on the field. Instead he starts by talking about the original settlers of the island of Kyrene and how they were prophesied to leave the island and found Libya. Pindar speaks of “ἔνθα ποτὲ χρυσέων Διὸς αἰετῶν πάρεδρος/...ἰέρεια/χρηῖσεν” (the priestess who/sits beside the golden eagles of Zeus/proclaimed in her oracle ll.4-5) but does not

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<sup>6</sup> I will only be concerning myself with the literary mentions of Medea, but there are some early artistic representations of the myth see Lauber, 2018.

tell us specifically who this priestess is or how she acquired her oracular powers. This unknown priestess he introduces into the narrative holds an important role in the structure of the plot because she is the only figure who is shown to have a close and intimate relationship with Zeus and because she holds the power to guide and change the story. Pindar then proceeds to tell us that Battus will found Libya, so that Kyrene is free for new settlers. A couple of lines later Pindar continues, “καὶ τὸ Μηδεΐας ἔπος ἀγκομίσαι/ἔβδόμεναι καὶ σὺν δεκάτῃ γενεᾷ/θήραιον, Αἰήτα τό ποτε ζαμενής/παῖς ἀπεπνευσ’ ἀθανάτου στόματος” (and to fulfill in the seventeenth generation/ the word of Medea spoken at Thera, which the mighty daughter of Aetes/once breathed forth from her immortal mouth ll. 9-11). It is not until four lines later that we learn that Medea is the all knowing and powerful priestess. Before we are even introduced to the myth of Jason and the Argonauts we are introduced to this immortal figure of Medea, who is not only a goddess but is also the queen of Colchis and is somehow given the ability to tell the future.

Pindar makes the legitimacy of Arkesilas’ rule contingent on a prophecy made by this, until now, obscure female figure of mythology. Pindar is in this moment bestowing Medea with her first chance to come out from behind the shadow of Jason and stand as a singular independent figure. In her speech, she commands the attention of Jason and his companions and begins by telling them that the land on which they stand on will one day be the city to rival all cities and be populated and ruled by the descendants of Euphamos. Euphamos is an important figure in this ode because he is the only figure that she spends any amount of time talking about in the beginning of her speech. Medea informs us that:

...τόν ποτε  
 Τριτωνίδος ἐν προχοαῖς  
 λίμνας θεῶ ἀνέρι εἰδομένῳ γαῖαν διδόντι  
 ξείνια πρόραθεν Εὐφάμος καταβαίς  
 δέξατ’

...the omen which  
 Euphamos once accepted at the mouth  
 of the Tritonis Lake having descended from the ship’s  
 head from a god in the guise of a man who gave  
 him earth as guest-gift (lines 20-23).

The moment in which Euphamos sets foot on this land and is offered some of it by the god, is the moment in which he is given the power to rule over the earth that was placed into his hand. It is this very small gesture of guest-friendship that shifts the power away from and out of the hands of the Battids and into the hands of Euphamos and future descendants. Medea is making it clear that this offering of the land is divinely sanctioned and to some degree fated to happen. There is no doubt in the language she uses that this could have happened any other way—quite the opposite, actually, since she states that there were signs that pointed to this specific moment happening.

Throughout much of the ode, Pindar is constantly shifting the voice of Medea between talk of the future and talk of her shared past with Jason, specifically right after she has told us about the gift given to Euphamos. Even this early in the narrative Medea is taking control of her own story and is the only one who is capable of altering the course of the narrative. Pindar has her saying, “άνίκ’ ἄγκυραν ποτὶ χαλκόγενυν/ναὶ κριμνάντων ἐπέτοσσε, θαῶς Ἄρ-/γοῦς χαλινόν.” (at the time when the god came upon us as we were/hanging the bronze-jawed anchor onto the ship, swift/Argo’s bridle; ll. 24-25). It is not clear whether she is still addressing Jason’s men or another group of people altogether. It is this ambiguity of language that sets the tone for the remainder of her speech. She is no longer talking about the things that will happen, but the things that have already happened, even though we have not been given any indication of any action on her part aside from what she is actively telling us in that moment. Medea then continues her narration of the encounter between Euphamos, the people on board the Argos, and the unnamed divinity disguised as a mortal man. Medea ends her prophecy by stating that it is only through bedding foreign women that they will be able to rule over Kyrene.



After her speech has ended Pindar makes it clear that the heroes were enraptured by her prophecy and were heeding all that she had just revealed to them. Pindar then takes back control of the narrative and reveals that the prophecy was foreshadowing the rightful reign of Arkesilas over Kyrene. He briefly mentions Arkesilas' victory in the chariot-race competition and his defeat of Amphictyons. The narrative then shifts back again to the world of myth as he invokes Muses to aid him in telling the story of Jason and the golden fleece. The narrative follows the myth of the *Argonautica* faithfully with Jason arriving in Iolcus with a single sandal and Pelias, fearing that he will lose his throne, proposes to give up his throne willingly only if Jason can recover the golden fleece and bring it back with him<sup>7</sup>. Jason then proceeds to gather up the bravest men of Greece, most of who are semi-divine, and they embark on their quest to find the golden fleece. They come upon many trials on their journey before they reach Colchis and are confronted with Aeetes the king. Pindar then informs us that Aphrodite decides to help Jason and his men by binding:

ποικίλαν ἴγγα τετράκναμον Οὐλυμποθεν  
ἐν ἀλύτῳ... κύκλῳ

μαινάδ' ὄρνιν...φέρειν  
πρῶτον ἀνθρώποισι λιτάς τ' ἐπαιιδὰς  
ἐκδιδάσκησεν σοφόν Αἰσονίδα,ν,  
ὄφρα Μηδείας τοκέων ἀφέλοιτ' αἰ-  
δῶ, ποθεινὰ δ' Ἑλλάς αὐταν  
ἐν φρασί καιομένην δονέοι μάστιγι Πειθοῦς.

...the many colored wryneck to the indissoluble,  
four-spoked, wheel brought forth

the first time the maddening bird from Olympus

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<sup>7</sup> There are a few events that Pindar mentions in the ode that are unique to him, such as Jason's reunion with his father (ll. 120-124) and Jason's offer of allowing Pelias to keep everything he already had in exchange for the throne (ll.148-153).

to men and thoroughly taught the son of Aeson to be  
 skillful in prayers and enchantments,  
 so that he might take away Medea's respect for her  
 parents, and so that her longing for Hellas might  
 excite her setting her mind aflame with the whip of Persuasion  
 (ll. 214-219).

Earlier, we saw that Medea embraced an active role in weaving and moving along the narrative that Pindar is constructing. The Medea we were introduced to at the beginning of the ode has all but disappeared and been replaced with a passive figure who is easily manipulated and is acted upon instead of being able to act of her own will. This is acutely felt and seen with the imagery that the “whip of Persuasion” presents us with. In order to get Medea to betray her loved ones she must be coerced and forced into submission—no kind or merciful speech will make her shift her loyalties. It is only through this violent act of persuasion that Medea is even capable of completely shifting her loyalties.

It is because of a female deity that Medea no longer holds the same kind of power she wielded at the start of the poem; she is stripped of it and is instead filled with longing for a foreign land. Jason is only given the power to subdue a powerful immortal like Medea and have her completely change her familial loyalties because of Aphrodite. It is important to point out that Pindar does not state that Medea has fallen in love with Jason, but is instead filled with a need to leave Colchis behind in order to explore Greece. Once she made her decision to betray her family and accept Jason's marriage proposal, she is able to tell Jason all of the tasks her father Aeetes will make him do. With a lot of help from Medea, Jason is able to yoke the fire breathing bulls to the plough and till the land. Once he has accomplished this task Aeetes informs Jason where he can find the golden fleece, but he fails to mention the giant snake that protects it

in hopes that Jason will be eaten by it. Jason is single handedly able to defeat the giant snake and capture not only the fleece, but also Medea through her own devices.

Pindar is one of the earliest surviving lyric poets to give some insight into who Medea is and the place that she holds within lyric poetry. The figure of Medea that Pindar presents is complex and multifaceted because she is able to exist in more than one state of being within the larger plot of the narrative. Pindar is able to paint us a picture of an all-powerful female deity who has the ability to give men good counsel as well as tell the future, but who is still subject to the passivity that is allotted to women when in the mortal realm. Medea is only able to express her power of divination through her divine connection with Zeus as his priestess at the beginning of the ode. Whereas the Medea in the latter half of the poem is only identified as the daughter of a king and as such is held to mortal law and customs that require her to play companion to the person who is able to control his own life. It is not until Euripides, some thirty years later, that we are confronted with a Medea who is able to embrace the power of her narrative, without having to constrain herself to the laws and customs that women are required to in society.

Euripides, working in the late fifth century BCE at Athens, is one of the three surviving canonical tragedians. Unfortunately, very little is known about Euripides' life with any certainty. Much of it is based on allusions made in Old Comedy and from statements in the dramas themselves<sup>8</sup>. In fact, the first reliable date recorded of his life is that of his first production of plays at the Great Dionysia, a festival held in honor of Dionysus, in 455 BCE. What we know concerning Euripides' theatrical career comes down to us from Athenian state archives, which records the competitions held during the festival. His name was found twenty-two times on the

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<sup>8</sup> See Mastrorarde, 2002 p. 1-3 for a more detailed account of Euripides' life.

list of competitions, and ancient scholars have catalogued ninety-two plays under his name.

Among the play's found under Euripides' name was the *Medea* as the first play in tetralogy that won third prize<sup>9</sup>.

In Euripides' *Medea*, we are confronted with a figure who is radically different from the one we were introduced to in Pindar's *Pythian IV*. Euripides' Medea is a woman scorned by her husband who is seeking vengeance for the injustices that were done on to her. She is a passionate and self-sufficient woman, who proves that she does not need the aid of men in order to survive the circumstances in which she finds herself in. In this reimagining of the myth, Medea takes control of her voice, actions, and reputation. She is no longer seen as a side character in Jason's adventures, but is now the focal point of the narrative and Jason is reduced in some ways to the passive character in this play.

The myth that Euripides is telling us is very similar to that seen in Hesiod and Pindar, but with a few new additions to the story line. At the beginning of the play we learn that Jason has taken a new Corinthian bride (ll. 18-19), despite the fact that Medea continues to be married to him and that they have two children. The Nurse informs us of almost all of the events leading up to this betrayal and how Medea fled to Corinth after Pelias' daughters killed their father at her behest. Later on in the narrative, Medea informs us that she and her children are now being exiled from Corinth and cannot return home to Colchis not only because she helped Jason acquire the golden fleece but also because she killed Apsyrtus, her brother (ll. 166-167). In light of this Medea decides to exact her vengeance by killing everyone in the royal Corinthian family as well as her husband Jason (ll. 373-375). She eventually comes to the realization/decision that

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<sup>9</sup> The production of the *Medea* is dated to 431 BCE and was accompanied with the now lost *Philoctetes*, *Dictys*, and a satyr-play *Theristai*. See Mastronarde, 2002 p. 3-7 for more on Euripides' other works.

killing Jason would be too gentle of a punishment, so she decides instead to murder the royal family as well as her own children (ll. 787-793). The infanticide is the element which Euripides is known for communicating into the public's imaginations and formulations of Medea, but he in fact borrows this plot from Neophron of Sicyon—it is even thought that his tragedy was inspired by Neophron's play on the myth of Medea<sup>10</sup>. Once she has formulated her plan, she seeks asylum from the Athenian king Aegeus in exchange she promises to help him with his infertility problem. Once Medea is successful in killing the princess and king of Corinth she feels some indecision over killing her children, but ultimately she does and rides off into the sky in her grandfather's chariot.

In his play Euripides is not interested in reconstructing the entirety of the Medea myth, but is more interested in a singular event in that story. He only briefly makes allusions to things that happened early on in the world of the myth, but does not dwell on them unless they pertain to what he is trying to illustrate. Euripides' reimagining of the Medea myth as a tragedy that must be performed is an interesting and powerful way to examine human nature and the role society plays in the portrayal of women. The character of Medea as a mother and a woman would have resonated with the women in Athens, if they were indeed among those in the audience seeing this performance. She herself describes all of the hardships women go through in marriage and childbirth and she speaks of the injustices that are inherent in being a woman in an oppressive patriarchal society (ll. 230-251). Yet the character of Medea as a victim and someone who is actively seeking revenge and justice, is a woman completely alien to the female citizens of

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<sup>10</sup> Scholars of the fourth and third centuries BCE believe that Euripides' *Medea* was either heavily dependent on another tragedy of the same name by Neophron or that the *Medea* we identify as Euripides is in fact not his. See Mastronarde, 2002 p. 57-64 for the *testimonia* of ancient scholars and a more detailed account of this belief.

Athens. Women in Athens were slaves to the norms and laws of their society, they were expected to adhere to them at all times and not deviate from their allocated sphere. Medea is not able to follow along with these norms and laws because she is not an Athenian citizen, she is a barbarian princess who was forced to conform with these laws because of the oath she and Jason made when they were married. Once that oath was broken Medea no longer felt the need to conform with the rules of society because it is those same rules that allowed Jason to marry another more suitable wife.

Euripides is not interested in telling us of Medea's past transgressions nor with Medea and Jason's early relationship; he is more concerned with the ways in which Medea articulates herself and is perceived by the other character's of the play. He is consciously making the decision to explore the social and psychological impacts people have on each other when pushed to their limits. It is no longer just about performing myth for an audiences enjoyment, but about exploring underlying anxieties that are present within his society. Yet, as modern readers of this play it is sometimes hard to understand what is going on in the story and the effect it had on its ancient audience, especially if no context is given to the mention of a later episode that happened in the larger context of the story. It is not until Apollonius of Rhodes that we are given a larger context for understanding what precedes the story that is unfolding in Euripides' *Medea*.

### The Hellenistic Medea

Apollonius of Rhodes was the head librarian in the Ptolemaic library of Alexandria in the third century BCE. Not much is known about his life, but what does survive is for the most part

fragmentary and contradictory<sup>11</sup>. The few things that can be said about his life with some certainty is that he was originally from Alexandria, he spent some time in Rhodes, and that he worked as the head librarian in the royal library of Alexandria. Aside from his duties within the library, we know that Apollonius composed works both in prose and poetry<sup>12</sup>. Yet, the only full work that does survive in its entirety is the *Argonautica*. Apollonius worked at a time when both oral and written traditions circulated not only throughout mainland Greece, but also around the Mediterranean. He lived in a world that was conscious of the oral tradition that had preceded it, and grapples with a way to insert himself within that tradition.

Apollonius' *Argonautica* is the only large-scale epic that survives from the centuries between when Homer composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and Virgil's composition of the *Aeneid*. It is clear that Apollonius was aware of the Homeric epics and the influence they had within the genre. Much of the *Argonautica* is a very conscious imitation of the way in which Homer composed his epic. Throughout much of his epic we see him consciously struggle to not only live up to the majesty and complexity demonstrated by Homer in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but also to set himself apart from what came before. Apollonius is approaching the genre of epic from a unique perspective: because of the position that he holds within the library of Alexandria he is able to draw inspiration from the most exemplary kinds of prose and poetry compositions. He is not approaching the material from the perspective of oral performance, where he must come up with a lot of the material on the spot, but from a written literary perspective where he is

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<sup>11</sup> See Hunter, 1989 p. 1-9 for a more detailed account of the different fragments that survive detailing Apollonius' life.

<sup>12</sup> See Hunter, 1989 p.9-12 for a more detailed account of his fragmentary works.

able to take the time to think about the material he is writing and formulate the best ways in which to narrate and guide his story.

In Apollonius' reiteration of the *Argonautica*, he draws inspiration from a multitude of different sources and myths surrounding Jason, Medea, and the Argonauts. In Apollonius' retelling of the myth, he focuses the first half of the story on the physical journey that Jason embarks on with his comrades aboard the Argos. This first half of the story expands on the very brief details that Pindar provides us with in *Pythian IV* about the actual journey from Iolcus to Colchis. It seeks to explore the different ways in which the men are tested both physically and mentally by the different challenges they must face before they are ready to arrive at their destination. Unlike in Pindar's ode, we learn more about who Jason is and the heroic qualities he is lacking throughout much of first two books of the epic. Throughout the epic, Apollonius continuously labels Jason and all of his men as heroes, but fails to show the men acting heroically. We also learn that Jason is not the only character who is unable to exhibit any heroic qualities throughout much of the narrative. For the most part these men tend to cause more misfortunes to fall upon themselves than actually conquering any of the obstacles that they are confronted with. They are constantly deviating from the path that was set before them and the purpose of their journey. It is in these moments of misfortune and mishap that we get a clear picture of the underlying purpose of this quest for the golden fleece. The reason behind this journey is to prepare Jason and the Argonauts for the world outside of the privileged lives that they lived at home, and to become actual heroic men who are capable of confronting any kind of obstacle that comes their way. Yet, it is not until Medea is introduced into the narrative that we



see Jason able to follow the path that was laid down before him and start to exhibit heroic qualities.

The Medea that we are introduced to in the second half of the epic shares a lot of qualities with the Medea's we are presented with in both Pindar and Euripides' works. However, Apollonius introduces some new elements into the narrative that are not explicitly stated in any of the earlier versions of the Medea myth. The third book of the epic opens with Hera and Athena trying to figure out the best way to help out Jason and his men (ll.7-22). They plan to make Medea fall in love with Jason in order that she may help him overcome all of the trials her father, Aeetes, will put him through. They enlist the help of Aphrodite and her son Eros in order to accomplish their goal (ll. 25-29). Once Medea is struck with Eros' arrow we see as she struggles internally with the overpowering love she feels for Jason and the love and loyalty she holds for her family. When she finally accepts the love that she feels for Jason she aids him in successfully completing all of the challenges set out by her father. After Medea helps Jason acquire the golden fleece, he brings her back to his ship and commands his men to leave before Aeetes has the opportunity to seize them. However, Apsyrtus and some Colchian soldiers, sent by Aeetes, catch up with them and block off different avenues of escape on the Ister river. The Argonauts, in hopes of returning home safely, argue over whether to leave Medea on Artemis' sacred island until some king is able to determine if she is to remain with the Greeks or be returned home to Colchis (ll. 338-349). Jason eventually allows Medea to accompany him on his journey back home, after Medea reminds him of all that she has sacrificed in order to help him. Apollonius then proceeds to narrate Jason's killing of Apsyrtus while Medea turns away veiling her face from Jason's vicious mutilation of her brothers body and only looks as he buries the body in the

ground (ll. 452-481). After the burial of Apsyrtus' body, Apollonius describes the different challenges Medea, Jason, and the Argonauts confront on their journey back to Iolcus.

In the last half of the epic, Apollonius is laying out the foundation and the basis in which we are to understand the Medea that appears in Euripides *Medea*, a text that he knew well and which has an influential place in his narrative. Yet, by having Jason assassinate Apsyrtus Apollonius is completely shifting our perception and understanding of Medea's character. Medea killing her brother is the first crime that drives her down a path of mayhem and destruction and will ultimately lead to her killing her children. But if this first crime is removed from Medea's narrative, what are we left with? The foundation of her later crimes no longer have a basis on which to rest, yet Apollonius makes various allusions to what she will do to Pelias once they reach Iolcus. In this moment Apollonius is transferring her first kill from her brother to Pelias in order to further emphasize the way she is the driving force behind a lot of the action in this final half of the epic. Apollonius is also taking on the responsibility of creating a fuller more cohesive background story of how Medea and Jason met and fell in love. He is trying to illustrate the different aspects of Medea and Jason's relationship to each other and the narrative at large. Apollonius is using the genre of epic in order to explore in a larger context the different ways in which Medea is able to influence those around her and still retain her agency even when she is no longer within the domestic sphere. He is also demonstrating how an innocent and naive Medea is even then carrying on her shoulders the burden of the treacherous trials her myth will later involve as we have seen in Euripides' *Medea*.

### Medea Comes to Rome

At around the same time as the figure and myth of Medea is being further developed and conceptualized in Alexandria by Apollonius in the third century BCE, we simultaneously have the beginnings of a new written literary movement occurring in Rome with the arrival of Livius Andronicus<sup>13</sup>. Although there is no record of whether or not Andronicus wrote about Medea or any part of her myth, he is an important figure to mention because of his unique relationship to Greek language and literature. Livius Andronicus is thought to have been brought to Rome by Livius Salinator as his freedman towards the end of the war between Rome and Tarentum, the Greek city where he is thought to be from. He may have been brought to Rome as a *grammaticus*, a teacher of Greek and Latin, to Salinator's children. As a teacher of both languages he was in the unique position of being well acquainted with not only Greek literary tradition and form, but also the Italic literary tradition and form. Through the combination of these two very distinct languages and forms he is able to translate Homer's *Odyssey* into Latin and Italic meter (*Oduisia*). His translation of the Homeric epic tries to stick close to the original, while still maintaining its clarity in the Latin. Andronicus' translation of the epic was intended as a way to introduce a new genre into Roman literature. Even though his poetic form falls out of fashion very soon, Andronicus lays down the foundation for the importing of Greek culture and literature into Latin culture—a process that is instrumental in transmitting Greek myths such as Medea into the Roman consciousness.

It is not until Ennius, arriving at Rome about seventy years after Andronicus in 204 BCE, that the myth of Medea once again appears on the tragic stage. According to tradition, he was

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<sup>13</sup> Very little survives to antedate 240 BCE, which is when Andronicus staged a drama he translated for the *Ludi Romani*. See Williams, 1982 p. 53-59 and Conte, 1999 p. 13-28 for more information regarding the evolution of Latin poetry in Rome.

brought from Rudiae in Calabria to Rome by Cato in the late third century in the midst of the second Punic war. Ennius was an Italo-Greek who spoke Latin, Greek, and Oscan and was a teacher in Rome. In the early second century Ennius made a name for himself as a tragic playwright, and many of the works that survive, although fragmentary in nature, reveal a great deal concerning Ennius' relationship to Greek tragedy in a Roman setting. In what survives, we see Ennius trying to place himself not only within the new genre of Roman epic, by writing the history of the Roman people<sup>14</sup>, but also within the genre of Greek drama. As a tragic playwright he was very familiar with the genre of tragedy and the works of the great Athenian tragedians of the fifth century. It is this familiarity with Athenian tragedy that inspires him to translate Euripides' *Medea*<sup>15</sup>.

Although his tragedy is fragmentary, enough of the text survives to indicate that Ennius was not just simply translating it directly from the Greek, as Cicero believes<sup>16</sup>. This is made apparent in the first few lines of the play, when the Nurse is introducing us to the main characters and everything that has led to her current predicament. In Euripides' Greek the first two lines of the play open with the Nurse saying, "If only the hull of Argo had not flown through/the dark Symplegades to the land of Colchis" (ll.1-2)<sup>17</sup>. In the Latin, it begins, "If only the timbers of the ship had not fallen/to the earth cut by axes in the Pelian grove"(ll.1-2)<sup>18</sup>. These two quotes are

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<sup>14</sup> Ennius writes an entire national epic about the Roman people entitled the *Annals*, which is one of the few poetic works that survives from the middle of the Republic. He is writing his epic in light of and along the same lines as Homer's epics and the newer Hellenistic epics. See Conte, 1999 p. 78-90 for a more detailed account of the epic.

<sup>15</sup> See Warmington, 1935 p. 31 for more on Ennius' play *Medea Exul* and its Euripidean roots.

<sup>16</sup> In his *De Finibus*, Cicero talks about how it is harder to deal with people who hate Latin authors. It is within this context that Cicero mentions how Greek works were translated word for word, he says "Quis enim tam inimicus paene nomini Romano est, qui Enni Medeam aut Antiopam Pacuvi spernat aut reiciat quod se iisdem Euripidi fabulis delectari dicat, Latinas litteras oderit" (Who has such a hatred, one might almost say for the very name of Roman, as to despise and reject the *Medea* of Ennius or the *Antiope* of Pacuvius, and give as his reason that though he enjoys the corresponding plays of Euripides he cannot endure books written in Latin. I, 2, 4).

<sup>17</sup> "Εἰθ' ὄφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος/Κόλχων ἐς αἴαν κτανέας Συμπληγάδας"

<sup>18</sup> "Utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus/caesae accedissent abiegnae ad terram trabes"

essentially conveying the same idea of regret and longing for a way to change the past. Yet, we see as Ennius decides not to translate word for word what the Greek is conveying, instead he decides to go a different direction entirely. Rather than describe the journey of the Argo through the clashing rocks of the Symplegades, he decides to lament the trees used to build the ship. The only location that he mentions is the Pelian grove from which the trees originated from—thus, Ennius chooses to delay the introduction of who the narrative could be about and where they are going.

Ennius' play, although closely reading Euripides' *Medea*, apparently bore a different title: *Medea Exul* (Medea the Exile / Medea in Exile)<sup>19</sup>. By choosing this rather different title, Ennius is already making strides to establish his tragedy within the same genre as Euripides, but as something completely separate from it. Even before the play begins, he is laying out the context of how his audience should view the character of Medea in his narrative. Ennius is calling attention to the implications that being an exile in a foreign land may have on her political and personal status as a woman in Corinthian society. This focus on exile was probably made even more poignant in performance, since Ennius extended the original plot of the play to include another of Euripides' plays, *Μήδεια ἐν Αἰγεί* (Medea in Aegeus) describing her arrival at Athens after the slaughter of the royal family and her children. Although the fragmentary nature of the text precludes us from saying more, it appears that Medea's multiple exiles was a strong focus of Ennius' treatment.

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<sup>19</sup> See Drabkin, 1937 p. 7-9 for a detailed account on the transmission of the title.

Medea once again appears on the Roman stage in the second half the second century, only about 30 years after Ennius' reported death in 169 BCE<sup>20</sup>. Accius was born at Pesaro the year after the death of Ennius to freedmen parents and is one of the first native born Roman citizens to write poetry in Latin<sup>21</sup>. He begins his career as a tragic playwright in 140/139 BCE, and soon becomes one of the most prolific Latin writers of tragedy and an eminent figure in the *collegium poetarum*. After Ennius' death Accius is seen to follow the path forged by his predecessor and further develops the genre of Roman tragedy. His tragedies were so influential that many of them continued to be performed towards the end of the Augustan age and traces of his influence continue to be felt in the works of some of the great poets of the first century CE: Virgil, Ovid, and Seneca the Younger.

The titles given to the Roman tragedies in Accius' lifetime demonstrates that poets were still explicitly working within the framework of Greek tragedy, but not to the same extent as Andronicus had. In this period Latin models were being superimposed upon the Greek in order to create a space where the issues of contemporary Roman society could be felt. Unfortunately, not enough of the tragedy survives to make any decisive claims concerning the way in which it refers to Roman society, as say Euripides in the *Medea*. What we are left with is a general understanding of what the play was about. Accius' *Medea*, is thought to be based on a play by

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<sup>20</sup> Ennius' own nephew, Pacuvius—who is writing at around the same time as Accius—is actually the first person to bring back the myth of Medea to the Roman stage, but as more of a continuation to the play written by his uncle. Pacuvius does not write about the myth of Medea explicitly, rather he writes about the son of Medea and Aegeus the king of Athens, Medus, and his journey back to Colchis in search of Medea. See Warmington, 1935 p. 249-265 for more a detailed account of the play. See Conte, 1999 p. 104-105 for more on the figure of Pacuvius.

<sup>21</sup> My understanding of Accius' works is directly influenced on Conte's discussion of the playwright (1999 p. 105-109).

Sophocles and its plot seems to be derived from the adventures in Apollonius' *Argonautica*<sup>22</sup>. His tragedy is interested in the episode of Apsyrtus' death and how it came about. Accius, for the most part, faithfully follows Apollonius' interpretation of what happened to Medea's brother. From what survives of Accius' tragedy we see as he follows Apollonius in blaming Apsyrtus' death on Jason, but with one minor deviation from Apollonius' epic, as far as we can tell, is present: Medea first entreating Jason to entrust the fleece to Diana and let one of the Thracian or Scythian kings determine who gets it, instead of the Argonauts trying to decide if they should leave Medea on Diana's island and having the kings determine her fate. Jason refuses and Medea then suggests having Apsyrtus killed. Medea then proceeds to trick Apsyrtus by sending him gifts and promising to come up with a way to return home secretly with the fleece. She lures him into the temple of Diana on an island and Jason stealthily murders him. In his reiteration Accius, in the same way that Apollonius had, absolves Medea of the murder of her brother, in direct contrast to Euripides.

In following Apollonius' lead, Accius is demonstrating not only how Jason's killing of Apsyrtus was more prevalent than Medea's killing of her brother. This emphasis on Jason being the active perpetrator of violence, works to show how he has become instigator of violent action; she no longer holds the same kind of power over her actions as she does in Euripides' tragedy or even in Apollonius' epic. Accius is quite possibly stripping Medea of the agency and power she possess over her actions. In this tragedy Medea's only active power is the way in which she can still influence others, like a siren leading men to their death. She no longer has the power to

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<sup>22</sup> Sophocles wrote a play entitled *Women of Colchis*, which followed Jason's adventures in Colchis and his capture of the Golden Fleece. See Lloyd-Jones, 1996 p. 186-189 for more on the plot of tragedy. He also wrote another tragedy entitled *The Root-Cutters*, unfortunately not enough of play survives to make any definitive assumptions about the plot. See Lloyd-Jones, 1996 p. 268-271 for more on the plot of the tragedy.

physically attack those she views as enemies directly, she has to rely on her words in order to inspire someone to act directly on her behalf.

### Medea Through the Lens of Ovid

After Accius' death Roman tragedy continues to be performed but not to the same extent as it had during the second century BCE. As tragedy becomes a passing fad, the Roman stage became more involved and interested in farces, mimes, and pantomimes. It is not until about 80 years later at the end of the first century BCE that we see a sudden resurrection of tragedy and other poetic styles once again<sup>23</sup>. Ovid leads this movement of poetic exuberance by deciding not to write within just one literary tradition, but in all of them while simultaneously challenging the basic components and themes of these genres. He even goes as far as creating a new genre of poetry. In Chapters two and three I will demonstrate the ways in which Ovid is explicitly challenging his audiences expectations of not only the way they are to understand the function of traditional literary genres but also the way in which they are to perceive mythological figures in this new context. This section, then, serves as an overview and background on Ovid and his fascination with Medea.

Publius Ovidius Naso was born on March 30, 43 BCE, at Sulmo in Abruzzi to a wealthy equestrian family<sup>24</sup>. As a young man he was sent to Rome to study rhetoric with the intention of starting a career in law and politics. After holding a few minor offices he decides to abandon his political career in favor for one in poetry. With this shift in careers, Ovid considered how he could break into the Roman literary scene and he was eventually able to by joining the literary

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<sup>23</sup> See Conte, 1999 p. 109, 129 for the decline of tragedy on the Roman stage and p. 252-255 for the resurgence of poetry and tragedy during the Augustan age.

<sup>24</sup> See Conte, 1999 p.340-364 for further information on the life and works of Ovid; See *Tristia* 4.10, where Ovid provides his audience with some biographical information about himself.



circle of Messalla Corvinus, where he met some of Rome's most renowned poets. Ovid himself came to be seen as the last of the great Augustan writers, despite being exiled to Tomis in 8 CE right at the height of his success by Augustus because of his poetry<sup>25</sup>.

From the outset of his career as a poet, even by ancient standards Ovid's flexibility and innovation with different genres was exceptional. In every genre that Ovid used—be it elegy, tragedy, or epic—where he was actively manipulating the very foundations of these literary styles. Ovid's awareness and re-shaping of genre can be felt right at the beginning of his writing career, in the *Heroides*<sup>26</sup>. The *Heroides* are a series of letters written in verse by famous women from Greek myths to the lovers or husbands who either abandoned or betrayed them. It is in this early work of Ovid where we are struck with the way in which he completely reworks the focus of elegiac poetry by making it no longer about the author's 'I' but rather about another character's 'I,' as he writes in verse a collection of letters on the subject of love instead of his own personal experience of love. One of these letters from Medea gives us our first taste of what is to be a lifelong fascination and obsession with this tragic figure.

Medea appears in the first series of letters in the collection dated to around 15 BCE. In the *Heroides*, Ovid seems to be placing the dramatic setting of the letter between the end of Apollonius' epic and right before the beginning of Euripides' play. Throughout the letter Medea makes numerous allusions to the fact that Jason has not yet married Creon's daughter, but that he is in the process of doing so. Ovid stays quite faithful to the overarching plot of the story in

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<sup>25</sup> The poem in question that landed him in exile was the *Ars Amatoria*, a didactic elegy divided into 3 books giving advice on how to seduce women (book I), how to keep their love (book II) and how to in turn seduce men (book III). This poem was in reaction to the laws that were put into effect by Augustus as a way to limit the sexual promiscuities present in Rome at the time. See Conte, 1999 p. 344-345 for more on the *Ars Amatoria*. See *Tristia* 2 for Ovid's explanation on why Augustus banished him.

<sup>26</sup> The *Heroides* is a more modern title, Ovid probably used the title *Epistulae Heroidum* (The Letters of Heroines). See Conte, 1999 p. 346 for more on the alternative title.

Apollonius' epic except for a few moments. The first is the location where Jason meets Medea to plead for her help and their marriage oaths are exchanged. In the epic Jason and Medea meet at the temple of Hecate, while in the letter they meet at the shrine of Diana (ll. 71). The second is Ovid's decision to blame Jason for Apsyrtus' death, like Euripides did in his tragedy. In the letter, Medea's is unable to write about how she killed her brother (ll. 113-115). Even though these are very small plot differences from the epic, they do shift our view of how Medea is remembering and filtering to some extent the information she wants us to keep in our memories. At the beginning of the letter Ovid has Medea identify herself as the queen of Colchis (ll. 1), which seems to be an innovation not attested in any other ancient texts or fragments. He is also the first person to name Creusa (ll. 53-54) as the princess of Corinth and the daughter of Creon.

In the letter itself we see as Medea constantly reminds Jason of all the sacrifices she has had to make for his benefit, as well as all of the crimes she has committed on his behalf. She talks about how she has single handedly saved his life on numerous occasions, while in turn Jason has given her nothing except for false promises and broken oaths. Despite everything that Jason has put her through, all that she wants is to be his wife again at first. Yet, as the letter nears its end her tone of voice suddenly shifts. Medea is no longer pleading with Jason to come back, she is threatening retaliation and revenge for having the audacity to openly marry another woman. She ends the letter with a threat and a warning that her anger is festering and that she will get her vengeance one way or another. Through these last words of warning, Ovid is guiding the narrative down the violent path of crimes as illustrated by Euripides' *Medea* and later in Seneca's tragedy of the same name.

Ovid's interest in Medea does not end with her appearance in the *Heroides*. He continues with the myth in his, now lost, play of *Medea*. Unfortunately not much is known about what aspect of the Medea myth he was exploring in the tragedy; all that we do know is that it was written early in his career. In keeping with the momentum of these two works and his exploration of different genres, Ovid writes an epic about the constant change of bodies and forms. In his *Metamorphoses*, we see as he once again introduces us to the myth of Medea through a different lens and literary tradition.

The *Metamorphoses* dated between 2-8 CE, is not only concerned with the conversion of divine and mortal bodies but also the transformation that the body of the work is undergoing. Ovid's epic is more reminiscent of Hesiod's catalogue of stories than Homer's cohesive and linear treatment of one figure and event in myth. Even the traditional mythological subject matter veers away from what one expects of epic. Ovid decides to write his poem starting from the very beginning of the cosmos stretching all the way down to his day all done in fifteen books. This large time frame allows Ovid the flexibility to experiment with different narrative structures and themes. Throughout the poem we see as Ovid makes a conscious decision over the myths that he briefly wants to mention and those he wants to further unpack. One figure in myth he decides to condense while simultaneously lingering on is Medea.

Ovid devotes almost the entirety of Book VII of the *Metamorphoses* to the myth of Medea. The main plot of the narrative follows Book's III and IV of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, starting from the moment Jason arrives in Colchis, through the major plot points of Euripides' tragedy. He is responsible for infusing a number of innovations into the myth, among them the identification of Apsyrtus as a baby (ll. 54), Jason, and not Medea, as the one who takes the

fleece (ll. 155-157), and changing the altar of Diana back into that of Hecate (ll. 74). Ovid is the first writer to make Medea's performance of different kinds of magical incantations and rituals an important part of who she is and the kind of power she wields. Our first glimpse of Medea as a sorceress comes when Jason pleads with her to make his father young again. She first prays to Hecate for help in fulfilling her promise to Jason (ll. 192-219); she then proceeds to perform the ritual that will make Aeson young again (ll. 238-287).

He is also the first author to instill Medea with a certain amount of self-awareness. In her first speech, we see as she identifies her homeland as barbarous (ll. 53) in comparison with Jason and his Greek companions. Earlier in that same speech she reveals her anxiety over having Jason leave her for another bride (ll. 38-44), even before she has met him, and at the end of her speech she cautions herself over being careful of "quin adspice, quantum/adgrediare nefas, et, dum licet, effuge crimen!" (in fact ponder, how great/a wicked deed you are approaching, and, while it is permitted, escape the offense ll. 70-71). In this moment Medea is taking a step back and reminding herself of the violent path that awaits for her if she allows evils to control her mind and her actions. Apart from these deviations, Ovid moves the narrative beyond Euripides' play and into the Athenian portion of his narrative, with Medea riding her chariot into Athens to escape from Jason and the murder of her children and the Corinthian royal family. Ovid finishes Medea's storyline with her attempt to poison her husbands, Aegisthus king of Athens, son Theseus. When Aegisthus recognizes Theseus as his son he thwarts Medea's murderous plot. Medea then proceeds to evade punishment once again by riding off in her chariot one final time disappearing from the narrative.

As Medea rides her chariot into exile once again, Ovid is starting his own journey into exile. Around 8 CE Ovid was exiled to Tomis, on the Black Sea by Augustus as punishment for undermining his laws restricting sexual behavior outside of marriage in the *Ars Amatoria*. Ovid was never to set foot in Rome again and would die in Tomis as an exile around 17/18 CE. His abrupt banishment from Rome did not stop him from continuing to actively compose poetry. In exile, Ovid returns to writing elegies which are more reminiscent of their Greek origins in the fact that they are no longer poems concerning love, but about grief and lamentation. Ovid's first literary work in Tomis was the *Tristia*; the collection includes five books all, in one way or another, lamenting his situation, pleading with Augustus to repeal his expulsion, and asking for support from his family and friends in persuading Augustus to change his mind. It is in this collection of elegies that Medea once again appears.

Ovid's first mention of Medea comes in Book 3.8 of the *Tristia*, in the context of him wishing that he could bridle the dragons that aided her in escaping from Corinth (ll. 3-4). However, unlike Medea, Ovid wants to use the chariot not to escape into self-imposed exile but to return home from it. He then mentions her once again in 3.9, where he gives mythological origins to Tomis. Ovid asserts in his poem that Tomis gets its name because it was the location where Medea kills her brother and scatters his remains so as to evade and slow down her father's pursuit of them (ll. 34-35). Even in this poem, Ovid is still able to add a few modifications of the Medea myth. In this reiteration, Apsyrtus seems to be a stowaway in Jason's boat because Medea had no idea that he had followed them (ll. 23); this variation is not attested to in any of the other sources or fragments. His body is scattered along the countryside (ll. 27) instead of buried on Artemis' island like in Apollonius' epic. The biggest innovation that Ovid includes in his

narrative is Medea sticking her brother's bloody head and hands on a high ridge so as to further slow her father down. Thus, the name Tomis is alluding to the Greek word τέμνω (tom) "to cut" (LSJ). To use the translation of Peter Green, who attempts to render Ovid's pun into English, Tomis serves as memorial of Medea's "anatomization" of her brother's body<sup>27</sup>. In the exile poetry, then, Ovid focuses on two distinct moments in Medea's myth that both touch upon her status as an exile. They both emphasize Medea's ability to flee from one exile to another, as well as her freedom of mobility between these different spaces. While Ovid has no such freedom, he is restricted and condemned to live out the rest of his natural life in Tomis without any real hope of returning to Rome or being exiled to another city.

### Medea in Latin Poetry After Ovid

After Ovid's death, Medea would make one final appearance in Roman epic and tragedy in the form of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* and Seneca the Younger's *Medea*. Unfortunately, not much is known with certainty concerning Valerius' life nor the reception of his works, except that he is responsible for writing the *Argonautica* and that he died before 92 CE<sup>28</sup>. Valerius' epic survives to us in eight books, with only the eighth book left unfinished. In his epic Valerius borrows nearly all of the principle episodes from Apollonius' *Argonautica*, but he does make a few innovations of his own<sup>29</sup>. Yet, Valerius was not alone in his exploration of the figure of

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<sup>27</sup> Green, 2005 p. 54-55

<sup>28</sup> Valerius Flaccus' name survives to us in manuscripts and what we can infer of his life comes from various allusions to historical events within the epic. See Mozely, 1934 p. vii-xi for a detailed account on the poet's life and p. xviii-xx for the manuscript tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Valerius' epic concerns itself more with the more Argonautic adventures that Jason and his men go on and the very beginning of the Medea and Jason love story. My focus is more on Medea and Jason's falling out and in particular Medea as an exile. See Conte, 1999 p. 488-491 and Mozely, 1934 p. ix-xv for a detailed account on the author's treatment of the story.

Medea. Seneca the Younger would endeavor to explore one final time the complex figure of Medea in the context of a new mode of tragic performance.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in Spain at Cordoba around 4 CE<sup>30</sup>. He eventually moved to Rome, where he was educated in the schools of rhetoric and philosophy in pursuit of a political career, which he began in 31 CE. In 41 CE he is caught up in a political scandal<sup>31</sup> and is exiled to Corsica until 49 CE, when Agrippina is able to secure his return to Rome from Claudius. Seneca continues to actively take part in Roman politics until 62 CE where he gradually starts to withdraw into private life due to his loss of influence as a political adviser to Emperor Nero<sup>32</sup>. Despite his best efforts to distance himself from Roman politics, Seneca was still implicated in a conspiracy that ultimately ended with him taking his own life in 65 CE after being condemned to death by Nero.

Throughout Seneca's life he wrote on a large number of topics, his most successful being, according to Conte, his philosophical works. Aside from his more political and philosophical endeavors, Seneca also wrote tragedy, of which nine survive. Unfortunately, not a lot is known about the dates of the plays or whether or not they were performed on an actual stage—this maybe due to the fact that in antiquity his tragedies seemed to have been for the most part neglected in favor of his other works<sup>33</sup>. What we do know is that Seneca's tragedies signal a

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<sup>30</sup> Seneca himself provides a lot autobiographical information in the *Epistulae* and the *Consolatio ad Helviam Matrem*. See Conte, 1999 p. 408-409 for a detailed account of Seneca's life.

<sup>31</sup> Seneca was accused of being involved in the adultery of Julia Livilla, the daughter of a very politically powerful man, by Claudius. See Conte, 1999 p. 408 for a more detailed account of Claudius' accusation and his intentions.

<sup>32</sup> After his return from exile, Agrippina hires Seneca to tutor her son from her first marriage Nero, who becomes the future emperor of Rome. Seneca, along with Afranius Burrus, was instrumental in guiding the young emperor in his governance of the state once he ascended the throne in 54 CE. See Conte, 1999 p. 408-409 for more information on Seneca's relationship with Nero.

<sup>33</sup> See Conte, 1999 p. 421-424 for a more detailed account on Seneca's reception from antiquity to modern times.

revival of Latin tragic drama on stage and in recital halls<sup>34</sup>. The way in which Seneca goes about structuring the narrative and the characters of his tragedies seems to indicate that they were not all meant to be performed on a stage in the same way as say Euripides' *Medea*, but read—as might be the case with Seneca's *Medea*.

Seneca's *Medea* follows the overarching plot that Euripides presents us with in his tragedy of the same name, but with a few alterations. Seneca's tragedy, much like Ovid's *Heroides*, starts at the moment right before Jason marries Creusa. Medea from the very beginning of the play knows that she wants to punish her unfaithful husband and his new bride. There is no explicit moment of deliberation or hesitation on her part concerning her need to destroy the Corinthian royal family (ll.17-18) and to have Jason wander as an exile for the rest of his life (ll.19-21). None of the authors that came before Seneca show Medea wanting Jason to live from the start of the tragedy; they usually have Medea wanting Jason to die for all he has made her suffer. By the end of her speech she has already decided on a course of action that will cause the downfall of both Creon and Creusa. After Medea has introduced her plans to the audience and has left the stage the Chorus starts its song. The Chorus of Seneca's *Medea* is unique in the way that it is unsympathetic of Medea's plight and favors Jason. The Chorus' main function at the beginning of the play is to announce Jason and Creusa's marriage ceremony to the audience (ll. 56-115). Later on in the play the Chorus' function morphs into informing the audience of the underlying story that has led to the events that are unfolding on stage. They have no real interaction with the other characters of the tragedy and are seemingly unaffected by their actions and decisions. The only moment in which the Chorus is allowed to interact with the

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<sup>34</sup> See Conte, 1999 p. 416- 418 for a more detailed account of how Seneca's tragedies signify the renewal of Latin tragic drama.



world of the narrative at large is when they are informed that Creon and Creusa are dead by the messenger. This is the only instance where the Chorus is not informing us of what has happened in the past, where they are reacting and guiding the narrative along to its final scenes.

Seneca's innovations do not stop there; he introduces a few more ideas that weren't present in past iterations. In his tragedy, Seneca is interested in the idea of what it means to become Medea as a figure (ll. 171-172, 910). Seneca, much like Ovid, is also interested in the ritual of using magic in order to enact Medea's vengeance, although Medea's use of magic is witnessed on a larger scale than in the *Metamorphoses*. Towards the end of the tragedy, Seneca has the Nurse describe how Medea puts together her altar and then proceeds to call upon different creatures and divinities to help her in her task (ll. 674-759). He then has Medea go about singing the incantations needed to finish up her potions (ll. 740-811). Once she finishes her ritual she sends her children off to give the deadly gifts to Creusa. The narrative from there on follows Euripides' play, except for the moment in which Medea sees her brother's ghost appear. Towards the end of the play, in the moment she is deliberating killing her children, she sees Apsyrtus' ghost appear before her (ll. 963-964). It is this apparition that motivates Medea to kill her children as a way of appeasing the ghost of her brother; she kills one child first and then takes his body and her other child to the roof of a house, where she has Helios' chariot waiting. Medea waits until Jason is back on stage to kill her second child (ll. 1019) and then proceeds to ride off on her chariot but not without first throwing the bodies of her son's to Jason (ll. 1024).

Seneca's *Medea* is written in such a way that it is hard to visualize how this would be performed on the tragic stage. Throughout the entire tragedy, Seneca had almost all of his characters give very long speeches directly to the audience and not very much interaction

between them. Even the chorus' ambiguous function in the narrative of the play leads one to believe that the performance of this tragedy was not a performance at all, but actually would have just been read to an audience especially when compared to Euripides' chorus. In Euripides' tragedy the chorus' main function is reactionary and affected by everything that unfolds on stage; while in Seneca's they are far removed from the action that takes place right in front of them. As one of the only full Latin tragedies about Medea that survives to us, it demonstrates that even after Ovid Medea was very much still in the Roman consciousness.

## **Chapter Two. Ovid's Memorialization of Medea: Between Victim and Perpetrator of Violence**

Ovid's reimagining and exploration of Medea is brimming with allusions to past iterations of this tragic figure, but he puts her in a completely different context than can be seen in the works of previous writers. From the outset of his literary career, Ovid breaks down the boundaries that exist within different genres—he modifies the way in which figures are perceived and understood not only by the other characters within the narrative, but also by its external audience. Medea comes to be Ovid's primary example of the way in which a character can come to be used in a multitude of different genres, but still remain a dynamic character. In each of his works, Ovid memorializes Medea in a variety of different ways, but always vacillating between two poles of how she is to be remembered: as either exile and victim of circumstance or assassin and perpetrator of violence. He brings the memory of Medea from other literatures and his own remembrance of her to the surface, turning it into the central theme in the *Heroides*, the *Metamorphoses*, and the *Tristia*. Ovid does not settle on just one version of the Medea he wants to keep present in the minds of his audience; he creates his own multivalent Medea who simultaneously is in conversation with those who came before, but who ultimately exists to stand apart from the traditional view of who she is as a woman and a mother.

### **Memory and Myth in *Heroides* XII**

The first genre that Ovid uses to delve into the figure of Medea is elegiac poetry, but not in its traditional Roman sense. Ovid uses elegy, not as a way of examining his own feelings of

love towards another but, as in the *Heroides*, a space for exploring the emotions of women who have been betrayed or abandoned by their significant others. In some ways Ovid is returning elegy back to its original Greek context as poetry of lamentation rather than of love. In the *Heroides*, Ovid compiles a series of letters where he takes on the persona of famous Greek women from myth who were jilted by their husbands and lovers. Throughout the *Heroides*, Ovid steps into these female personas by invoking the pasts that these women share with their lovers. He takes the memories of their pasts and weaves them into a new tapestry that explores the emotions and convictions of women on a level that is unprecedented. In letter XII, Ovid steps into the persona of Medea, a figure with a particularly rich, complex, and troubling literary and mythological history. By taking on her persona, Ovid illustrates the way in which Medea has become a victim of her own narrative, plagued by memories of things she can no longer change but who nevertheless strives to alter the way she is perceived by Jason.

The Medea that Ovid creates in letter XII is a woman who has been exiled from Colchis and has just learned that her husband, Jason, is minutes away from marrying the princess of Corinth. Medea opens her letter by indirectly asking Jason for help in her time of need, and by reminding him of a time when he sought out her assistance to overcome his problems. Already in the opening lines of her letter we are confronted with this question of memory:

At tibi Colchorum, memini, regina vacavi,  
 ars mea cum peteres ut tibi ferret open.  
 tunc quae dispensant mortalia fila sorores  
 debuerant fusos evoluisse meos.  
 tum potui Medea mori bene! quidquid ab illo  
 Produxi vitam tempore, poena fuit.

Yet for you, I remember, I the queen of Colchis had time,  
 when you requested that my art might bring aid to you.

It was then that the sisters who distribute mortal threads  
 should have spun out my spindles.  
 Then I Medea could have been able to die well! Whatever life  
 I have lead from that time, has been a punishment (ll. 1-6)<sup>35</sup>.

In the first six lines of the poem, Ovid constructs a setting in which we are to understand the types of remembers that Jason and Medea are. He is making it clear from the outset that it is Medea alone who is *memor* (remembering), thus becoming the subject of *memini*, while Jason becomes the object into whom she must project her memories on to in order to garner any kind of sympathy or aid from him. Ovid is placing Medea in a narrative that she does not want to be part of but is forced to be in out of necessity. All Medea has at the outset of her letter is her past and the memories she shares with Jason because she has once again become an exile. The opening lines of the letter show Medea recapturing the person she used to be before she met Jason and left Colchis. She is reminding not only herself but also Jason of the authority that she wielded as the *regina Colchorum* (queen of Colchis)—a power so great that she was able to help Jason acquire the golden fleece in spite of the loyalty she feels for her family and her country. It is also important to note that Medea, in trying to make Jason recall their past, is consciously constructing the Medea that she wants him to keep present in his mind at all times. By introducing herself first as the *regina Colchorum* instead of simply Medea, she is taking up the authority that is inherent in a queen, while simultaneously reminding Jason that they are of the same social standing.

Yet, in the same breath as she remembers who she was, she wishes that the fates had ended her life the moment in which Jason came seeking her help and had stopped her from the suffering she is now enduring. Medea even says, “tum potui Medea mori bene” (Then I Medea

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<sup>35</sup> All translations are my own unless indicated.

could have been able to die well) because death at the moment of their initial contact is the only way in which her story and her life could have had a happy ending in her eyes. It is also in this moment of a reimagined past that Ovid provides us with Medea's name. This is the first moment in which Medea uses her own name instead of her title as *regina* to identify herself. She is once again making herself the subject of a verb in first person, in this case *potui* (I could have), in order to lament the girl she was prior to her meeting with Jason and being exiled from Colchis. She is coming to the realization that she is no longer that same girl who ruled Colchis and that she has no way to recapture that "Medea" anymore. In this moment, Ovid is not only providing Medea with a connection to her past, but is also providing his audience with a potential future. In having Medea exclaim "tum potui Medea mori bene!" he is inserting into our memories the tragic ending of Euripides' *Medea*. Ovid is centralizing in our minds the crimes she has yet to commit, but will commit not too much longer after the ending of this letter to Jason. He is making both Medea and his audience reflect on who she was before she met Jason and the circumstances that have led her down this path of punishment and regret. While simultaneously calling into question whether or not Jason remembers who Medea queen of Colchis was and the debt he owes her for all she has done for him.

One purpose of Medea's letter is not only to remind Jason of their shared past but also to hinder his movements into the future with a new bride in a new country apart from her. Jason is a character who is firmly settled in the now and is looking toward a brighter future, while Medea is incapable of looking forward in time. It is in another moment of an imagined past that Medea reveals to us the kind of rememberer she sees Jason as. In the process of remembering the moment she first saw him and how taken she was by him she wishes:

aut, semel in nostras quoniam nova puppis harenas  
 venerat audacis attuleratque viros,  
 isset anhelatos non praemedicatus in ignes  
 inmemor Aesonides oraue adusta boum;

Or at least, when once the strange ship had come onto our  
 sands and brought her bold men,  
 unprotected by charms would the unremembering son of Aeson  
 have gone into the exhaled fires and scorched mouths of bulls (ll. 13-16).

Medea starts out by reminding Jason of his past ignorance, and how if she had not stepped in to help him he would have surely lost his life to one of the deadly tasks put forth by her father. She is at this moment for the first time making it explicitly clear that Jason was *inmemor* (unremembering) then and continues to be to this day. It is also important to note that this is the second and last instance of the root *memor* in the entire letter and thus the echo of the earlier use in line 1 becomes a more vivid contrast of the different abilities of Medea and Jason to remember. In the moments before her reimagining of Jason's arrival, she admits that she was completely taken by Jason's appearance and it is because of his looks and his clever tongue that she became so enamored with him. Now she just wishes that she had never met or laid eyes on him so that the fates would have cut his life short instead of her own, as she had previously wished in the first few lines. In her reimagining of this moment she is wishing that their fates had deviated from the path that destiny called for, while simultaneously questioning whether or not Jason has forgotten all that she has done for him in the past when he came begging for her help and expertise. His lack of memory strengthens the fact that she vividly remembers and is actively recalling all of the hardships she has had to endure on Jason's behalf. She is unable to stop remembering, while Jason is able to put the past behind him, and focus on what his future holds with his new bride. All Medea has is the past because she has no real future to look forward to

being an exile from her home, Jason's home and now Corinth. Medea is now only able to reach Jason through their shared past and by constantly reminding him of the similarities between her and his new bride.

In order to reignite Jason's memory of all they have shared in the past, Medea tries to remind him of every single adventure and trial they have gone through and survived because of the power that she wields. Yet, in these moments where she is recounting their past Medea is unable to forget what is currently happening in the world outside of her letter. At times Medea becomes so impassioned that she is unable to stay fully in the past and interjects with little snippets of what is happening in the present. The first moment in which she does this is when she is relating the first moment in which Jason sets foot into Colchis. She says, "hoc illic Medea fui, nova nupta quod hic est;/quam pater est illi, tam mihi dives erat" (There I Medea was this, which your new bride is here;/as rich as her father is, so rich was mine ll. 25-26). Medea is in this moment not only emphasizing that she has as much, if not more, land and wealth than his new bride, but also reminding herself and Jason, once again, that she is royalty and of a higher social standing than Creusa, his new bride. Even though she does not use the title of queen here as she had previously done, she still is able to elevate herself above his new bride by talking about herself not only in the first person but also simultaneously in the third person, while leaving Jason's new bride and her father nameless. This switch from first to third person is forcing Jason to keep Medea in his thoughts and to remember when she was his *nova nupta* (new bride). Medea purposely leaves out the names of his new bride and her father so as to keep herself and all that she possesses present in Jason's mind. She does not name Creusa and Creon until several lines later, after she recounts the way in which her father welcomed Jason and his crew into her



house and put forth the harsh tasks needed to acquire the golden fleece. It is in this moment of reminiscing on the tasks that brought them together to begin with that she says, “*quam tibi tunc longe regnum dotale Creusae/et socer et magni nata Creontis erat!*” (How far then was the inherited kingdom of Creusa and your father-in-law and the daughter of great Creon to you ll. 53-54). Medea is once again bringing to the fore Jason’s inability to keep others in his thoughts when they are of no use to him. Jason is only able to live in two states of time: the present and the immediate future. The past that Medea is describing shows a Jason who is only concerned with surviving the deadly tasks and taking the fleece in order to become the ruler of Thessaly, his home. He is not thinking about the Corinthian royal family or of becoming the king of Corinth because he has no need to yet, it is only once he has taken the fleece by way of Medea that he is able to set his sights on them. Jason is an opportunist who is unable to do anything on his own and is constantly seeking different ways in which to advance his own agenda. He is unable to look upon past events or people that are no longer useful to him in the present, which in turn forces Medea to construct a narrative pleading with Jason to bring forth those buried and forgotten memories of their time together.

Medea continues her mission to rekindle Jason’s memories by moving away from the present and firmly cementing herself in the past once again. After her short outburst about Creon and Creusa, she reveals to Jason the fear, grief, and guilt she felt at not only the thought of Jason going about the deadly tasks unaided but also the thought of betraying the loyalty she felt towards her family if she were to help him. This internal battle between love and loyalty is brought to an abrupt end by her sister. After Medea retires to her room in sorrow her sister seeks her out in order to ask that she lend her aid to the Argonauts. Medea becomes so enraptured by

her memories of that moment that she starts to visualize the grove where they first met in secret, instead of immediately reminding Jason of the false promises he made to her. She says, “sunt in eo—fuerant certe—delubra Dianae;/aurea barbarica stat dea facta manu./nosics? an exciderunt mecum loca?” (There is in it—at least, there used to be—a temple of Diana;/There stands the golden goddess fashioned by barbaric hand./Do you know it? Or have places fallen out of your mind with me ll. 69-71). Medea’s wavering memory of the grove’s actual state in this moment can be likened to Jason’s wavering memory of her. She is in many ways coming to the realization that the grove she once knew so intimately now stands in for her own situation, obstructed in shadows by the passage of time because no one remembers its existence. The grove and the sacred shrine of Diana that dwells within symbolizes the way in which Medea comes to perceive herself—especially since she too was fashioned by barbaric hands and now only exists within her own memories. In Medea’s eyes, she has become just as easily forgotten by Jason as the grove and the shrine in which they made their vows. Because of this Medea questions whether Jason remembers the grove where the course of their lives was irrevocably changed or if he has chosen to forget that as well.

Just as her memory of that space fails, Jason’s memory of Medea is but an afterthought in his mind, especially since in the dramatic setting of the letter he is moments away from marrying the Corinthian princess. While Jason walks towards his future, Medea is forced to witness his nuptials to Creusa because of his demand that she abandon his father’s palace in light of the crimes she has committed and presumably seek asylum in Corinth. Just as she finishes recalling their shared past, Medea hears the sound of wedding hymns. As Jason takes his first steps into his new life, Medea is left with nothing except “tibiaque effundit socialia carmina vobis,/at mihi

funerea flebiliora tuba,/pertimui” (and for you the flute pours out nuptial-songs,/but for me songs more tearful than the funeral trumpet,/I became very much frightened ll. 139-141). The sound of hymeneals signals for Jason the shedding of his past life and his entrance into a new future. But for Medea this song signifies the end of any and all hope she had of Jason returning to her and abandoning Creusa. The hymeneal also signals the moment when Medea is wrenched fully away from their shared past and placed firmly in the present. At this moment in time she no longer has the comfort brought on by their reimagined past; she is now forced to once again confront the harsh realities of her present circumstances and her bleak future.

Medea is also simultaneously bringing into stark relief the extent of Jason’s faulty memory and his callous disregard for all that they once shared. He does not give her or her feelings a single thought as he enters into a new marriage knowing that she would be around to witness it along with her slaves and their children. His failure to notice Medea’s state of mind and presence at this moment is what causes her to relive and reimagine their past in hopes of inciting emotions of compassion or even pity in him. For this reason Medea is filled with fear because she is on the one hand fully aware that she is powerless to change anything and that Jason may have truly forgotten her. On the other, she is afraid because she understands the reality of her situation and how much she has depended on Jason and his promises. Her fear in this moment informs how she wants Jason to understand her position in all of this. She is painting a portrait of a woman who has given everything up for the sake of a man who promised her the world but has now left her with nothing. The only thing she now has any control over is the way in which she wants Jason to perceive her. Throughout her letter Medea must place in Jason’s mind her memories of their encounters and their effect on her.

In the first six lines of the letter, we saw as Medea started out her plea by reminding Jason of the authority she once wielded. Yet, through the course of her narrative we see how she slowly starts to realize how much control Jason actually had over her physically and emotionally. In the course of reliving their past Medea becomes aware of the moment in which she was bewitched by Jason, thus triggering another occasion where she is able to reconstruct her memories of that time. It is after Aeetes, her father, has welcomed Jason and his men into their home and Medea spots him in the crowd that she realizes:

tunc ego te vidi, tunc coepi scire, quid esses;  
 illa fuit mentis prima ruina meae.  
 et vidi et perii; nec notis ignibus arsi,  
 Ardet ut ad magnos pinea taeda deos.

Then I saw you, then I began to know, what you were;  
 that was the first downfall of my soul.  
 And I saw you and I was undone; nor did I burn with familiar fires,  
 but as a pine-torch before the mighty gods (ll. 31-34).

Medea is not able to realize the impact of her first encounter with Jason until this moment of self-reflection; she slowly starts to realize that the love she feels for Jason is not typical. She remembers how all it took was one look for the flames of love to be awakened within her. Her immediate need for Jason, as she remembers it, is not something kindled by ordinary love, but was jump started by some divine force, which the audience knows to be Aphrodite. Even though she is not aware of which deity it was, she nevertheless comprehends in this moment of reflection that this love is something dangerous and not at all mortal. It is a love that has sprung up out of divine intervention and that is ultimately exploited by Jason as a means to acquire the golden fleece, but that did not vanish as soon as he got what he wanted. This divine love Medea feels for Jason has fueled all of her actions since leaving Colchis and has her even now begging

Jason to lend her a hand in her time of need. By remembering her past, Medea is able to pinpoint the exact moment in which her fate was forever changed and her soul placed on a treacherous path of lies and betrayals. Medea is now able to see and comprehend not only how impulsive her love for Jason was but also how ensnared she still is by it. It is because of the divine love by which Medea was initially enchanted that she was compelled not only to actively reconstruct and redefine the memories of their past but also to alter how she would come to perceive Jason and his promises to her.

Just as Medea vividly remembers the first moment in which she became bewitched by Jason, she also remembers the promises he made that changed the course of her life. Medea even goes so far as to have Jason himself narrate the vows he once made to her in the sacred grove of Diana, which until now only seemed to exist in her memories. In the process of giving Jason a voice in Medea's narrative, Ovid seems to be allowing his audience to see Jason's perspective on the matter of their union. But in actuality, Ovid is further emphasizing how Medea's love for Jason has infused her with a need to project some of her own desperation and anxieties onto Jason's voice and show Jason that he too once felt the same way she currently does. Medea is essentially placing Jason in her own shoes without allowing his actual voice to distort the narrative and the Medea she is constructing.

After Medea finishes describing her initial reaction to Jason, she continues to describe the way in which the dangerous tasks put forth by her father created within her an inner struggle between helping the man she loves and staying true to her family. In the end, we see her struggle come to an end when her sister comes seeking her aid in helping Jason and the Argonauts. Yet, instead of describing the way in which his false promises affected her, Medea decides to give

Jason a voice for the first time in her narrative. She introduces his voice and his side of their story once they have entered into the sacred grove of Diana. Jason starts out his speech by telling Medea that his fate is in her hands and that she should, “miserere mei, miserere meorum;/effice me meritis tempus in omne tuum!” (pity me, pity my men;/with kindness make me yours for all time ll. 81-82). Jason begs Medea to have pity on him and his men; he asks that she show him kindness in his greatest moment of need and to allow him to become hers forever. In this moment Jason is not only asking Medea to help him acquire the golden fleece but is also asking that she accept his love. His need to be hers forever is not connected to his need for the golden fleece, but his feelings of devotion towards her are completely genuine at this moment: all Jason seems to want is Medea and her compassion. All of this is made more poignant several lines later when he says:

spiritus ante meus tenues vanescet in auras  
 quam thalamo nisi tu nupta sit ulla meo!  
 conscia sit Iuno sacris praefecta maritis,  
 et dea marmorea cuius in aede sumus!

My spirit will vanish into thin air before any woman  
 other than you should live as a bride in my chamber!  
 May Juno be my witness as the overseer of sacred wedlocks,  
 and the marble goddess in whose temple we are (ll. 85-88).

Jason is so devoted to becoming Medea’s one and only partner that he scorns the very thought of taking another bride. He would rather perish or allow his spirit to abandon his mortal body before he ever betrays his vows to her. His invocation of both Juno and Diana to bless and preside over their union strengthens his vow to be only faithful to Medea. For Jason, it is important that Medea understand that his loyalties will not be swayed or corrupted by another woman because he needs her to be as faithful to him as he is to her. Yet, in the world outside of

this brief window into Jason's memories, we know from Medea's numerous mentions of his false tongue and his new bride, that he is only too eager to break his vows in pursuit of another bride in his chamber.

What then are we to make of his clear desperation and need for Medea in the only occasion where he is given a voice? In this moment it is important to remember that this is not actually Jason's voice that we are given, but Medea's memory of what he once said to her in the grove—a memory that she is reconstructing and reimagining in order to push forth her own agenda. Medea uses Jason's own voice as a weapon against him in hopes that he will heed his own words and not go through with marrying Creusa. In fact, at this moment, Ovid is using Medea's use of Jason's voice and his words in order to implant in our minds the vows that we witnessed in Apollonius' epic the *Argonautica*<sup>36</sup>. By introducing an imagined voice of Jason, Ovid is teasing his audience with how he could have reconstructed this moment, but instead decides to demonstrate the way in which he wants his Medea to be remembered. He wants his Medea to not only be in control of crafting the way in which she wants Jason to remember their past adventures but also in control of the memories and the Medea she wants to keep present in the minds of her readers.

The words that Medea places in Jason's mouth are more reminiscent of the way in which she goes about pleading for his help and declaring her love than the way she has previously described his attitude towards their shared past. Earlier in the narrative, we saw as Medea at lines 53-54 made it a point to demonstrate Jason's callous disregard for others who are of no use to him by inquiring where his new bride and father-in-law were when he came seeking her aid in

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<sup>36</sup> Lines 973-1130; See Chapter 1 p. 16-19 for my discussion on Apollonius' *Argonautica*.

acquiring the golden fleece. She shows him to be a man whose only real concern is his need for survival and his own ambitions to become the ruler of Thessaly. In fact, Medea purposely introduces her memory and understanding of Jason's vows in order to lay down the foundation of how she wants him to perceive her. After Medea has witnessed and heard the signs of Jason's impending nuptials in lines 139-141, she makes one last effort to entreat Jason to change his mind. She says, "tam tibi sum supplex, quam tu mihi saepe fuisti,/nec moror ante tuos procubuisse pedes" (I am as much a suppliant to you, as you have often been to me,/and I hesitate not to have fallen prostrate before your feet ll. 185-186). Much in the same way that Jason begged Medea to have pity on him and his men on line 81, she is now pleading with him to show her compassion. Medea has now become the *supplex* (suppliant) that Jason once was and is overwhelmed by the need to fall before his feet and beg for his aid. Now it is her voice that is imbued with desperation for him to help her in her greatest moment of need. She no longer cares that he is to wed another woman or that he has exiled her from his home and now from Corinth. All she wants is for him to remember what it was like being in her position.

Even Jason's declaration of love for Medea is more evocative of the way she still feels about him than any affection he is said to hold for her—especially since Medea is still being influenced by the divine love that Jason ignited at lines 31-34, while his own feelings have been transferred to another woman. Yet, this does not stop her from wanting him to, "redde torum, pro quo tot res insana reliqui;/adde fidem dictis auxiliumque refer" (restore me as your wife, for which I have madly abandoned so many things;/add trustworthiness to your words, and bring help ll. 193-194). Medea pleads with Jason to allow her back into his chamber as his bride and reminds him of all that she has given up for his sake. The only thing she wants is for him to make



good on the vows he promised her when they came together in Diana's sacred grove; the promises which she reconstructed for Jason in his own voice in order to remind him of the love and devotion he once felt for her. In this moment Medea is not only trying to recapture the innocence of the young girl she was when she first married Jason but is also trying to change his perception of her. The only way she is able to alter how he perceives her is by carefully constructing a narrative that highlights all of the ways she has been a good wife to Jason while simultaneously eliding anything that could shatter this illusion.

Throughout the letter, Ovid creates a narrative that showcases Medea as a victim of circumstance who is utterly consumed by her memories and is self-conscious of the way others may perceive her. He empowers his Medea to take complete control of the way in which Jason understands her perspective of their journey in order to invoke his compassion. His influence, as we have seen, allows her to not only take on her own persona of "Jason" but also grants her the ability to decide how she presents some of her more violent actions. Medea does not outright ignore or omit any of the crimes she has committed on Jason's behalf. Even though she does not enumerate all of them, she does present us with two instances where she had no choice but to end the lives of people in order to help Jason. The first moment of violence that Medea experiences is the murder of her brother. Yet, Medea is not able to actually talk about nevertheless write about what she actually did to the body of her younger brother. She even says, "deficit hoc uno littera nostra loco./quod facere ausa mea est, not audet scribere dextra,/sic ego, sed tecum, dilaceranda fui" (In this one place my letter fails./What my right hand dared to accomplish, it is not bold enough to write,/thus I too, but with you, should have been torn to pieces ll. 113-115). This is one of the only moments where language fails Medea and she is unable to fully express her

experience of an event. Her own body (her right hand, *dextra*) rebels against even the idea of mentioning the death of her brother, Apsyrtus, and how it came about. Medea realizes that her hands have lost their daring in this moment and are hesitant to reinsert their violent actions back into the narrative she is reconstructing. She even goes so far as to wish that she had also been torn to pieces in the same way as her brother so as to avoid all of the pain and misery she now finds herself in. Her decision to gloss over this moment of her past demonstrates the way which Medea is consciously working to alter Jason's perception of her. She no longer wants to be remembered for the vicious actions she has committed; instead, she wants to be remembered as someone who is capable of redemption while reminding Jason of his own guilt.

In the same faltering breath as she remembers the death of her brother, she also recalls the next person whose life was taken away due to Jason's ambitions. After lamenting the death of her brother, Medea questions why the gods allowed them safe passage through the seas and wishes that they, Jason and his men, had perished before ever reaching Thessaly's shores. Once Jason arrives back home victorious from his quest, Medea asks him:

Quid referam Pelias natas pietate nocentes  
 caesaque virginea membra paterna manu?  
 ut culpent alii, tibi me laudare necesse est,  
 pro quo sum totiens esse coacta nocens.

Why should I recount the daughters of Pelias, who did harm because  
 of their devotion and the paternal limbs they cut with their maidenly hand?  
 Others may condemn me, but it is necessary for you to praise,  
 for whom I have so often been forced to do harm (ll. 129-132).

Medea questions whether or not Jason needs to be reminded of the role he played in plotting Pelias' destruction since it is what ultimately led to his engagement to the Corinthian princess.

She is once again calling into question Jason's ability to remember things that have had a significant effect on both their lives, except that this time she is certain that his memory of this event has not yet disappeared. Even though she starts out her question by not seeing a need to recount what happened with Pelias' daughters, she still does make a couple of allusions to what they did to their father in order to remind Jason of the way in which another family was torn apart by his ambitions. She reminds him that Pelias' daughters tore their father to pieces out love and devotion; while he only perpetrated this assault against his uncle in order to seize control of the throne. In this moment, Medea is using the memory of Pelias' death to remind Jason of another occasion where she was able to help him further his agenda. Yet, instead of praising her, Jason condemns and exiles her for her persuading Pelias' daughters to commit patricide on his behalf. Medea understands that others may condemn her for her actions, but that Jason above all ought to praise her since she was only propelled down this path of death and destruction on his behalf. Her decision to briefly mention the second life that she was responsible for ending demonstrates Jason's callous disregard for the lives of others who are of no use to him and how she has become a victim of his need for power.

So far, we have seen how Ovid carefully crafts Medea's narrative in order to show her as a victim and Jason as the source of all her violent actions. Yet, after making strides to make Medea into someone worthy of redemption, Ovid cannot seem to stop himself from ending the letter by infusing Medea with the potential for violence in the future. Once Medea is ripped out of her memories of the past by the sound of hymeneals at lines 139-141, she is confronted with the fact that her last hope for a better future has been shattered. When she comes to this realization she becomes so full of anger that she not only injures herself but also vows "flebit et

ardores vincet adusta meos!/dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt sucusque veneni,/hostis Medeae nullus insultus erit” (she will weep and inflamed she will surmount my own flames!/while a sword and fires are at hand and the juice of poison,/no enemy of Medea will be unpunished ll. 180-182). Medea vows that Creusa will come to know the same kind of flames that once awakened her love for Jason. She promises that Jason’s betrayal will not go unpunished and that she will use both a sword and poison in order to get the justice she deserves.

It is clear that in this moment Medea is no longer worrying about the way in which Jason is supposed to perceive her. She has become so possessed by her anger that all she can think about is getting revenge against Jason and his *nova nupta*. Yet, several lines later we see as she tries one last time to entreat Jason into taking her back as his wife at lines 193-194. In this moment, she seems to have set aside her anger and made a more rational decision that will earn her Jason’s sympathy more than her angry outburst would have. However, Ovid decides not to end the letter at this last request for forgiveness and mercy, instead he decides to end it by having Medea say, “ingentis parturit ira minus./quo feret ira, sequar” (My wrath has given birth to remarkable threats./To where my wrath will lead me, I will follow ll. 208-209). Medea in this final moment has set aside her need for Jason’s compassion and has decided to turn her narrative into a warning to Jason of what is to come. She is no longer filled with the same anger she felt when she heard the wedding songs, this new anger is more level headed and destructive; she is now willing to take on the mantle of violence that she has tried to set aside. The only future she sees for herself now is one paved by death and vengeance. She even ends her letter by saying, “nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit” (I do not know what greater thing my soul is surely driving ll. 212). In this last moment she realizes that her soul has undertaken a new task to once

again changer her fate, yet her *mens* (soul/mind) is not ready to fully disclose where that sentiment will lead her or how it will manifest itself. She ends her letter with the realization that her attitude towards her situation has changed and that she no longer cares whether Jason grants her his aid because she has a new agenda that she is ready to pursue. What began as Medea constructing a narrative around her past memories with Jason, in order to invoke his compassion, ends with Medea needing to exact justice on Jason and his new bride.

At the beginning of the letter, Ovid focuses his efforts on creating a Medea who has become a victim of circumstance and who is completely consumed by her own memories of the past. He is consciously constructing a Medea whose narrative is informed by events that unraveled in Apollonius' epic the *Argonautica*, but who is ultimately in control of how her own memories and the way in which she wants others to perceive her. Yet, he ends this letter by setting aside the Medea of the *Argonautica* and introducing us to the Medea who will appear in Euripides' tragedy *Medea*. Ovid consciously ends Medea's narrative by fashioning a Medea who is only willing to aside her past after Jason's final act of betrayal. She makes the conscious decision to embrace the violence that will follow her into not only Euripides' tragedy, but also perhaps into Ovid's own lost tragedy *Medea* which was written early in his career<sup>37</sup>. In setting the end of the letter right before the start of Euripides' tragedy, Ovid is signaling that his Medea is now ready to take on the mantle of violence and death that is synonymous with her myth. Ovid is using Medea's personal memory as well as literary and mythological memory of her myth in order to compose a figure who is constantly struggling to alter the way in which she is perceived, but who is ultimately unable to escape the violence of her own persona.

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<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 1 p. 28 for my discussion on Ovid's lost tragedy.

*diva triformis: The Three Voices of Medea in Metamorphoses VII*

The next major genre that Ovid uses to explore the figure of Medea is epic, but not in its traditional context as in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or even as Apollonius does in the *Argonautica*. Ovid decides to construct an epic that is structurally reminiscent of Hesiod's *Theogony* with its focus on cataloging the cosmogony of the gods, but he deviates rather quickly from that by extending the timeline all the way up to his contemporary day through the course of fifteen books. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid presents his audience with the ways in which not only divine and mortal bodies are subject to transformations but also the body of work itself. Ovid is experimenting with different ways in which narrative structures and themes are constantly subject to change. In Book VII of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid endeavors to once again experiment with the way in which he understands and wants his audience to comprehend the figure of Medea. He devotes almost the entirety of Book VII on the complete myth of Medea beginning with Book III of the *Argonautica* and ending at Athens after her escape from the violence she caused at Corinth as illustrated by Euripides' *Medea*. Yet, in this new reiteration of Medea Ovid starts out by first re-creating and reintroducing the persona of Medea who he created in the *Heroides*; he then decides to completely eradicate this idea of Medea as victim from his audiences' memories and creates a Medea who is consumed with the need for perpetuating violence using her goddess given arts.

At the beginning of Book VII of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid starts narrating how Jason and the Argonauts arrive at Colchis demanding the golden fleece and how Aeetes put forth tasks Jason needed to accomplish before he could acquire it. Ovid rather quickly summarizes the events that make up the first half of Book III of the *Argonautica* in order to talk about Medea's

reaction to Jason and the challenges he must overcome. Yet, when he finally does mention Medea he informs his audience how taken she was by Jason. In the same breathe he decides to once again step back into the persona of Medea so that she can construct the way she wants to her audience to perceive her. The Medea we are introduced at the start of her speech has already fallen in love with Jason and is struggling to do what is right. She says, “Sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido,/mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque,/deteriora sequor” (But a new power drags me against my will, and my desire/urges me one way, reason another: I see the better and approve it,/but I follow the worse ll. 19-21). Medea is aware that something or someone has changed her desires for the worse and is left feeling utterly powerless. Desire and reason are at war in her mind; she wants to remain loyal to her family, but her heart is urging her to help Jason overcome the dangerous tasks. She is aware of the path she is supposed to take, but knows that she will follow the one that will not only join her fate to Jason’s but that will also lead her towards unknown dangers. Ovid is already infusing Medea with the fore knowledge that she is traveling down a dark path that she will have no hope of returning from. Yet, Medea is still striving to do what is right and just even if it goes against her familial loyalties.

As Medea continues to narrate her conflicted feelings over Jason, she determines that Jason deserves to live since he has done nothing to merit the dangers that await him. She is deliberately designing the way she wants her audience to perceive her as a character who is able to sympathize with the plight of strangers when they are confronted with unforeseen obstacles. Even though her desire to help Jason is personal, she still views it as a crime against her own beliefs if she does not try and help someone in need. She even says, “hoc ego si patiar, tum me de tigride natam,/tum ferrum et scopulos gestare in corde fatebor” (If I permit this, then I will

confess that I was born from a tigress,/that I wield iron and evils in my heart ll. 32-33). Medea acknowledges that she cannot allow Jason to confront any of the challenges put forth by her father, Aeetes, without offering her help. If she were to refuse him aid in this his greatest moment of need, she would be no better than an animal. Only someone brought forth from a wild beast would be unable to show compassion to someone who is about to blindly embark down a path full of dangers. She believes that her heart would need to be full of an iron like substance to remain unmoved by the suffering or pleas of others; or be in possession of a heart that is full of evils and delights in the misfortune of others. In this moment Medea is demonstrating that her strong impulse to help Jason is not only just but also humane. She is demonstrating to her audience that she is in possession of a *cors* (heart/soul) that is not full of evils, but that is able to effectively empathize with the suffering of others.

Medea eventually convinces herself that Jason is worthy of her aid and that he will willingly become her husband because of the debt he will owe her. She then starts to visualize the way her fame will spread throughout Greece for her part in Jason's acquisition of the golden fleece. At this moment she has resolved to follow Jason back to his fatherland and leave her own family behind in pursuit of something greater than can be found in Colchis. Yet, at the end of her long speech in the same breath as she declares that she has no need to fear the future, she takes a step back and issues herself a warning. She says, "*coniugiumne putas speciosaque nomina culpae/inponis, Medea, tuae?—quin adspice, quantum/adgrediare nefas, et, dum licet, effuge crimen*" (Do you consider it a marriage and do you give, Medea, attractive/names to your crimes?—Nay rather behold, how great/a wicked deed you are approaching, and, while it is permitted, escape the crime ll. 69-71). Medea questions the status of the relationship she



possesses with Jason can actually be considered a marriage, or if it is something altogether different. She asks herself whether she is actually giving her crimes their proper names or if she is lying by calling them something else. Yet, it is not clear what crimes she speaks of here at the end of her speech. It is possible that she could be asking about the crimes she is about to commit against her household when she makes the conscious decision to help Jason or she could also be subtly hinting at the crimes she will eventually commit on behalf of Jason. The question she is asking herself in this moment is not only self-reflective in the sense that she is questioning the validity of her own desires but also holds traces of what her potential future may look like if she goes forward with marrying Jason. Her warning is then made more poignant when she states that the path she is heading down is riddled with wicked deeds, but that she still has time to escape these crimes before it is too late. She is allowing herself room to change her mind even though she has already made it clear at lines 19-21, that she has no intention of following her *mens* (reason)—thus rendering this warning moot since she herself and her audience already know that she is unable to escape her present or future crimes.

Ovid is deliberately setting aside his own opinions and allowing Medea to shape how she wants her audience to perceive her. He uses Medea's voice in order to invoke in his audience's memories the figure of Medea that he presented them with in the *Heroides* and who they were introduced to in Apollonius' *Argonautica*. Medea is once again an innocent maiden who is being manipulated by forces outside of her control in order to help a man who she barely knows but who she has come to desire above all things. She is caught in an internal war between doing what her father wants, which is simply to not help Jason, and what Jason as well as Aphrodite want her to do: help in successfully acquiring the golden fleece. As she struggles against her divided heart,

she purposely makes it a point to illustrate that her intentions for helping Jason are just and pure; she explicitly states that she would have helped him regardless of her feelings towards Jason because she possesses a *mens* that is virtuous and empathetic to the dire circumstances of others. Yet, her words at the end of her speech complicate and question the validity of the narrative she has constructed for herself in this moment. By calling into question her own perception of the marriage she is to embark on with Jason as well as how she has convinced herself that betraying her father is right instead of a crime shows how her own uncertainty over what she is about to do. She is trying to do right by everyone but comes to the realization that she does not possess the power to do so. Try as she might she knows that she will continue down a dangerous path but that she might still be able to avoid it if she simply changes her mind, even though her audience already knows that it is too late for her.

Once Ovid takes control of the narrative away from Medea, he proceeds to depict her offer to help Jason and the moment in which they are married at the altar of Hecate. He then summarizes how Jason accomplishes each task successfully and is able to gain the golden fleece. Ovid then decides to completely omit the killing of Apsyrtus, which was an important moment in the *Heroides* for understanding the way Medea needs to be perceived and as an example of the lengths she went through in order to help Jason, and simply has her arriving at Iolcus. However, Ovid decides to replace Apsyrtus' death with another episode that has only been attested in a very early Argonautica myth<sup>38</sup>: Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson. After they reach Iolcus Jason pleads with Medea to give his dying father a portion of his own life. Medea responds, "arte mea soceri longum temptabimus aevum,/non annis revocare tuis, modo diva triformis/adiuvet et

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 1 footnote 4 for my discussion on early Argonautica myths.

praesens ingentibus adnuat ausis” (By my art we will try to recover the long lifetime/of my father-in-law, not with your years, but may the three-formed goddess/help me and in person allow these remarkable daring attempts ll. 176-179). Medea once again agrees to use her goddess given skills in order to help Jason and his father. She is not completely certain that she will be able to restore Aeson’s youth back but she is willing to try. One of the few things she is sure of is that she is not able to take someone else’s years, Jason’s in this case, and bestow them onto another person. Her only means of acquiring the ability to extend Aeson’s life span is by requesting that Hecate herself imbue her with the sacred knowledge of this daring ritual. In this moment, Ovid illustrates the way in which Medea fully embraces her role as enchantress to a fuller extent than had been seen or alluded to in past reiterations. It is also important to note, that Ovid, by effectively erasing Apsyrtus’ murder from her narrative, is keeping with the persona Medea herself constructed at the beginning of Book VII, while simultaneously taking up a new persona. He is continuing and developing the theme of Medea as a woman who is unable to bear witness to others suffering without interceding, while at the same time she is establishing for herself a new voice dedicated to the crafts that Hecate has bestowed upon her.

Ovid’s decision to skip over Apsyrtus’ death and instead focus on Medea’s rejuvenation of Aeson demonstrates how he no longer wants Medea to be weighed down by the memory and the guilt of murdering her brother. Instead, Ovid decides to bestow Medea with a first death that is more contingent not only with the persona she constructed at lines 32-33 but also lays down a more direct path to her future acts of violence as well as to her new persona of enchantress. Once Medea returns from her journey gathering all of the ingredients needed to perform the rejuvenation ritual, she goes about preparing the life-giving mixture with her incantations. When

Medea has finished the potion, Ovid informs us that “*stricto Medea recludit/ense senis iugulum veteremque exire cruorem/passa replet sucis*” (Medea opens the throat of the old man with her unsheathed/sword and having allowed the old blood to go out/she fills him up with her potions ll. 285-287). Medea first slices Aeson’s throat open in order to let out all of his old stagnant blood, she then proceeds to fill up his dried veins with her spirited brew. Even though this is the first human death Medea causes, she is still perceived as the same woman whom she introduced herself as at the beginning of the book only because she is able to bring Aeson back to life. She does not need to worry about the way in which this vicious attack on Aeson’s body will affect the way Jason or her audience view her because she is still in possession of her virtuous persona. This particular episode works to emphasize not only Medea’s consistent need to help others but also briefly touches upon the murderous violence that lies just beneath her more noble instincts. In this moment Ovid endows Medea with the ability to give and take life away. This is the first deliberate step that Ovid takes in his creation and development of a new Medea who is easily able to use the incantations given to her by Hecate to transform mortal bodies.

Yet, after Ovid diligently works to make Medea into an empathetic figure who is constantly trying to ease the suffering of others in spite of her own, he completely shatters the illusion of a virtuous Medea. Once he is done talking of the way in which Medea was able to rejuvenate Aeson, Ovid suddenly shifts the tone of the narrative. He says, “*Neve doli cessent, odium cum coniuge falsum/Phasias adsimulat Peliaeque ad limina supplex/confugit*” (And so that tricks don’t yield their place, the Phasian woman feigns a deceitful/animosity with her husband and flees towards the house of/Pelias as a suppliant ll. 297-299). This is the moment in which Ovid leaves behind the persona Medea first constructed at the beginning of the book.

Ovid introduces his audience to this new Medea by saying that he cannot effectively construct a narrative about her without mentioning her more deceitful inclinations. In the next line, Medea purposely makes Jason angry so that she can be given a reason to find refuge at Pelias' home. She comes before Pelias and his daughters as a suppliant complaining about Jason's treatment of her, even though Ovid does not show that to be true anywhere in Book VII. In this moment, Ovid feels compelled to demonstrate to his audience a darker side to Medea that has been up until now absent from the narrative as a whole, but that is more reminiscent of the Medea who he briefly makes mention of at the end of the *Heroides*.

Ovid's decision to introduce Medea's more duplicitous persona demonstrates more vividly the way he personally perceives Medea, especially since at the beginning of the Book VII it was Medea herself who introduced us to the persona she wants to be viewed as. In the process of showing his audience the persona of Medea that she herself creates, he is subtly pushing to the surface her more sinister machinations. Her inclination for evils is more poignantly felt when she involves herself in the arts of Hecate, especially when she violently slits Aeson's throat in the process of making him younger. The new facet of Medea that he is developing while describing the incantations she makes to Hecate and the whole ritual aspect of creating the youthful potion all signal to an aspect of Medea that won't be fully realized until she embarks on a new path of death and destruction, completely shattering the illusion of the virtuous and sympathetic Medea. Ovid must now endeavor to demonstrate how vastly different the Medea he first introduces is to the new one he is formulating.

Once Medea gains Pelias' daughters' trust and they learn of how she was able to make Aeson young again they ask that she do the same for their father. Medea promises to help them

and, as a token of good faith, bids that they bring her the oldest sheep in the flock in order to demonstrate the extent of her arts. After Medea is able to convince them of her abilities, she puts into motion her plot against Pelias. When it came time for Pelias' daughters to enact their part of the ritual they are unable to. Medea then says, “quid nunc dubitatis inertes?/stringite' ait 'gladios veterumque haurite crurorem,/ut repleam vacuas iuvenali sanguine venas” (“Why do you now hesitate, idle women?"/she said, 'Unsheath your swords and spill his old gore,/so that I may refill his empty veins with youthful blood' ll. 332-334). Medea chastises Pelias' daughters for hesitating when confronted with the frail old body of their father. She commands them to take out their blades and drain their fathers withering life blood so that she can fill his dry veins with her life-giving brew. Unlike Medea, Pelias' daughters are unable to even contemplate harming a mortal body even if they were doing it to save someone. In this moment Medea has become the instigator of death and violence. At Medea's urging, they blindly start slashing at their father's body as he begs them to stop. Before Pelias is able to further beg for his life:

Plura locuturo cum verbis guttura Colchis  
 abstulit et calidis laniatum mersit in undis.  
 Quod nisi pennatis serpentibus isset in auras,  
 Non exempta foret poena:

When he was going to say more words the Colchian severed  
 his throat and plunged his mangled limbs into the hot water.  
 But if she had not gone away to the airs with her winged snakes,  
 she would not have been freed from punishment (ll. 348-351).

Medea quickly severs Pelias' throat before he is able to beg for mercy. There is no hesitation in her movements to strike Pelias down, much in the same way as their wasn't any when she drained Aeson of his life-blood. She quickly throws his mangled body into the scorching water that is devoid of any life giving ingredients. Once she has succeeded in her treachery, she quickly

makes her escape so as to avoid the punishment that is her due for not only tricking the daughters of Pelias into believing that she was sincere in her promise to restore their fathers youth but also for delivering the final death blow against a man who was completely powerless. In this moment, Medea has become the one thing she dreaded most in lines 32-33: the child of the vicious tigress with a heart filled with iron and evils. It is in this moment where the virtuous Medea is viciously torn apart along with Pelias' body.

The Medea we are witness to at this moment is someone who takes immense pleasure in killing those who have no power to fight back. She flees, not because she is a coward, but because the wicked deed has already been done and she must now go off into the world and find other lives to destroy through her crafts. At this moment it is important to remember the way in which Medea reacted to Pelias' death in the *Heroides*. In the epistle, Medea can barely mention what Pelias' daughters did to his body at lines 129-130. In the context of the letter, Medea is so full of shame and remorse over what she compelled those maidens to do out of love and devotion for their father. Yet, in Book VII all of that remorse and regret is all but eradicated by Ovid in order to destabilize and alter his audience's perception of not only this moment but also of Medea's reaction to what she has persuaded others to do. It is especially poignant in this moment, since Medea is punished with exile to Corinth for her crimes, while in the epic she is able to escape the repercussions of her actions but still decides to go to Corinth to continue feeding her obsession with death and violence.

After Medea has made her successful escape from Pelias' palace, Ovid decides to not only speed up the tempo of the narrative but also provide us with a catalogue of the different places Medea passes over with her chariot. Each place he names, Ovid decides to describe the

way in which mortal bodies were transformed in one way or another until he finally has Medea land in Corinth. But just as quickly as she arrives at Corinth, she swiftly exits after leaving death and destruction in her wake. Ovid says:

sed postquam Colchis arsit nova nupta venenis  
 flagrantemque domum regis mare vidit utrumque,  
 sanguine natorum perfunditur inpius ensis,  
 ultaque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma.

But after the new bride burns with Colchian poisons  
 and both seas see the blazed house of the king,  
 the wicked sword is dyed with the blood of her sons,  
 and the mother, having taken her vengeance wickedly, fled the weapons  
 of Jason.(ll. 394-397).

The first thing Medea does on arrival at Corinth, from what Ovid narrates, is incinerate not only Jason's *nova nupta* but also Creon's house. It is in this instance where Medea's prophecy at the end of the *Heroides* comes to pass. She is not only successful in setting ablaze Creusa with the same fires that first consumed her but also engulfs Creon's palace in flames for promising his daughter to Jason. Her next major act of violence also fulfills her promise of following where he anger leads her, but in a way she did not foresee. After Creusa and Creon have been dealt with, Medea decides to kill her children in cold blood so as to leave Jason with nothing but pain and grief, yet she is only addressed as a mother after her children she has killed them. Medea is just barely able to escape Jason's wrath after having taken her vengeance in the most vicious way possible. In this final act of mass violence, Ovid does not supply his audience with the context in which to understand Medea's motivation for killing so many people. Ovid is in this moment making a very deliberate decision not to provide her with justifications, aside from vengeance, for heartlessly committing such violent actions because it would alter his audience's perception



of Medea as an assassin. He wants his audience to believe that she is a heartless killing machine who only cares about hurting others. This is made poignantly clear one final time when she arrives at Athens.

After Medea has committed her last acts of violence in the narrative, we see as she makes one last stop in Athens. Ovid is at this point in the narrative using Medea as vehicle in order to arrive at Athens and introduce a new subject matter. Once Medea arrives at Athens, Ovid quite quickly moves her out of the narrative with one last attempted murder. Medea escapes Corinth seeking asylum in Athens since she can no longer go home or to Iolcus, Jason's home, because of all of the crimes and betrayals she has committed up until that point. In the end, Medea ends up married to the king of Athens, Aegeus. However, she is not in Athens for long before she tries to kill Theseus, Aegeus' long lost son, out of jealousy. When her plot is discovered by both Aegeus and Theseus, "effugit illa necem nebulis per carmina motis" (That woman escaped death with mists stirred by her incantations ll. 424). Just as quickly as Medea is introduced into the narrative, she just as quickly flown out it. Medea for the last time in the entirety of the *Metamorphoses*, escapes death and punishment at the hands of those who have become her enemy because of her penchant for violence. In this last moment of violence, Ovid combines Medea's persona of enchantress with that of assassin. He has ultimately created a very dangerous sinister version of Medea, that until now has been absent from her myth.

At the beginning of Book VII of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid allows Medea herself to create the persona that she wanted projected into her audiences minds and memories of her. Ovid in turn, sets out to completely alter their perception of who and what they think Medea is. He subtly starts to morph his audience's understanding of Medea by allowing them to bear witness to a side of her that is only alluded to throughout each reiteration of her myth: Medea's goddess given craft. Ovid makes it his mission to demonstrate the hidden sacred rituals and spells of Hecate's cult in order to give them a glimpse of the terrible power the lies just beneath. He

lingers on specific moments were all three personas—Medea as innocent, enchantress, and assassin—are felt and are working in tandem to at first help others. But, Ovid then takes this idea a step further and decides to completely eradicate Medea’s virtuous heart so that we are only left with two very unstable and volatile personas. It is because of Ovid’s elimination of the persona created by Medea herself that Medea suddenly becomes this entity that is constantly looking to either to instigate violence or perpetuate it in some way. Ovid is essentially disassembling the literary memory of Medea in order to create his own memory of this simultaneously compelling but troubling mythological figure.

### *divulsaque membra: The Scattered Remnants of Medea in Ovid*

In much the same way that Medea is forced to flee Corinth and Athens because of her crimes against their royal families, Ovid too is forced out of Rome and into exile, in Tomis, for his own misdeeds against the Roman Emperor<sup>39</sup>. Yet, this banishment did not hinder him from continuing to actively compose poetry; in fact it inspired him to once again write in elegy, but not in the same context or in the same way as we saw him do in the *Heroides*. In the *Tristia*, Ovid not only decides to use elegy in its original Greek context as poetry of grief and lamentation but also uses this genre of poetry to talk about his emotions and circumstances. Throughout this collection of epistles, Ovid repeatedly brings in figures from mythology in order to lament his situation, plead with Augustus to allow him back into Rome, and ask his friends and family for help in changing Augustus’ mind<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> See chapter 1 footnote 25 for my discussion on Augustus’ banishment of Ovid.

<sup>40</sup> See Claassen, 2001 p. 44-64 for extensive tables listing the mythological figures that appear not only in the *Tristia* but also in all of his other extant works.

After Medea rides out of the narrative in Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*, she makes one last stop in her continuous journey of exile in Book 3.8 of the *Tristia*. Yet, in this moment Ovid invokes Medea not to illustrate another moment of her myth, but in order to aid him in his escape from exile. Ovid starts his poem by yearning for different mythological means of escape, it is in this context that he says, “nunc ego Medeae vellem frenare dracones,/quos habuit fugiens arce, Corinth, tua” (now I wish to bridle the dragons of Medea;/which she had fleeing from your, O Corinth, citadel ll. 3-4). Ovid wishes he had the chariot of dragons that Medea uses to flee Corinth; he wishes that he too could escape from a place that has only brought him pain and misery. In this moment, Ovid is equating his own situation with that of Medea when she escaped Corinth, specifically in the way both of their situations are fraught with the political tensions that drove them into exile to begin with. Ovid is in need of the chariot that Medea uses to escape Corinth in order to leave behind the tragedy of his own life, much like Medea did on that fateful day. Yet, it is important to remember that Medea is escaping from Corinth because of her assassination of Creusa, Creon, and her two children. How then are we to understand Ovid’s purpose for composing a poem that invokes a woman who directly attacks the political figures of Corinth and is then forced to flee because of her crimes? Ovid purposely leaves out Medea’s crimes as her motivation for escaping into exile in order to focus on Medea as purely a figure of exile who he in some ways aspires to be. Ovid’s deliberate invocation of Medea as an exile not only informs the way he goes about lamenting his displacement but also alludes back to earlier Roman interest of Medea as an exilic figure.

Once Ovid finishes invoking different means of escape, he leaves the world of myth behind and returns back to the reality of yearning to escape his situation. Ovid wishes he could

see the beloved form of his home as well as the faces of his friends and his wife. Unlike Medea, Ovid wishes to return back home and regain all that he has lost, while Medea is forced to seek asylum in Athens and continue being an exile. Yet, Ovid's wish soon takes a bitter turn once he realizes "stulte, quid haec frustra votis puerilibus optas,/quae non ulla tibi fertque feretque dies" (Fool, why do you in vain wish with silly prayers for these things,/which no day brings nor will bring to you ll. 11-12). Ovid questions his need to return home even when he knows that it is a futile wish and nothing will ever come of it. He chastises his own fanciful ideas of ever returning to see those he holds dear, knowing that Augustus' anger has not lessened nor has his will been moved into allowing him entry back into Rome. At first, Ovid is unable to stop himself from hoping that he will one day return to his own land. However, he soon realizes how pointless it is to wish for something that is completely out of his control. He scorns himself for letting such fanciful fantasies take root in his mind forcing him to think about the people who he misses the most but is unable to see because of his banishment. In this moment he is reminded of the fact that he has no real options available to him, much like Medea did not when she was fleeing from Corinth.

Even though Medea is not seeking to return home, she too is quick to criticize her own flights of fancy and dwelling upon the past. She also demonstrates how alone and powerless she feels when confronted with the reality of her own situation. In Ennius' tragedy *Medea in Exul*<sup>41</sup>, we are presented with a moment where Medea is forced to deliberate where she is to go now that she has been exiled from Corinth. Although not much of Ennius' tragedy survives to us there is one fragment in where Medea says, "Quo nunc me vortam? Quod iter incipiam ingredi?/Domum

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<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 1 p. 20-22 for my discussion on Ennius and his tragedy.

paternamne anne ad Peliae filias” (Where now am I to turn? What journey am I to begin to advance on?/Towards my paternal home, to the daughters of Pelias fr. 284-285). Medea questions who and where can turn to for help in her greatest moment of need, especially since she can no longer rely on Jason or own family to give her aid in this moment. At this point in Medea’s narrative she is no longer welcome in Colchis, Iolcus, or Corinth, she has essentially run out options and is only left with the memories of the bridges she has burned in her pursuit to help Jason. Ovid and Medea are both at the moment in their lives where they are constantly reminded of what they once had, but foolishly lost by way of breaking the social and political norms of their respective homes. They have both come to accept their fate and have come to the realization that they will probably never be able to set foot back in their homelands again because of the wrath they ignited in the rulers of either their home, like Ovid, or while a guest in someone else's home, like Medea has in Corinth. Both Medea and Ovid are unable to stop themselves from lamenting their present circumstances and wishing that they had a better future to look forward to.

However, Ovid is quick to remind himself that not all hope is completely lost because Augustus has the power to allow him back into Rome, if he so wished. Once he finishes berating himself, Ovid quickly changes the tone of his poem from self-deprecating to laudatory. He is rather quick to praise and show deference to Augustus when he decides to try and appeal to the only man who has the power to actually allow him back into Rome. What began as a poem of yearning for escape, swiftly changes to one concerned with supplicating Augustus to change his mind and provide Ovid with his own chariot drawn by dragons. Ovid even says, “forsitan hoc olim, cum iam satiaverit iram,/tum quoque sollicitia mente rogandus erit” (Perhaps one day,

when he will have satisfied his present anger,/then I too will with an agitated mind make this request ll. 19-20). Ovid hopes that one day one of his pleas will not fall on deaf ears, but entice Augustus to change his mind and allow Ovid to return to Rome. He realizes that while Augustus remains angry with him, he will never have the opportunity to return home. His hope is that once Augustus has satisfied his anger, he will be given an actual opportunity to plead his case before him. Yet, Ovid is afraid that even when Augustus' anger has dissipated he still will not allow Ovid to return from exile. In this moment, Ovid's mind is agitated/anxious because he fears Augustus' answer to his request, be it good nor bad. The only thing that Ovid wants more than returning back home to Rome is changing the way in which Augustus perceives him. He no longer wants to be perceived as the young poet who he once was, much like Medea no longer wants to be viewed as someone who is constantly hurting others for either her or Jason's gain.

When Medea is given the opportunity to change the way in which her father perceives her and her actions she does not hesitate to seize the moment. In Pacuvius' tragedy *Medus*<sup>42</sup>, he imagines what it would be like for an exile to return home after not only having been gone for years but also having betrayed familial bonds. Despite the tragedy's fragmentary nature, there is one scene that demonstrates Medea's confrontation with her father for, what we can assume, is the first time since her betrayal and subsequent escape with Jason. She says, "Cum te expetebant omnes florentissimo/regno, reliqui; nunc desertum ab omnibus/summo periculo sola ut restitutum paro" (When all men were seeking you because of your most prosperous/kingdom, I abandoned you; now abandoned by all/I alone with the greatest peril prepare a plan so that I can restore you fr. 261-263). Medea immediately admits one of the ways in which she failed her father, by abandoning him at the height of his power. But she redeems herself now by being present when

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<sup>42</sup> See chapter 1 footnote 20 for my discussion on Pacuvius' tragedy.

he needs her the most. She vows that she will restore him to the throne that was taken away from him by his brother Perses. Unfortunately, these are the only lines that survive from the tragedy describing how Medea felt about arriving at Colchis and confronting her father. Even though Aetes response or reaction to Medea do not survive, this fragment still shows the way in which she is trying to make up for her wrongs by offering to help her father. In this imagined moment of homecoming, Medea is wasting no time in showing her father how she has changed and how she is now ready to become his defender. Even though Ovid would probably not have imagined his own return home in the way Pacuvius envisions Medea, he would have probably set out to apologize to Augustus and demonstrate the way in which he has changed since being sent away to Tomis in 8 CE. Medea is in this moment proving to be a good model of how Ovid should demonstrate the extent of his own changed state.

Yet, Ovid would be more at ease with his displacement if Augustus were to decide to place him in another location. Once again the tone of the poem changes now from laudatory to desperation. Ovid sets aside, at least for the moment, his praise and his beseeching that Augustus restore him back to Rome. He now turns his narrative to asking that Augustus, “*ex his me iubeat quolibet ire locis*” (Let him order me to go anywhere at all out of these regions ll. 22). Ovid now wishes that Augustus would send him away anywhere at all just as long as he does not have stay in Tomis anymore. He then spends a large amount of time complaining about how much he dislikes everything about Tomis. In this moment, Ovid would rather become like Medea, an eternal wanderer with no actual home, than spend another day in Tomis. He would relish the idea of being described in the way Medus describes Medea in Pacuvius’ tragedy: “*Exul incerta vagat*” (She wanders as a wanderer on obscure paths fr. 239). Ovid would much rather take up the title

of *exul* (exile/wanderer) if he were given the same freedom Medea is in possession of at lines 351-390 of Book VII of the *Metamorphoses*. Just as he had given Medea the ability to wander from one place to another, he now wishes that he too could bridle her dragons in the same way he has written of Medea doing in not only the past but also at the very beginning of this poem. Medea has once again become the figure who Ovid would most like to emulate in this moment of utter entrapment in a land he abhors.

Ovid's main purpose for invoking Medea in *Tristia* 3.8, is not only to escape from exile but also for a moment to escape the realities of his solitary and harsh existence. Even though Medea is only mentioned at line 3, her presence can be felt throughout the poem as Ovid shifts from one sentiment to another. This poem is very evocative of the way in which he described the persona of Medea *Heroides*. But instead examining Medea's past, Ovid becomes the Medea figure in this poem to Augustus. Like Medea, Ovid is consumed with his past and wishes that he could change it, yet knowing that it is impossible. He wishes that he could change Augustus perception of him as well earn his favor so that he is able to return back home. Ovid is also drawing on this Roman fixation with Medea as a figure of exile who is able to weave in and out of different places but is never able to stay, which is in direct contrast to Ovid's own situation and inability to leave his place of exile. For Ovid, Medea becomes the ideal model of the kind of exile he wishes and aspires to be.



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