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THE METAMORPHOSIS OF OVID'S MEDEA

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THE MEDEA of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the result not only of interaction with the rich tradition of Greek and to a lesser extent Roman literature, but also of interplay with the author's own earlier poetry—with Medea's letter to Jason in *Heroides* 12 and his lost tragedy *Medea*.[1] His treatment of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7.7–424 represents his third and final attempt to elucidate this complex myth, and here, unlike his major Greek predecessors Euripides and Apollonius of Rhodes, who focus respectively on the mature Medea at Corinth and the young Medea at Colchis, he tells her story in a linear narrative that runs from her first meeting with Jason in Colchis to her final departure in disgrace from Athens.

In the opening essay of this volume, Graf demonstrates the disparate nature of the individual episodes of Medea's life. Ovid's treatment of Medea in the *Metamorphoses* exacerbates that disparity, for it is neither predictable nor uniform. For instance, while Ovid refers in only four lines to the events at Corinth, including the murder of Medea's children (7.394–97), he treats at length material largely suppressed by Euripides in which Medea's magical powers are central: Aeson's rejuvenation (159–293) and the murder of Pelias (297–349). Furthermore, Ovid's linear narrative lacks the psychological unity that Euripides and Apollonius in book 3 of his *Argonautica* achieve with their focus on one time and place. Instead, in the *Metamorphoses* Ovid passes abruptly from a sympathetic portrayal of Medea as love-sick maiden to a tragicomic account of her career as accomplished *pharmaceutria* (witch) and murderess.[2] The Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is not a coherent, rounded

[1] On Ovid's lost tragedy see Nikolaidis 1985:383–87.

[2] Thus Anderson 1972:262 introduces the first story that clearly presents Medea to us as a witch: "The Medea we see here has very little to do with the love-torn girl we have watched earlier. Now she is an accomplished witch, delighting in her powers and

character. Her role as Jason's wife and the mother of his children is traditionally a powerful and complex one. But the young Medea who bares her soul at the start of Ovid's narrative becomes in her maturity a one-dimensional figure of evil that arouses neither sympathy nor revulsion.

In *Metamorphoses* 7 Ovid offers an implied contrast to his own procedure in *Heroides* 12, a poem that takes the form of a retrospective letter written by Medea to Jason on the eve of her slaughter of their children. The epistle skillfully combines the two temporal and spatial frameworks of Euripides and Apollonius—mother and girl, Corinth and Colchis. By giving Medea control over the narrative, Ovid is able to smooth over the inconsistencies in her character.[3] The few hints of Medea's dreadful powers in *Heroides* 12 do little to detract from her self-representation as an unjustly injured wife and lover, the victim of an ungrateful Jason.[4] The letter plays upon the notion of

rather amusing us by her skill. Except for a momentary conversation between Jason and Medea, we hear nothing of the passionate love which is the theme of 7.9–99, of Apollonius 3 and Euripides' tragedy; here we remain in the make-believe world of marvel created in 7.100ff." For a different view see Rosner-Siegel 1982:231–43. Rosner-Siegel divides the myth into three stages, each marked by a change of character and moral deterioration: Medea and Jason, Medea and Aeson, Medea and Pelias. His interpretation depends upon the hypothesis that Medea's failure to keep Jason's love explains the contrast between the youthful and the mature Medea, but the change in Ovid's Medea resists a single interpretation. Jason is virtually absent from the second half of the myth in which Medea appears as an autonomous figure of supernatural powers and moral questions remain implicit, not explicit.

[3] See the discussion of *Her.* 12 in Verducci 1985:66–81, who comments: "Medea's epistle to Jason is the only literary artifact preserved from antiquity in which the mature, demonic Medea of Euripides' play speaks with the same voice as the young, sympathetically engaging Medea of Apollonius Rhodes' *Argonautica*. What is most surprising in this diminutive fact of literary history is not that no other author attempted what Ovid did, but rather that Ovid, against so many odds, succeeded. The agency for the reconciliation of the youthful and the mature Medea accomplished in Ovid's *Heroides* 12 is memory ..." (71). H. Jacobson 1974:109–23 likewise sees the poem as a unified composition, generated by the idea of presenting Medea's entire career from her point of view, but unlike Verducci, he finds the poem plagued by a dull uniformity. On the authenticity of *Her.* 12 as an Ovidian composition see Hinds 1993, esp. 9–21, on the epistle's relationship to *Met.* 7.

[4] Interestingly, H. Jacobson 1974 and Verducci 1985 have entirely different responses to Medea's letter. Jacobson sees Medea's letter as a futile attempt to cover up her true "contemptible personality" (119). While accepting that Medea does engage in some distortion, Verducci argues that "throughout *Heroides* 12 we sympathize with Medea, and must sympathize with her, because however distorted her memory of the past, she does not seem to lie. She is not hypocritical. She is not covert. All that she relates is so suffused with emotion that the narrative of past events is a secondary product of what she tells us she wishes, regrets, or suffers" (79–80).

Medea as the abandoned woman, a sympathetic elegiac type, and not as *pharmaceutria*.

The humanization of Medea undertaken by Apollonius and continued by Ovid in *Heroides* 12 does not square well, however, with the strong tradition concerning Medea's evil supernatural powers. By representing both disparate branches of the tradition in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid thus shows that the tradition as a whole is problematic, for how in fact can the love-stricken Medea who cannot control her own nature be reconciled with the Medea who controls and even alters nature with her drugs? How does the trembling maiden become the murderess? Only, it seems, by suppressing one branch of the tradition, as Ovid has his Medea do in *Heroides* 12. By juxtaposing in the *Metamorphoses* the two Medeas of literary tradition, the sympathetic girl and the wicked sorceress, Ovid invites reflection on the difficulties and dangers involved in the rewriting of myth.

The dissonant structure of the full Medea story has one clear advantage, however. It removes some of the moral pressure from Medea herself. Questions concerning marriage, love, betrayal, and woman's marginal status tend to be engulfed by the horror of Medea's act of infanticide. Ovid's cardboard figure of evil does not invite reflection on such questions, nor does she arouse strong emotions. But Ovid does find a way to explore the urgent moral issues that are involved in the Medea story without the preexisting biases that result from her overdetermination as a figure of evil: the foreign enchantress and the bad mother. He surrounds the myth of Medea with other myths about women and marriage, allowing him to explore in different ways questions of female power that are elided in the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7. Recurrent themes in the myths of Procne, Philomela, and Tereus (6.424–676), Scylla and Minos (8.1–151), Procris and Cephalus (7.694–862), and Boreas and Orythia (6.677–721) are filial duty, marriage, betrayal, the exercise of power through violent crime, and, connected to all these themes, the problem of a woman's physical and psychological displacement. There are other tales about marriage in the *Metamorphoses*, but the four I will proceed to discuss are so closely related to the myth of Medea—by means of their structural relationship to one another, the family connections between the protagonists, and their shared thematic concerns—that they can conveniently be called a "marriage group."[5]

[5] The recent study of *Met.* 2.549–835 by Keith 1992 argues for the importance of the structurally and thematically related sequence as a formative principle of Ovidian narrative. I obviously differ here from Otis 1966:chap. 6, who groups together the tales of Procne and Scylla with those of Byblis, Myrrha, and Ceyx and Alcyone because of their generic affiliations with tales of amatory pathos. Otis excludes the tale of Procris and Cephalus from this group because its martial context approximates it to epic; its content, however, a lament for a lost love, is a classic elegiac theme. Cf. Pöschl 1959 and below, n. 39. The Ceyx and Alcyone myth (*Met.* 11.410–78), which Otis regards as the "resolution" to the tales of amatory pathos, stands structurally and thematically apart from the others. Alcyone is not displaced by marriage and her husband does not betray her trust: his departure from home on a mission unrelated to his love for his wife motivates the tragedy. Conversely, Scylla's tale does belong: although she does not marry Minos, she *desires* marriage with him, and her actions and thoughts are directed to that end. I thus classify this myth not as a "digression," (cf. the generic classification of Pechillo 1990) but as an important variant in the marriage group. Larmour 1990 argues that parts of one story in this group are woven into another because Ovid could not engineer a metamorphosis, or wished to avoid repetition of a hackneyed theme, but Ovid shows himself often capable of transforming a well-known myth into something vital and engaging. G. Jacobsen 1984 points out the similarities between the Apollo-Daphne myth and the Tereus-Procne myth. In recalling these similarities, however, Ovid also demonstrates the difference between gods and humans: both are aroused by *amor* but only the latter suffer.

Through these myths Ovid alerts us to the complex issues surrounding a woman who violently resists dispassionate scrutiny. In the *Metamorphoses* he offers not one Medea but different figures of a single type—a woman who is so driven by passion that she oversteps cultural conventions and acts independently of her traditional male guardian, whether father or husband.

This paper will explore two aspects of the narrative of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7: first its bipartite structure and then its narrative relationship to the other "marriage tales" that form a cluster in books 6, 7, and 8. As Medea is removed from her family and known ways to a strange and unfamiliar land, her physical and psychological displacement is echoed in the dissonant structure of the Ovidian narrative. The human issues surrounding such displacement are most fully played out in the surrounding myths that form, as it were, a magnetic field of which the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is the center.

Young Medea

In the first part of Ovid's narrative (7.1–158), the young Medea is presented as a sympathetic character. The account of her falling in love with Jason is conveyed in large part through her first dramatic soliloquy in the poem (11–71). Here her intimate feelings and inner moral struggle are revealed. Medea is introduced as a young girl caught

in an extremely difficult situation and unable to cope with the new emotions that threaten to overwhelm her:

> concipit interea validos Aeëtias ignes
> et luctata diu, postquam ratione furorem
> vincere non poterat, "frustra, Medea, repugnas:
> nescio quis deus obstat" ait.
>
> (9–12)[6]

> Meanwhile, Aeëtes' daughter harbours burning emotions;
> she struggled a long time to conquer her mad passion with reason,
> but finally said, "it's useless, Medea, to fight back:
> some god is against you."

Medea debates these rival claims of reason and passion, *ratio* and *furor*, in her soliloquy without any clear resolution; the chiastic arrangement of lines 19–20, *aliudque cupido, / mens aliud suadet* (your desire and your mind urge you in different directions), reflects the inner bind in which she finds herself.[7] Her debate hinges on the fact that she is in love with a foreigner who is, moreover, her father's enemy. To help Jason means to betray her country and her father. Medea makes no claim to special knowledge or powers that can help her cope with an overriding passion; rather her opening remark, *frustra, Medea, repugnas* (it's useless, Medea, to fight back; 11), draws attention to the theme reiterated throughout this passage: her helplessness in the face of a love that she recognizes is forbidden by duty to her father and her fatherland.

That same helplessness and vulnerability is projected into her imagined future with Jason. Thus, as she anticipates her fears of the dangerous voyage back to Greece, she consoles herself with the thought that her lover's embraces will drive away her fears: *nempe tenens, quod amo, gremioque in Iasonis haerens / per freta longa ferar: nihil illum amplexa verebor* (Of course I shall be carried far across the sea holding what I love / and clinging to Jason's lap: I shall be afraid of nothing when I clasp him to me, 66–67). This from a woman whose task it will be to keep Jason safe from terrors as great or greater than the Argonauts encountered on their voyage! Medea is sympathetically portrayed as she reveals her innermost thoughts. Her comment, *video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor!* (I see and approve the better course, / I follow the worse, 20–21), echoes Euripides' Medea, who at lines 1078–79 of the Greek play claims that she recognizes the rational course, but her anger will not let her take it. Euripides makes Medea speak these words before she kills her children; her failure to do what she clearly sees is reasonable and right is therefore appalling. But the transferal of these words to the youthful, untested Medea makes them disarming, a sign of her love rather than her barbarism.[8] Her irrational passion drives her to help, not to harm. Medea emerges in the first part of *Metamorphoses* 7 not as a being with supernatural powers that can control the universe, but as a struggling young girl who knows what is "right" but is impelled by her passion to act otherwise. In speaking to herself, Medea is also speaking directly to her readers, who are thus invited to engage in her personal dilemma.

In keeping with Medea's sympathetic portrayal as an innocent and vulnerable young woman, her powers of witchcraft are not mentioned in her soliloquy. Medea is a victim of passion, not the controller of powerful forces. When Medea sees Jason in a seemingly unplanned encounter in Hecate's grove, we are made to see how ironically slender are the inner claims of *pietasque pudorque* (filial duty and modesty, 72) when confronted with a powerful love.[9] Her moral collapse is swiftly conveyed in the appropriate imagery of fire: *et iam fortis erat, pulsusque resederat ardor, / cum videt Aesoniden, exstinctaque flamma reluxit* (And now she was resolute, and the fire of her passion, beaten down, had sunk low, / but when she sees Jason, the flame that had been extinguished flared anew; 76–77). Fire, the very element over which Medea will exercise control as she protects Jason from the fire-breathing bulls, is here applied to Medea's psychological state, over which she clearly has no control as she switches suddenly from propriety to passion.

In the *Argonautica*, Medea's representation as love-stricken young girl is combined with her superior knowledge of magic, for at her meeting place with Jason, Medea prescribes elaborate magical rituals for him to perform prior to his encounter with the brazen bulls (3.1029–51). In the *Metamorphoses* Ovid compresses the giving of the important

[6] Text for the *Metamorphoses* is that of Anderson 1988; commentaries are those of Bömer 1976–77 and Anderson 1972. Translations are my own.

[7] At least, as Anderson 1972 points out in his note on line 11, Medea's attempt to resist her desires, fruitless though it may be, makes her far more sympathetic than the gods, who show no moral compunction when they fall in love.

[8] On the importance of Eur. *Medea* 1078–79 for the philosophers see Dillon in this volume, and his conclusion: "Medea remains for the philosophers a dangerous, barbarian woman, occasionally to be pitied (Epictetus), but generally to be condemned as the paradigmatic example of a disordered soul" (p. 218).

[9] Ovid omits the role of the sister in persuading Medea to meet with Jason, thus focusing solely on Medea's inner feelings. Cf. Ap. Rhod. 3.664–741; Ovid *Her.* 12.62–66.

charms to Jason into two perfunctory, paratactic lines: *Creditus accepit cantatas protinus herbas / Edidicitque usum laetusque in tecta recessit* (He was believed and immediately received the charmed herbs / and learned their application and happily returned home, 98–99). Ovid emphasizes instead Medea's insistence upon an oath promising Jason's protection and marriage (89–98). She remains a sympathetic figure even in her capitulation to Jason and *amor*, for although she insists upon the oath she is frankly aware of the power of her own self-deception, which she is helpless to stop: *quid faciam, video, nec me ignorantia veri / decipiet, sed amor* (I see what I am doing, so love, not ignorance of the truth, / will ensnare me; 92–93). Medea's open recognition of her human weakness makes her an endearingly vulnerable character at this point of the story. Her implicit magical powers cannot help her control her agonized feelings, and thus they play little part in the initial presentation of her character.[10]

The human terms in which Medea's dilemma is presented are made more vivid by the absence of nearly all divine or supernatural elements in this first part of the narrative. Ovid makes no mention here of Medea's role as priestess of Hecate. Medea's meeting of Jason at the goddess's ancient altar, *ad antiquas Hecates Perseidos aras* (74), provides us with the sole mention of Hecate. Nothing is made here of Hecate's associations with magic and witchcraft, although the description of the altar's surroundings in a secluded, shady wood at line 75 could have led to some demonstration of the goddess's or Medea's supernatural powers. Instead, with the unusual patronymic *Hecates Perseidos* (Hecate, child of Perses), Ovid alludes obliquely to Medea's close family connections with Hecate. According to one well-known tradition Perses was Aeëtes' brother and the father of Hecate.[11] An adjective such as *triformis* (triple-formed) would have more clearly associated Hecate with the supernatural.[12] The epithet *Perseidos* instead brings to the fore the competing claims of family and love. Medea betrays her family at a place consecrated to a family member.[13]

[10] Thus Rosner-Siegel 1982:236 comments that "this lack of information and detail with regard to magic, and the use of the magical herbs by Jason and not by Medea, once again stress Medea's characterization so far in the narrative as a normal, mortal woman in love. Her witch-character remains, for the moment at least, only in the background."

[11] On the family connections between Hecate and Medea see Bömer 1976–77:*ad* 74.

[12] When Jason swears to be true to Medea, he invokes Hecate in this ritualistic context as *triformis* (goddess of three forms, 7.94).

[13] In *Her.* 12.67–70 Jason and Medea meet at the grove of Diana. Although Diana is one aspect of Hecate, the choice of the name of the goddess associated with virginity is ironically appropriate to a scene in which Medea, described as *puellae simplicis* (naive girl, 89–90), is manipulated by Jason into believing he will be always faithful to her in marriage.

[14] In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, as soon as Jason enters Aeëtes' palace, Eros, bribed by his mother with the promise of a new ball, shoots an arrow straight into Medea's heart (3.275–84). Ovid's Medea opens her soliloquy with the remark *nescio quis deus obstat* (some god is against you, 12), an opening attempt to rationalize emotions that her subsequent speech reveals as purely internalized.

Moreover, the gods play no apparent part in motivating the love affair. In the *Metamorphoses*, we hear nothing of the machinations of Aphrodite and Eros that in the *Argonautica* prompt Medea to fall in love.[14] Indeed, the gods show no interest in either Medea or Jason and are not mentioned as active participants in the drama.

Like Medea, Jason appears stripped of his associations with the divine. This is most notable on his first appearance in the poem, when Medea meets him at the altar of Hecate. Apollonius, drawing upon Nausicaa's encounter with Odysseus in book 6 of the *Odyssey* (229ff.), describes Jason's appearance as greatly enhanced by Hera (3. 919–26), a motif that Vergil powerfully reinforces in Dido's first encounter with an Aeneas gift-wrapped by Venus in book 1 of the *Aeneid* (587–93). But Ovid chooses to deny this convention. It is simply by chance, *casu* (84), not by divine agency, that Jason happens to look more handsome than usual when he meets Medea (84). Moreover, whereas Apollonius' Jason is made to look as if he were semidivine (3.919–27), and Vergil's Aeneas is compared to a god, *deo similis* (1.589), we are told that Ovid's Medea thinks that Jason looks like a god but that she is mad to make this assumption: *nec se mortalia demens / ora videre putat* (the crazed girl thinks she sees a face that is not mortal, 87–88). As we have seen, her love involves self-deception, as Medea herself realizes when she blames love, not ignorance, on her ensnarement (92–93, quoted above). Nonetheless she persists in it. Jason is not given any direct speech in this encounter; we see him through Medea's eyes, a factor that reinforces the obsessive and one-sided quality of her passion.

In its omission of divine agencies and its subjective focusing upon the heroine, the first half of the Medea narrative provides a psychological study of how human passion involves contradictory emotions and voluntary self-deception. Even in the following episode, when Jason meets the fire-breathing bulls (100–48), Medea's magical powers remain in the background; she is cold with fear lest Jason not succeed

(134–38).[15] The climax to the quest for the Golden Fleece—the slaying of the dragon and the return voyage to Greece—is passed over in one long sentence (152–58), a sign that love and the exploration of feelings are more important in this narrative than actions and magical powers. The first half of the Medea story in *Metamorphoses* 7 does not prepare us for the following parts of the narrative, in which Medea, now Jason's expatriate wife, appears as an accomplished witch and scant attention is paid to her feelings or to motives for her deeds. This second section falls into four episodes: the myth of Aeson's rejuvenation (159–293), the myth of Pelias' murder (297–351), Medea's journey to Corinth and Athens (351–403), and the debacle with Theseus (404–24).

Medea the Witch

The first and longest of these episodes marks an immediate contrast to what has gone before. While admittedly a good deed, the rejuvenation of Aeson is presented in a way that emphasizes Medea's extraordinary powers and her remoteness from ordinary humans. Her reply to Jason's request that she give some of his life span to his father reveals little emotion for her spouse, who was the focus of her previous speeches:

> "quod" inquit
> "excidit ore tuo, coniunx, scelus? ergo ego cuiquam
> posse tuae videor spatium transcribere vitae?
> nec sinat hoc Hecate, nec tu petis aequa, sed isto,
> quod petis, experiar maius dare munus, Iason.
> arte mea soceri longum temptabimus aevum,
> non annis renovare tuis, modo diva triformis
> adiuvet et praesens ingentibus adnuat ausis."
>
> (171–78)

> "What criminal words have fallen from your lips, husband?"
> she said. "Do I appear to have the power to transfer to anyone
> the span of your life? Hecate would not allow this; besides,
> you do not make a reasonable request. But I shall try
> to give a greater gift than you seek, Jason.
> We shall try to renew my father-in-law's long life

[15] There is nothing spine-chilling or horrific about Medea's recourse to a supplementary spell and secret arts (137–38). Vague and unspecified, her magical arts here function much as the superstitious muttering of a prayer in moments of crisis.

> by my art, not by your years, provided the triple-formed
> goddess helps and by her presence assents to my great experiments."

Medea speaks for the first time of her art (176) and of her close relationship through magic with Hecate, here called "triple-formed" (177). Her refusal to take away years from Jason's life span seems not to be motivated by love.[16] Having abandoned her own father, she is moved first by Jason's filial piety (169–70). Her reply to him elaborates a second motive, her ambition as witch: she desires to try something even greater, *maius ... munus* (175). Medea wants to test her powers as witch. She is like a heart surgeon who refuses to do a transplant but insists upon the impossible, the rejuvenation of the heart itself.

In this narrative, speech is directed toward the proposal or description of magical ritual, not toward the individuation of feelings. Medea's longest speech here is a ritualistic prayer to various deities to help her with her magical spells (192–219). Attention is focused not upon Medea's thoughts but upon her incantatory words and her superhuman actions. Here, where we see Medea for the first time practicing her supernatural craft, Ovid plays up her new appearance as a witch. The previously fearful maiden now shows no fear of the dark and silent woods, and she reveals her distance from the world of ordinary mortals by filling the nocturnal silences with ritualistic triple howlings, *ternisque ululatibus* (190).[17] Ovid goes into tremendous detail—112 lines in all—in describing the magical rituals involved in Aeson's rejuvenation (179–287). The excess of detail is part of the humor of Ovid's portrayal of Medea as witch. When he comes at last to her cauldron (264–84) and begins to itemize at length its exotic and horrible ingredients—foreign vegetables, snake skins, deer's liver, and crow's head among them—he indicates that his patience is exhausted with the length and oddity of the list by mockingly concluding that she added a thousand other nameless items (275). This hyperbole establishes his segregation as narrator from Medea. Whereas previously he provided close insight into Medea's feelings, he now preserves an ironic distance tinged with humor. He plays here with the idea of the witch and gives us no further insight into Medea as a person. Through his focus on externals in this second part of the narrative, Ovid pays scant attention to the motives for Medea's

[16] Cf. Rosner-Siegel 1982:238, who sees this speech as demonstrating Medea's "misguided love." But Medea says nothing of *amor* here.

[17] Cf. *Met.* 14.405 where, in a rather pat piece stereotyping the witch's craft, Circe (Medea's aunt) summons Hecate *longis ... ululatibus* (with lengthy howlings).

deeds and permits no further glimpses into her inner thoughts. His Medea has become remote and fantastic.

Apart from the speech with which the myth of Aeson's rejuvenation opens, Medea has no further conversation or interaction with Jason. Although traditionally the mature Medea's relationship with Jason is of prime importance, in *Metamorphoses* 7 her relationship with him and his family members disappears from the story.[18] Apart from the brief reference to the infanticide at Corinth (394–97), we hear nothing further of Medea the wife and nothing at all of Medea the mother; she appears exclusively as a witch. Jason plays a very minor role in the entire second part. His speech requesting new life for Aeson is his only one (164–68), and thereafter he drops out of the narrative. Thus in the following story of the murder of Pelias (297–351), Ovid breaks with precedent by excluding Jason from any involvement in the deed. Although other sources, including *Heroides* 12, insist that in the murder of Pelias Medea was merely the instrument of Jason's desire for vengeance, no motivation is provided in the *Metamorphoses* for Medea's masterminding of Pelias' murder beyond the weak transitional disclaimer with which Ovid crosses from the story of rejuvenation to that of Pelias' murder, *neve doli cessent* (her purpose was to prevent any lack of treachery, 297).[19] Here then, since Jason plays no part in setting the crime in motion, Medea seemingly acts alone purely for malice's sake. She is detached from the family context that in Euripides' *Medea* plays a crucial role in articulating her moral dilemma.

Medea was moved by Jason's piety toward Aeson and the thought of her filial dereliction, but no such thoughts influence her contrivance of the murder of Pelias by his daughters. Although she is called *Aeëtias* for the second time in *Metamorphoses* 7 (326), a reminder of her disobedience to her father in a story in which she persuades others to violate their filial bonds,[20] the sensitivity with which the question of a daughter's duty is handled in the first part of the Medea myth is not found here. As Frécaut has pointed out, much of the story focuses on the gullibility of the

[18] The rejuvenated Aeson's feelings are perfunctorily described without reference to feelings of gratitude for Medea or indeed to her emotions (293–94).

[19] Cf. Apollod. 1.9.27; Hyg. *Fab.* 24; Ovid *Her.* 12.129–32.

[20] The patronymic *Aeëtias* (daughter of Aeëtes) was first used at the start of the myth to introduce Medea's passion, *concipit interea validos Aeetias ignes* (meanwhile Aeëtes' daughter harbors burning emotions, 9), and was obviously chosen with care: a reminder of the central obstacle to Medea's passion, her father Aeëtes, is placed in the middle of the two words describing her powerful feelings.

daughters of Pelias, not on the moral failings of Medea.[21] The question of filial *pietas* devolves upon them, not upon the one-dimensional Medea, and because of their grimly comic folly in trusting Medea, the story lacks a tragic dimension and moral complexity. The narrator's distance from Medea in this act of evil is articulated in the choice of epithets he applies to her. Here for the first time he calls her the "Colchian" (296, 301, 331, 348).[22] The repeated use of this epithet serves to associate Medea with the foreign and outlandish, to distance her from common human experience as she performs her act of malice. Here too for the first time she is called by a clear term of reproach, *venefica*, "poisoner" (316).[23] The choice of epithets for Medea in the myth of Pelias again serves to remove the reader from any close identification with her. She appears as a foreign barbarian, dissociated from any cultural or familial ties with Greece.

As a witch Medea has clearly undergone a form of metamorphosis. Like many of the metamorphosed characters in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* she has lost her human characteristics, but unlike them she has retained her human form. Her flights in her chariot drawn by winged serpents assimilate her to the divine rather than the human world. Like Ovidian divinities, she operates by a different code of behavior from human beings. Her opening soliloquy debating the rival claims of passion and reason calls upon the reader to judge her in moral terms. But we cannot do so in the second half of the myth, for she increasingly appears as airborne, a sign of her literal and metaphorical removal to another plane of existence. Euripides' *Medea* ends with Medea's removal from the scene of tragedy by an airborne chariot, which appears in the play for the first time as a device providing closure. The appearance of her chariot in Ovid's narrative of Aeson's rejuvenation (218–23), early in her tale, distances Medea physically and psychologically from the human world with its moral frames of reference. Her psychological metamorphosis is accompanied by her physical removal from the world of land-bound

[21] Frécaut 1989:67–74 centers much of his discussion of the myth on the daughters of Pelias rather than on Medea. For him, the story lacks a deep sense of tragedy, for the daughters are not individualized. Instead, the story has a moral that is directed at them, "rien n'est si dangereux qu'un ignorant ami" (nothing is as dangerous as an ignorant friend, 74).

[22] The first reference occurs in the last line of the brief transitional episode, the rewarding of Bacchus' nurses (294–96), that articulates the two contrasting tales of Aeson and Pelias.

[23] The term *venefica* is used, e.g., by Hypsipyle at *Her.* 6.19 to describe (and condemn) Medea.

humans. In the second half of the myth, Medea is no longer presented within the same ethical framework as at the beginning.

One-dimensional characters cannot sustain a reader's interest for long. Not surprisingly, Medea as witch becomes of decreasing importance in the text. In the myth of Pelias she shares the stage with Pelias' foolish daughters. In her subsequent aerial journey over places connected with obscure metamorphoses, she chiefly takes on the role of observer (351–401). Corinth, the focal point of so much suffering in Euripides' play, is simply one stopping point in a long, learned journey. Instead of building up to the climactic events at Corinth, Ovid's myth of Medea winds down with a zigzag course that serves, in large part, as a narrative device by which a number of other myths involving metamorphoses can be told (351–401).[24] The first thing Ovid has to say about Corinth, the city in which Medea's most dreadful deeds were performed, is that there was a tradition there that the first people sprang from magic mushrooms (392–93). Thus the normally climactic events there are subordinated to the etiological import of Medea's journey and are given no more than a quick summary that ascribes the minimum of motivation for Medea's slaughter of her children:

> sed postquam Colchis arsit nova nupta venenis
> flagrantemque domum regis mare vidit utrumque,
> sanguine natorum perfunditur impius ensis,
> ultaque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma.
>
> (394–97)

> But after the new bride burned from the Colchian poisons
> and the Isthmus saw the king's home blazing,
> the impious sword is drenched with children's blood,
> and the mother, evilly avenged, flees Jason's weapons.

The syntax here makes Medea directly responsible only for the final act, that of flight. Beyond the brief reference to *nova nupta* (the new bride, 394) and the oblique phrase *ultaque se male mater* (the mother evilly avenged, 397), any reference to Medea's motives, such as Jason's betrayal of Medea, is conspicuously absent. The four lines dealing with what is traditionally the emotional climax of the Medea myth thus became basically a further item of antiquarian lore. In the next episode, which tells of Medea's attempted poisoning of Theseus at Athens, no explanation at all is given for her malice toward the Greek hero (398–424).

[24] Thus Bömer 1976–77 *ad* 286.

Instead, the bulk of the narrative focuses on an etiological explanation for the poison, which, Ovid reports, originated from Cerberus' foam-flecked jaws when Hercules dragged him from the Underworld (406–19). At the emotional highpoints of Medea's story—her killing of her children and attempted killing of her stepson—antiquarian interests are instead preeminent and preclude attention to the thoughts, the motives, and the troubled desires that intimately concern Medea in the myth's first half.

The emphasis upon a fantastic journey at the end of the myth rather than at the beginning marks the disruption of the traditional order of the tale and is in keeping with Medea's own displacement. She has in a sense appropriated the Argonauts' role, but at the wrong time and the wrong place in the story. The journey of the Argonauts was a traditional and important precursor to the myth of Medea's love for Jason, but at the start of book 7 Ovid, intent on pursuing Medea's feelings, rather pointedly passes over their fabulous adventures with the brief words *multaque perpessi* (having endured many things, 5). In the second part of Ovid's treatment of the myth, Medea herself undertakes a journey to bizarre, outlandish places. The girl once fearful of traveling across the sea to Greece is now transformed into a witch fearlessly crisscrossing the Mediterranean world. The reversal of the expected order of the journey points to the reversal of Medea's role from vulnerable girl to fearless adventurer. The emphasis in the journey, however, falls not upon Medea but upon the narratives embedded in the peripatetic frame. Ovid's version moves outwards from almost exclusive focus upon Medea and her feelings to a diffuse set of stories in which Medea is chiefly important as an observer, while her infamous crimes are only cursorily described.[25]

By splitting the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* into two incompatible types, Ovid suggests the difficulties and inconsistencies involved in the rewriting of tradition. The complex workings of Medea's psyche are replaced by her complex ritualistic activities and journeys. The focus shifts dramatically from internal to external events. The themes of filial and conjugal obligations that are significantly raised in the first part of the myth are not pursued in the second half, where there is virtual silence on Medea's role as wife and mother. We are invited to view Medea from two dramatically opposed perspectives, the first closely involved with her character, the other far removed. Anderson notes that in Ovid's

[25] Schubert 1989 makes an interesting attempt to trace links between each of the stories of metamorphosis and that of Medea and Jason.

Metamorphoses a person's actual physical change is usually preceded by a psychological transformation, often due to the effects of love.[26] But Ovid does not explain the reason for Medea's transformation into a sorceress and semidivine, evil being, a metamorphosis that occurs well before the drastic events at Corinth. Only the disjunctive narrative mirrors the physical and psychic displacement of Medea herself.

Absent from the second half of Ovid's myth of Medea are the suffering and personal tragedy that mark the life of the Medea who is presented as primarily wife and mother. Ovid's Medea is a figure of supernatural power for whom conjugal and maternal obligations are minimal. She successfully escapes from her evil deeds. Thus the story of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7 does not come to a definite conclusion. Rather, Medea disappears abruptly from the text as she flees from execution and Athens in one line (424), and the focus of the narrative subsequently shifts to events in that city.

The open-ended nature of Medea's story invites further reflection on issues that are elided or suppressed in Ovid's version. As a woman with supernatural powers, Medea is exceptional in her avoidance of physical punishment. Although ultimately she is excluded from human society, the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 eludes human judgment, for she is removed from the complex moral issues that traditionally sustain her story. Far different is the case for the women whose stories surround hers in books 6, 7, and 8. As mere mortals, their assertion of power inevitably leads to personal disaster and loss of identity. The tales that surround the myth of Medea examine the "missing link" in the Medea story, namely the intricate motivating factors that push a woman to violent crime and personal destruction.

Procne

The first of these interrelated stories is the myth of Procne, Philomela, and Tereus (6.424–676). Like Medea, Procne is guilty of infanticide. This crime, which is so cursorily treated in *Metamorphoses* 7, forms the climax of Procne's story. Here in book 6 Ovid explores at length the complex factors that drive to such an extraordinary act a woman who, unlike Medea, possesses no extraordinary powers and has no criminal background. At issue are Procne's marriage to a foreigner and his

[26] Anderson 1963.

betrayal of her conjugal trust. Like Medea, Procne marries a foreigner, the Thracian Tereus, but whereas Medea moves from a barbarian land to civilized Greece, Procne moves from civilized Greece to a barbarian land.[27] The results of her displacement, however, are equally disastrous. Ironically, although her marriage, unlike Medea's, is arranged by an approving father (426–28), paternal wisdom and approval do not lead to a happier conclusion.

Like Jason, Tereus betrays his wife for another woman. But he does so in an apparently irredeemable way: Philomela, the woman in question, is his sister-in-law; he rapes her; he mutilates her; he imprisons her in the woods; he then lies to his wife, saying that Philomela died on the voyage. Ovid condemns Tereus early on in the narrative with the exclamation, *pro superi, quantum mortalia pectora caecae/noctis habent!* (gods above, how much darkness human hearts contain; 472–73), and Tereus is labeled impious (482) for his violation of the kinship bonds requiring that he honor his father-in-law and sister-in-law as well as his wife. Tereus betrays not only the kinship bonds that should have made rape of his sister-in-law taboo but also the fundamental trust between husband and wife. The breaking of such trust is an important issue in the myth of Medea that Ovid virtually ignores; here in the myth of Procne he explores its disastrous consequences.

At first justice seems to be all on Procne's side, for Tereus is given no excuse for his actions. Unlike Medea, who marries Jason with blood on her hands and betrayal on her conscience, Procne starts her life with Tereus unblemished. But when Tereus violates the kinship ties that forge a link between Procne's new home and her old, Procne is in a sense displaced. Social categories are confused, as the raped Philomela recognizes when she accuses Tereus of upsetting their fixed family relations with one another: *omnia turbasti* (you have messed everything up, 537). With the fabric of her marriage rent asunder, Procne acts out her displacement in the most terrible fashion. A case of obvious right and wrong, with the husband irrefutably the guilty party, becomes a very different matter with Procne's slaying of her own child.

Unlike Euripides' Medea, Procne shows little compunction about using her son as the instrument of her vengeance. Ovid merely touches on Procne's dilemma between love for her son and love for her sister

[27] See the discussion of Joplin 1984, which explores the dynamic between civilized and barbarian in the myth. By marrying Procne, the barbarian Tereus has successfully "invaded" Athens and appropriated the princess for himself (31–33).

in a short speech in which Procne debates their rival claims (631–35). The collapsing of the social categories that stabilize marriage is demonstrated in her rejection of her maternal *pietas* (629) for a perversely redefined concept of conjugal duty: *scelus est pietas in coniuge Tereo* (for Tereus' wife, crime is a duty, 635). Conjugal duty here means killing one's offspring, an exercise of female power that defies the normative nurturing roles of wife and mother. Procne's paradoxical statement bluntly presents a moral dilemma to which there are no easy answers. The reciprocal obligations of conjugal *pietas* demand that a crime answer her husband's crime. But Procne the wronged wife thus becomes guilty of dreadful impiety.

Like Ovid's Medea, Procne undergoes a drastic metamorphosis of character. The sweet dutiful wife becomes the implacable murderess of her child. But we are at least given an explanation for Procne's empowerment in terms of Tereus' destruction of the marital and familial bonds that traditionally constrain her. On learning of her husband's betrayal, the deferential wife of the start of the myth, *blandita viro* (440), becomes a wild, barbaric woman, *terribilis Procne* (595). She is likened first to a Bacchante (590–600) and then to a tigress as she drags her own son to his death: *nec mora, traxit Ityn, veluti Gangetica cervae / lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas* (immediately she dragged Itys away, like a tigress by the Ganges dragging / through the impenetrable woods an unweaned fawn, 636–37). The simile is resonant of Tereus' rape of Philomela, in which he is described as a wolf (520–26) dragging to the dark woods a lamb or dove (527–30), a gentle, vulnerable young creature like the fawn to which Itys is now compared.[28] The comparison of Procne to a wild beast implicates Tereus in his wife's metamorphosis. Once the civilized accord and trust of her marriage is destroyed, she takes on a man's role and becomes like the barbarian Tereus in her vengeance. Indeed she surpasses Tereus in her impious cruelty, for whereas he mutilates his sister-in-law, she kills her own son. Moreover, whereas he cuts out Philomela's tongue, a savage enough act, Procne dismembers her son's body, cooks it, and serves it up to Tereus as a meal in a ghastly inversion of her wifely role. In this horrific meal, Tereus' confusion of social categories reaches its tragic

[28] Though Philomela is transformed like Procne into a resolute and savage avenging fury. After Procne has stabbed Itys to death, Philomela performs the additional and unnecessary act of cutting his throat (642–43) and even hurls the boy's head at Tereus (657–60). Her hair, sprinkled with blood (658), suggests her change of roles from victim to killer. My concern here, however, is with the connections between Medea and Procne.

climax. The ultimate similarity of Tereus, Philomela, and Procne in their use of violence is confirmed in their transformation into birds that perpetuate the cycle of violence in Tereus' endless pursuit, the women's endless flight (667–74).[29] As a swallow, with plumage perpetually stained with the marks of blood (669–70), Procne loses her complex human identity and becomes frozen in the ambiguous role of guilty victim.

Unlike Medea, Procne is at first a dutiful daughter. She marries the man her father chooses for her. But like Medea, she becomes metamorphosed into a powerful woman who operates outside all civilized bounds of restraint. The clear boundaries between male and female roles in society are blurred as Procne kills her son. Having no links with divinity, she is punished for her impious transgression. Although Procne's crime has a clear motivation, the motivation does not match the enormity of her vengeance. Ovid thus reveals the complex factors at work in an act of infanticide and our response to that act. Procne is an innocent wife who is unjustly injured, yet the sympathy that she gains is severely tested by the bloody meal she cooks for her husband. In Procne, Ovid offers a morally ambiguous picture of a woman who answers her betrayal by her husband with a violent crime.[30]

Through Procne Ovid explores the themes that are acutely compressed in his version of the Medea myth—betrayal, vengeance, and infanticide—and reveals their troubling complexities. As a version of the Euripidean Medea, Procne serves as an appropriate vehicle for exploring the difficult situation of the woman whose displacement from her homeland through marriage, followed by subsequent betrayal, leads to her repudiation of the traditional roles of womanhood. Her behavior is not complicated by the fact that she is semidivine with a criminal record. The moral ambiguities of her infanticide are instead explored in consistently human terms.

[29] Anderson 1972:*ad* 667 points out that the versions of Apollodorus and Hyginus make the metamorphosis of the women the result of the gods' intervention. Ovid, in contrast, by omitting the gods and by making the birds recall the crimes they have committed, suggests there is no escape here. Joplin 1984:45 takes this approach further and sees the metamorphosis as ironically meaning no further change: "in the final tableau all movement is frozen. Tereus will never catch the sisters, but neither will the women ever cease their flight. In such stasis, both order and conflict are preserved, but there is no hope of change."

[30] Joplin 1984:45: "The women, in yielding to violence, become just like the man who first moved against them. . . . And as literary tradition shows, the end of the story overtakes all that precedes it; the women are remembered as more violent than the man."

Scylla

Betrayal and the empowerment of women are the themes that likewise preoccupy the myth of Scylla (8.1–151) and are explored through Scylla's relationships with her father and with the man she loves, King Minos. As in the myth of Procne, the moral balance in the story shifts, although in a different direction. Initially unsympathetic, Scylla becomes less so as troubling questions are raised about the responsibility of Minos to the young woman who has granted him victory. When a woman helps a man by morally culpable means, does he then have any responsibility for her fate? This question, which is ignored in Ovid's version of the Medea myth and yet is crucial to any judgment of Jason's abandonment of Medea, is made of central importance in Ovid's treatment of Scylla.

Through the dramatic soliloquy, the same medium he uses in the myth of Medea, Ovid explores the theme of the woman in love with an unsuitable foreigner (44–80). Like Medea, Scylla is young and in love with a handsome warrior from abroad who is her father's enemy. Like Medea, she thinks she can secure marriage with the foreigner by betraying her father. The betrayal takes a similar form, the theft of an important talisman—in this case not a Golden Fleece but her father's purple lock of hair. Ovid's perspective on the lovelorn maiden has undergone a metamorphosis, however. Unlike Medea, Scylla is obsessed exclusively with her own feelings rather than attending to the ethical issues at stake, as is clear from her opening question: *"laeter" ait "doleamne geri lacrimabile bellum,/in dubio est"* ("it's uncertain," she said, "whether I should be happy or sad that this lamentable war is going on"; 44–45). For her there is no moral decision to be made. Instead of debating the rival claims of reason and passion, of duty and love, as Medea did, she discusses with herself the best strategy for securing Minos as her husband. Her father is a nuisance, an obstacle best out of the way: *di facerent, sine patre forem!* (if only the gods could make me fatherless, 72). Indeed, she abandons all morality with her decision to take the law into her own hands: *sibi quisque profecto/est deus* (anyway, everyone is her own god, 72–73).[31]

[31] See Anderson 1972:*ad* 44–80 and on the psychological intricacies of Scylla's monologue; Larmour 1990:138–41 on the sexual resonances of Scylla's words and their similarity in thought to those of Phaedra, Minos' daughter.

Scylla's callous maneuverings and casuistical arguments throw into sympathetic relief Medea's troubled moral sensibilities in the first part of *Metamorphoses* 7. Scylla's cutting of her father's lock of hair is presented as a violent deed that approximates parricide, for she claims that she is in effect offering Minos her father's head, not just his hair (93–94). The betrayal of her filial duty, an issue that is kept to the background in the Medea myth, here explicitly involves a criminal, impious act. With this desperate measure, Scylla finds a way of cutting through the cultural and political norms that deny her a voice in choosing her own husband. Unlike Medea, however, she has no ties with the divine world, and she lacks the encouragement of Minos. Her one powerful act renders her powerless. Swift retribution comes in the form of Minos' curse, which, in banishing her from land and sea, anticipates her final loss of human identity through metamorphosis into a bird. The physical and psychological isolation that finds tragic expression in her neurotic obsession with Minos becomes her permanent lot.

Like Procne and Medea, Scylla ends up as a woman displaced and devoid of kin. Also like them, she is not a passive victim. Abandoned by Minos, she harangues him with words and then tries physically to flee through the waters to him. As a displaced and abandoned woman, does she then command greater sympathy than in the first part of her story? I think so. Once again Ovid has engineered a metamorphosis of our perceptions of the female protagonist.

Medea's passion for Jason is reciprocated because Jason needs her help to secure the Golden Fleece. Minos in contrast recoils with horror from the lock of hair that Scylla offers him as a pledge of her love (92). Nonetheless he takes full military advantage of Scylla's betrayal and sacks her father's city. The second part of the Scylla myth suggests that Minos' high-minded rejection of Scylla is, in some ways, as morally questionable as Jason's exploitation of Medea. Here then Ovid explores another aspect traditionally important in the Medea myth, the betrayal of the woman to whom the beloved owes his success. As Graf argues, Apollonius builds his story of Jason, Medea, and her father upon a familiar Hellenistic model, the "Tarpeia-type," to which the story of Scylla also belongs.[32] In the second part of Ovid's tale of Scylla, however, we see the female protagonist from a different perspective, in the role of the deserted lover. She has undergone a typological metamorphosis

[32] See Graf in this volume, pp. 23–25. On the connections with Tarpeia see also Bömer 1976–77:13.

from a Tarpeia to an Ariadne, herself the daughter of Minos, whose story of abandonment directly follows Scylla's (8.169–82).[33]

When Scylla addresses Minos directly as he sails away from her, we are invited to view her with some sympathy. She is as frighteningly isolated as if, like Ariadne, she were abandoned on a desert island. She has nowhere to go to, nobody to turn to. Her homeland hates her; the neighboring lands fear her example (113–18). She is cast out, an orphan of the world, *exponimur orbae/terrarum* (117–18). She reveals at last a moral sensibility, for she openly admits her guilt and expresses repentance for her crime (125–30). Like Ariadne's, Scylla's speech is a mixture of special pleading and abuse. Indeed, several of Scylla's complaints against Minos—her abandonment by her lover, her social ostracism and geographical isolation, his ingratitude and inhumanity—are found in *Heroides* 10, the letter of Ariadne written supposedly as Theseus speeds away from the shore of Naxos.[34] However, Scylla emphasizes to a greater extent her beloved's obligation to her. In this important regard she comes closer to the Medea of *Heroides* 12, whose letter, a litany of reminders to Jason that his successes are due to her, leads to the expected conclusion that he should not abandon her. Scylla calls herself *meritorum auctor*, the agent of Minos' success (108), for, in her view, he owes his military conquest of Megara to her. He has exploited her action while expressing the utmost distaste for it. We are thus offered a different, more sympathetic perspective on Scylla when she appears in the role of abandoned heroine, who, through the speech that Ovid gives her, vents her feelings about Minos' departure without her (108–42).

Of course, like the deserted heroines' complaints in the *Heroides*, Scylla's words are not to be accepted uncritically. Her speech serves to show that her story is not a simple one of right and wrong, however. Ovid prepares the way for the substance of Scylla's complaints by hinting at the moral ambiguity of Minos' own position.[35] Refusing

[33] On the links of Ovid's Scylla with Catullus' and Ovid's own Ariadne and Vergil's Dido, see Anderson 1972:333.

[34] Each heroine addresses her departing beloved from the shore; each anguished speech begins with the despairing cry *quo fugis?* (*Her.* 10.34, *Met.* 8.108); each woman complains of her banishment from her father (*Her.* 10.65, *Met.* 8.115–16) and from all the world (*Her.* 10.93–98, *Met.* 8.113–18); each reminds her lover of the service she has performed on his behalf (*Her.* 10.99–110, *Met.* 8.108–13); and each accuses her hard-hearted lover of an inhuman birth (*Her.*10.131–32, *Met.* 8.131–33).

[35] Earlier versions of the Scylla myth make Minos drown Scylla as she clings to the prow (Apollod. 3.15.8) or drown herself (Hyg. *Fab.* 198), a possible misunderstanding, according to Anderson 1972:334, of Minos' throwing her into the sea. Ovid then has certainly removed the charge of murder from Minos. It is in his artistic interests, of course, to conclude the tale with a metamorphosis, one moreover of a female whose rejection of civilized norms is symbolized, as with Procne and Medea, in her departure from the earth. Rather than presenting Minos as a callous murderer, Ovid skillfully suggests the moral complexity of his rejection of Scylla. Cf. Anderson 1972:*ad* 101–3: "Ovid consistently retains our sympathy with Minos, who undertook a just war, treated Scylla justly, and now deals with the Megarians with just conditions."

to take the purple lock as a pledge of love from Scylla, Minos expresses his horror at the thought that such an abomination as this girl should touch Cretan soil:

> di te submoveant, o nostri infamia saecli,
> orbe suo, tellusque tibi pontusque negetur!
> certe ego non patiar Iovis incunabula, Creten,
> qui meus orbis est, tantum contingere monstrum.
>
> (97–100)

> O infamy of our age, may the gods remove you
> from their world, and may earth and sea be refused you!
> Of course I shall not allow Jupiter's birthplace, Crete,
> which is my world, to touch such a monstrosity.

The climactic noun *monstrum* (100) used to describe Scylla lends irony to Minos' seemingly high-minded refusal to take her home, for Minos' home is famous for its family monsters—as Scylla will remind him with her taunting references to Pasiphae's perverse mating with a bull (131–37). Indeed, the next occurrence of the word *monstrum* refers to the Minotaur itself (156). The phrase with which Scylla describes herself, *meritorum auctor*, somewhat ironically recalls the description of the victorious Minos as *iustissimus auctor* (the excellent agent of justice, 101), for the traditional view of Minos as judge is counterbalanced by the reminder of the different tradition about Minos as king of perversions.[36] Minos' high-minded position can hardly be sustained by his own ugly history of family betrayal, of which we are amply reminded in the following story of the Minotaur (152–82). By letting Scylla speak her thoughts about what she perceives as her betrayal by Minos, Ovid opens

[36] Minos lurks in a more unsavory role in the background of the preceding story of Procris and Cephalus. According to Apollod. 3.15.1 and Antoninus Liberalis *Met.* 41.4–5, Procris cured Minos of unusual sexual problems, in return for which he gave her a javelin. In Ovid's version Procris' loving husband Cephalus does not tell this story, telling only *quae patitur pudor* (what decency allows, 7.687), a hint of the less reputable material that is suppressed in his account. Note that Ovid refers to the donor of the javelin as *muneris auctor* (agent of the gift, 686). The phrase *auctor* is not used again until book 8, with reference there to Minos. See Anderson 1972:*ad* 7.687; Ahl 1985:204–11.

up to moral uncertainties a story of a rather conventional type, the girl who betrays her country for love. Like Medea, Scylla is both the betrayer of her father and the betrayed. We find here the same slippage of moral categories as in the myth of Procne. Ovid thus adds complexity to the theme of betrayal by woman and by man. Although Scylla betrays her father, moral perfection is by no means all on the side of Minos, who cannily takes advantage of her betrayal. In Ovid's hands the theme of betrayal, like that of infanticide in *Metamorphoses* 6, resists moral absolutes.

Lacking special powers and status, Scylla is a more open and potentially a more sympathetic vehicle than Medea for the exploration of the moral implications of betrayal. Presented at the end as a victim of her passion and naïveté rather than as a mere traitor, she is a forceful example of the woman condemned and ostracized for an impious crime for which society allows no extenuating circumstances. Her metamorphosis into a bird is a form of solution to her tragic displacement—at the expense of her human identity. Like Procne she ends her life as a bird hunted by a vengeful male relative, for her father is also transformed into a bird, the predatory sea eagle (145–47). Scylla's one powerful act condemns her to both perpetual victimization and perpetual guilt, for she becomes a bird that bears its name from the cutting of the fatal lock (150–51). Scylla is suspended in an endless cycle of pursuit and flight, without hope of forgiveness from her father or of respite. The marginalization of the woman who disobeys social norms and attempts to seize power for herself is here displayed in an extreme and unresolved form, with the cycle of paternal vengeance and filial rejection endlessly repeated.[37]

Procris

On the surface, the story of Procris and Cephalus, which concludes book 7, is of a very different type from the three I have discussed thus far.[38] The story is told from the male perspective, and it is a man, not a

[37] Anderson 1963:15 shows how Scylla's metamorphosis as *ciris*, literally "the cutting bird," is psychologically related to her desires as lover to plunge down into the Cretan camp (39–40) and to glide on wings to Minos to confess her ardor (51–52): "When her metamorphosis takes place, then, her bird-shape commemorates her love and the crime to which it led (150–51)."

[38] Otis 1966:176ff. discusses the story and its departure from Hellenistic sources; Anderson 1990 discusses its relationship to the version in *Ars Am.* 3.687ff.

woman, who has lost his object of desire.[39] In addition, this story tells of a marriage that results from a father's arrangement and the mutual love of a couple, as the narrator Cephalus is at pains to say: *pater hanc mihi iunxit Erechtheus,/hanc mihi iunxit amor* (her father Erechtheus united her with me,/ love united her with me; 697–98). For once, the two necessary ingredients for a marriage come together. Scylla and Medea had *amor* but not the father's consent; Procne had the father's consent but we hear nothing of *amor*.

Like the marriages of Medea and Procne, however, the marriage of Procris and Cephalus is severely tested when Cephalus is abducted by the dawn goddess Aurora shortly after the wedding (700–713). Different versions of this story tell of a series of complications that result from this abduction, among them Procris' own sexual liaisons.[40] In his account of his married life, Cephalus, presumably respectful of his royal audience and protective of his wife's memory, tells only what modesty permits (687) and emphasizes his wife's chastity (734–36). The presence of Procris in the text is carefully controlled by Cephalus' words, through which she appears as the honorable object of his desire, not as the angry, sexually independent woman portrayed by other writers.

Cephalus' self-representation in his narrative is likewise carefully controlled. Although he betrayed Procris with Aurora, he argues that throughout his enforced abduction he remained faithful to Procris in his heart: *Procrin amabam:/pectore Procris erat, Procris mihi semper in ore* (I stayed in love with Procris:/ Procris was in my heart, Procris was always on my lips; 707–8). Unlike the marriage of Jason and Medea, the marriage of Procris and Cephalus survives its first betrayal, the first assault upon the necessary trust between man and wife, for the couple are eventually reconciled. This first testing of their trust, however, leads to a second testing that proves fatal to Procris. After hunting in the woods, Cephalus calls in a sensually evocative manner upon a breeze, *aura*, to visit him. Procris' suspicions are aroused by the name *aura*, so resonant of *Aurora*. Like the other women discussed by Ovid in the "marriage tales," she decides to act for herself and find out the truth of her suspicions by spying upon him in the woods. But

[39] Pöschl 1959 likens Cephalus as narrator to the elegiac love poets, particularly Propertius and Catullus in their most deeply felt poems.

[40] According to Apollod. 3.15.1, Procris achieves an independence comparable to Medea's through her success at sexually ensnaring a royal male and concocting a magical potion, in this case a beneficial one used to cure Minos of ejaculating deadly serpents. See also Antoninus Liberalis *Met.* 41; Hyg. *Fab.* 89; Anderson 1972:*ad Met.* 7.687.

although previously she had hunted with Diana during her separation from Cephalus (746), as a wife she is extremely vulnerable when she leaves the home for the wilderness and crosses into the man's realm of action. The javelin she gives Cephalus when she abandons her hunting for a wife's role is the instrument of her death, for Cephalus kills her, thinking she is a wild beast hiding in the bushes. The resemblance in sound between *aura* (breeze) and *aurora* (dawn) implies that the first dislocation of their marriage has led tragically to its end. Cephalus catches Procris' final breath on his lips, *infelicem animam nostroque exhalat in ore* (she breathes out her unfortunate spirit upon my lips, 861), in a literal and unhappy rendition of Cephalus' obsessive murmurings of Procris' name in Aurora's presence, *Procris mihi semper in ore* (Procris was always on my lips, 708). Like Medea, Procris is the victim of sexual betrayal.

Despite its auspicious start and its survival of the first serious challenge to their marital trust, the marriage of Procris and Cephalus ends in tragic failure like the rest. The woman is again the victim of betrayal and misunderstanding, clearly so since the details of Procris' independence from Cephalus that dominate the other versions of this myth are here suppressed. *Amor* is evidently not enough. The marriage of Procris and Cephalus tragically founders upon the issue of trust. Procris' suspicions are false but not, given the couple's past history, baseless. The marriages of both Procne and of Medea collapse when the trust between husband and wife is broken, just as Scylla's imagined relationship with Minos is destroyed when he refuses her pledge of trust in him. And once again, a woman's independent act is self-destructive.

The story of Procris and Cephalus has an important function within the group of tales that surround the myth of Medea in that it offers a thorough investigation of inequality between the male and the female experience of love. Unlike the other marriage tales, it is told from the man's perspective. It shows that the man as well as the woman can be cast in the role of the lover deserted by his beloved as well as the role of the murderer (no matter how inadvertent) of close kin. But unlike Procne, Medea, and Scylla, whose desertion or betrayal leads to their ostracism and ultimate loss of human identity, Cephalus does not destroy his life or halt his career in any way because of his slaying of his wife, and he tells his tragic story while on a diplomatic mission that turns out successfully.

The nature of that mission is important to our interpretation of his narrative. Cephalus is asking King Aeacus and the inhabitants of

Aegina for military help against his enemy, King Minos. According to Apollodorus and Antoninus Liberalis, Minos was one of Procris' lovers in Cephalus' absence.[41] Ahl has persuasively argued that Ovid's Cephalus cannily suppresses the salacious details about his wife's relationship with Minos because of his diplomatic need to recruit from his audience military help against Minos.[42] If so, Cephalus' story is shaped not just by his heartbreak and feelings for Procris but by his political needs. While offering a pessimistic view of the course of true love, his story forms a contrast with the surrounding "marriage tales," for Cephalus does not undergo any metamorphosis through sorrow for his wife. His grief remains a private matter that does not impinge upon the public realm, and he is not ostracized for killing his wife. By living on to tell his story and by thus assuming the role of narrator, Cephalus stands in sharp contrast to the marginalized, lovelorn women whose independent feelings or actions redound disastrously upon them. Cephalus' violent act has caused him sorrow but has in no way destroyed him. Cephalus continues to live and to thrive after Procris' death; he is not in any way displaced. The difference between his fate as injured lover and that of Procne, Medea, Scylla, and his own wife Procris emphasizes the tragic difference between men and women not only in social standing but also in the experience of love.

In *Ars Amatoria* Ovid observes that women are by nature more easily deranged than men.[43] His treatment of deranged women in the *Metamorphoses* provides a different, sustained view of women as the prisoners of social conventions that fail to protect them, at the same time as these women are denied legitimate means of expressing their desires and feelings. Their violent acts are a product of the very culture that attempts to prevent such acts. The story of Procris and Cephalus therefore invites reflection upon the social inequities that make women Medeas, the victims of their own tragic and temporary empowerment.

Orythia

The final tale of this group that I wish to examine, that of Boreas and Orythia (6.675–721), likewise describes the experience of love and

[41] Cf. n. 36 above.

[42] See Ahl 1985:204–11. Such a view modifies that of Pöschl 1959, who sees Cephalus as a sufferer in love like Propertius.

[43] *Ars Am.* 1.269–350.

courtship largely from a male perspective. Although generally regarded as a lighthearted appendage to the myth of Procne, Philomela, and Tereus, it takes a comically subversive look at the major themes that are concentrated in the "marriage tales": the power of the father, the rituals of courtship, conjugal trust, and female victimization. We are invited to read the myth of Boreas and Orythia in relation to the other marriage tales in books 6, 7, and 8 through the explicit connections Ovid makes between this story and that of Procris and Cephalus as well as that of Procne. Orythia's father succeeded Procne's father to the throne (6.675–80); Orythia's sister is Procris, as we are reminded in both tales (6.681–83, 7.694–97). The marriages of the two sisters, however, run an entirely different course from the start. Cephalus' marriage has the approval of Procris' father; but fearing all foreign suitors after Procne's tragic experience, he rejects Boreas' suit for Orythia. The god therefore forcefully abducts Orythia, but instead of abandoning her, as happens with most divine rapes, he makes her wife and mother, *coniunx* and *genetrix* (6.711–12). The formality of these terms suggests the legality of their arrangement. Together Boreas and Orythia raise two fine sons who become a credit to their parents as Argonautic heroes. Unlike Itys, Procne and Tereus' son, these children grow into manhood. We are told, moreover, that they resemble both parents (713), a crucial point, for it is Itys' too close resemblance of his father that impels Procne to murder him (621–22).[44] This then is the only marriage in this cluster of tales that takes a normative course, and yet it does so by dispensing with all the civilized formalities involved in cementing male and female relationships.

Like Cephalus, the male god Boreas is basically in charge of his own story and offers his own perspective on the rituals of courtship. Unlike most of the other gods of Ovid's mythical world, Boreas has attempted to observe the formal etiquette of courtship; with eloquent pleas he has approached the father, not just the girl, before finally resorting to rape. Ovid gives Boreas a long speech in which the god justifies his resort to violence on the grounds that his prayers to Orythia's father and blandishments have gone unheeded (6.687–701).[45] His problem lies not with Orythia, whose opinion is never made known and who apparently is never consulted, but rather with Orythia's father, who categorically

[44] See Anderson 1972:237 on the sources and Ovid's treatment of this tale.

[45] Anderson 1972:*ad* 690–701 comments on the rhetorical skill and wit of Boreas' speech, which he delivers in the role of *exclusus amator*. Although he claims his proper sphere is *vis* (physical force) not speech (*Met.* 6.689–90), he is comically made very articulate here.

fears and rejects all Northerners (682). Boreas' speech is a sort of comic paraclausithyron in which Boreas plays the role of *exclusus amator*, the excluded lover. But unlike the unhappy lover of elegiac poetry, Boreas has the divine power to achieve his goal. The god decides to cut through the red tape of courtship and marriage proposals; he will simply make Erechtheus his father-in-law, not beg him to be one (700–701). His defiance of cultural conventions at the start of the relationship, rather than at its end, leads surprisingly in this case to a stable marriage.

The father's role is here undercut. In the other stories I have considered, the father is a source of familiar if ineffective values, displaced from which the female suffers tragically. Aeëtes and Nisus seemingly know nothing of their daughters' illicit passions; Orythia's father alone tries actively to oppose the foreign suitor. Nonetheless, he too fails to prevent his daughter marrying a man not of his choosing. Yet in this case his failure ironically results in the children that a father naturally hopes for in a daughter's marriage. The civil protocol of oaths and promises by which fathers hope to sanctify marriage and protect their daughters is here rejected in favor of violent action—with socially normative results! Boreas, in his role of Northern Jason, proves the father's opposition not only ineffective but misguided. He subverts the rituals of courtship, oaths, promises, and patriarchal power that are the usual substance of the institution of marriage. In his comically inflated speech Boreas spells out here what the other tales imply: passion and force rule in human affairs as in divine ones. He gives humorous voice to what the other myths have shown, the fragility of cultural conventions in the face of the unpredictability of human experience and the strength of human passion. Carefully constructed social institutions and hierarchies are all subject to flux and metamorphosis.

Boreas succeeds, however, not just because Orythia's father is ineffective but because he does not have a Medea to oppose him. Indeed, Orythia is the antitype of Medea. Unlike Medea, Scylla, Procne, and Procris, she has no voice in this story and takes no independent action. Her passivity ensures her survival, whereas the women who protest male power are socially ostracized, destroyed, or metamorphosed. If power in a woman is generally dangerous and destructive, then it is easy to see why Orythia survives. She does not threaten or subvert male authority, as do Procne, Medea, and Scylla. From the point of view of Boreas, she is the perfect wife—a silent woman.

Seen in contrast to Orythia, Medea, whose myth directly follows, appears highly vocal. Her inner debate in the first half of the myth

is replaced in the second half by her incantatory spells, her *carmina*. Indeed, Medea's incantatory spells serve as the female counterpart of Boreas' physical power. The special powers Boreas gains through force, *vi tristia nubila pello, / vi freta concutio nodosaque robora verto* (by force I drive away the storm clouds, / by force I whip up the seas and overturn knotted oaks; 6.690–91), are achieved by Medea through her verbal charms: *stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello / nubilaque induco* (I whip up the calm seas, I drive away the clouds / and I enshroud the sky with clouds; 7.200–201). Her incantation corresponds to his physical force in its power to uproot oaks (6.691, 7.204–5) and to agitate the spirits of the dead, the *manes* (6.699, 7.206). Medea reveals speech as the characteristic source of female power. Yet, as *carmina* her incantations are connected with poetry, which in the ancient world is primarily a male activity. The female appropriation of *carmina* is threatening to social order. Thus whereas Boreas' power secures him domestic harmony, Medea's power sets her apart from human society and relationships.[46] Like the story of Procris and Cephalus, the story of Boreas and Orythia illustrates the difference between the male and female experience of love and power.

In the other stories of the "marriage group," too, speech is an important but dangerous aspect of female power. Tereus fears Philomela's speech, so he rips out her tongue. She continues to express herself verbally only by weaving her tale into a tapestry that will inflame her sister Procne to madness. This, like Medea's spells, is called a *carmen* (6.582), and Procne unrolls the horrific story (*evolvit*), like an ancient scroll.[47] Words are also deceptive. Scylla and Medea both talk themselves into pursuing their mad passion; Procris tragically misunderstands the song

[46] Wise 1982:21 argues that "the relation of language to the magician's powers of metamorphosis connects Medea's incantations with poetic activity." As Ovid emphasizes the destructive aspects of Medea's transforming, magical powers, he shows his awareness of the destructive power of both types of *carmen*. See O'Higgins in this volume, pp. 103–26, on Medea's function as a kind of Muse in Pindar *Pyth.* 4. O'Higgins notes that our perspective on Pindar's Medea alters in the course of this poem. But unlike in the *Metamorphoses*, Medea is presented first as a divinely inspired singer and subsequently as a human and fallible victim of Jason's and Aphrodite's superior arts.

[47] Joplin 1984:53, who interprets Philomela's weaving as a sign of female resistance to male attempts at silencing woman's voice, asks us to celebrate "not Philomela the victim or Philomela waving Itys' bloody head at Tereus" but rather the woman who in the act of weaving uncovers her voice's potential "to transform revenge (violence) into resistance (peace)." Yet unfortunately what we remember in this story is the effect of that weaving upon Procne and its incitement to violence, not peace. Cf. the remarks of Joplin, n. 30 above.

to *aura* that Cephalus sings to the breeze.[48] The dangerous power words, their frequent slippage in meaning, reflects back upon Ovid procedure in the myth of Medea whereby he lays bare the inconsiste cies between the two parts of the tradition that he himself rewrote *Heroides* 12 and, presumably, his own lost *Medea*.

The Fractured Woman

In Ovid's rewriting of the myth of Medea, the inconsistencies betwee the figure of Medea as girl and as witch are particularly sharp. Indee Ovid plays up the difference between the two figures. Who then his Medea? Ovid offers us not one figure but refracted images th vary according to the different perspectives from which the read is invited to survey them. Although the cause for Medea's sudde change is nowhere developed, the stories of Procne, Procris, and Scyl provide us with different standpoints from which we can recogni how complex are the motivations and consequences involved in t power struggles between men and women. Medea, Procne, Procri and Scylla all provide broken, refracted images of one complex typ the displaced woman who suffers because of the loss or lack of husband's or lover's affection and trust and who actively seeks redres But only Medea is removed from human experience through divir and magical connections. In the stories that surround the Medea myt Ovid investigates in more consistently human terms the social an moral ambiguities that involve the love-torn woman who chooses speak and act independently.

Ovid then stands in relation to tradition much like a cubist paint who fragments his subject into disparate parts. Otis sees the *Metamo phoses* in terms of large sections of similar themes enclosed by framin devices.[49] Departing somewhat from this image, I suggest that like cubist painter, Ovid wants to dispose of the frame. Rejecting organ form in favor of a certain degree of thematic fragmentation and disloc tion, Ovid offers us not one canonical Medea but many perspectives o the central idea of the powerful woman.

In the *Metamorphoses* Ovid adds complexity to the story of Medea b juxtaposing it with stories that are simultaneously similar and differen

[48] Ahl 1985:206–7 points out that Cephalus admits at *Met.* 7.821–23 that his words we open to misconstruction.

[49] See above, n. 5.

Like Medea's rejuvenating brew, which has different effects depending on the situation in which it is used, myths are elusive, shifting bodies of knowledge that offer partial truths in their particular context. By articulating Ovid's myth of Medea with the myths of Procne, Scylla, Procris, and Orythia, Ovid uses his awareness of the mutability of myth and tradition to good effect by offering us varying studies of the female as victim and criminal. Her shifting representations in the marriage group call attention to the variety of human experience and the elusiveness of moral and social categories. Ovid thus typically offers no single moral judgment. This complex of stories does clearly display the difference between the female and the male experience of love, however, and it thereby leads to some disturbing implications. The violent man rarely suffers from his acts of violence; indeed, like Boreas, he may benefit from it. The violent woman, however, is ostracized and condemned. Medea is a byword for the unnatural mother. Ovid's marriage group of tales illustrates how society both denies a woman power and rejects her when she uses it; at the same time these tales illustrate how fragile social conventions are and how ineffective they are to either protect or restrain a woman.

By presenting us with two very different Medeas, who cannot be reconciled except, perhaps, by stepping outside the boundaries of the myth to other similar tales, Ovid reworks the story of Medea into an open-ended form that offers divergent perspectives on the problems of marriage, betrayal, and power. Comedy is juxtaposed with tragedy, and overall Ovid offers compassionate insight into a vilified type of woman. There is however no resolution to this story of sexual and social differences; significantly Medea does not die but simply disappears from Ovid's text. If judgments are to be made, the onus ultimately falls upon the reader, for Ovid, I believe, would have concurred with the remark of a very different writer, Jane Austen, who concludes *Northanger Abbey:* "I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience."

PART III

UNDER PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION

MEDEA

ESSAYS ON MEDEA IN
MYTH, LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY,
AND ART

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