AMOR, METAMORPHOSIS AND MAGIC: OVID'S MEDEA (*MET.* 7.1-424)

I

For centuries, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has been entertaining readers with its skillful and colourful selections from Greek and Roman myth. To the serious critic, however, this vast work presents grave problems of analysis.[1] Because of its variety in form, tale, and theme, critical interpretations have also been diverse. Scholars have concerned themselves, for example, with the relationship between the *Metamorphoses* and the Emperor Augustus;[2] with the form, thematic and structural unity of the work;[3] and with the question of the poem's sources and genre.[4] More recently, however, there have been several attempts at critical interpretations aimed at a more general understanding of the variation of motif and theme in the *Metamorphoses*.[5] Perhaps the most interesting of these is an attempt by W. S. Anderson to define the metamorphosis-theme as something more than mere physical change and to show that most of Ovid's stories contain

[1]Perhaps the best example of the difficulty entailed in interpreting the *Metamorphoses* may be seen in the startling recantation of his own earlier theories made by Brooks Otis in the second edition of *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge 1970). The first edition appeared in 1966.

[2]For example, B. Otis, "Ovid and the Augustans," *TAPA* 69 (1938) 188-229; B. Otis, *Ovid* (above, note 1) *passim*; C.P. Segal, "Myth and Philosophy in the *Metamorphoses*: Ovid's Augustanism and the Augustan Conclusion of Book XV," *AJP* 90 (1969) 257-292; L. C. Curran, "Transformation and Anti-Augustanism in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Arethusa* 5 (1972) 71-92; D. Little, "The Non-Augustanism of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Mnemosyne* 25 (1972) 389-401; C. Moulton, "Ovid as Anti-Augustan: *Metamorphoses* 15.843-879." *CW* 67 (1973) 4/7; O.S. Due, *Changing Forms: Studies in the Metamorphoses of Ovid* (Copenhagen 1974) 66-89; G.K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Oxford 1975) 210-217.

[3]For example, F.J. Miller, "Some Features of Ovid's Style: III, Ovid's Methods of Ordering and Transition in the *Metamorphoses*," *CJ* 16 (1921) 464-476; F. Norwood, "Unity in the Diversity of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *CJ* 59 (1964) 170-174; G. Steiner, "Ovid's *Carmen Perpetuum*," *TAPA* 89 (1958) 218-236; W. Ludwig, *Struktur und Einheit der Metamorphosen Ovids* (Berlin 1965); B. Otis, *Ovid* (above, note 1) *passim*; R. Coleman, "Structure and Intention in the *Metamorphoses*," *CQ* n.s. 21 (1971) 461-477; E.J. Kenney, "The Style of the *Metamorphoses*," in *Ovid*, ed. J.W. Binns (London and Boston 1973) 116-153; G.K. Galinsky (above, note 2) 31, 79-101.

[4]L.P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955) 144-145; T.F. Brunner, "The Function of the Simile in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *CJ* 61 (1965) 354-363; Otis, *Ovid* (above, note 1) *passim*; Coleman (above, note 3) 461-462; Due (above, note 2) 15-42; Galinsky (above, note 2) 1-25.

[5]Some examples are W.C. Stephens, "Cupid and Venus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *TAPA* 89 (1958) 286-300; H. Parry, "Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Violence in a Pastoral Landscape," *TAPA* 95 (1964) 268-282; C.P. Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's Metamorphoses: A Study in the Transformation of a Literary Symbol* (Wiesbaden 1969) *Hermes* Einselschriften 23; C.P. Segal, "Narrative Art in the *Metamorphoses*," *CJ* 66 (1971) 331-337.

change on more than just a physical level.[6] G.K. Galinsky elaborates on Anderson's view that psychological transformation also plays an important role in the *Metamorphoses* but fails to pinpoint its real and serious purpose in the work.[7]

Despite the variety of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, several themes are repeated throughout the poem and are central to its interpretation. The first, and most obvious, is the theme of transformation itself. The metamorphosis-theme, however, should *not* be limited only to the physical transformation of a being into something other than itself, although such change does occupy a large part of the work and often plays a significant and unifying role. In addition to physical change, the metamorphosis-theme may manifest itself in changes of emotion and in changes of scene and circumstance.

A second and often repeated theme is that of *amor*.[8] Although sexual love is the most frequent manifestation of this theme, *amor* should not be limited to sexual relationships alone. Rather, it often refers to love of family and friends, love of glory and honour, love of evil. Further, the poet most often focuses his attention on *amor* which in some sense may be regarded as improper or unacceptable. For example, a sexual relationship is sought by one party but rejected by the other. It is often in the eyes of the object of the pursuit that the *amor* seems improper, and he or she will sometimes express horror at the prospect of being caught.[9] This type of *amor* may be seen in the myths of Apollo and Daphne (1.452-565), Jove and Io (1.567-746), Syrinx and Pan (1.689-712), Polyphemus and Galatea (13.738-897), Circe and Glaucus, Ulysses, and Picus (14.1-400). Secondly, two lovers may be reciprocally involved, while their relationship is, nevertheless, frowned upon by their families and their societies, or is questioned by one of the pair. The famous tale of Pyramus and Thisbe (4.55-166) fits into this category, as do the stories of Ceyx and Alcyone (11.270-748), Cephalus and Procris (7.670-865) and Semele (3.259-309). Thirdly, a relationship which is objectionable according to Roman law, religion, or social acceptability—incest, adultery, homosexuality, and the like—may be involved. The stories of Byblis (9.453-665), Myrrha (10.312-518), Scylla and Nisus (9.453-665), Procne, Philomela, and Tereus (6.424-674). Phaedra and Hippolytus (15.500-546), Narcissus (3.344-510), Hermaphroditus (4.285-388), Iphis and Ianthe (9.666-797), Mars and Venus (4.167-189), Ganymede (10.155-161), Apollo and

[6]W.S. Anderson, "Multiple Change in the *Metamorphoses*," *TAPA* 94 (1963) 1-27.

[7]He recognizes Medea's inner struggle, for example, but dismisses it since its "visual over-explicitness is one of the chief ingredients of Ovid's humor," (above, note 2) 64.

[8]Galinsky (above, note 2) 31, sees a thematic connection between the *Amores* and the *Metamorphoses* "because the main subject of the *Metamorphoses* is love." But he limits "love" to "amatory episodes" which "account for the thematic unity of the *Metamorphoses* as much as and even more than the metamorphoses theme proper." This limitation of *amor* is too narrow to apply to the *Metamorphoses* as a whole.

[9]Connected to this kind of *amor* is the motif of the chase or the hunt. Parry (above, note 5) offers a good over-view of violence and the motif of the hunt in the *Metamorphoses*.

Hyacinthus (10.162-210), and others, should be considered under this heading. A final example of improper *amor* can often be found in the pursuit of honour and glory. This pursuit can be improper if an unattainable goal is sought, an unanswerable question asked, a superior rivalled. Under this rubric fall such stories as that of Meleager and his pursuit of the Calydonian boar (8.269-546), Phaethon and his desire to prove his ancestry by driving the Sun's chariot (1.750-2.328), Arachne and her attempt to surpass Athene's art (6.1-145), Niobe and her pride and love for her children and her rivalry with Leda (6.146-312), Perseus (Books 4 and 5 *passim*), Ajax and Ulysses (13.2-398), Midas and his love for gold (11.100-145). More than one type of *amor* may sometimes be found in a single story. So, for example, Meleager pursues not only the boar but also Atalanta; his mother, Althaea, loves her son *and* her brothers, and is forced to choose between them. Similarly, Cephalus questions Procris' faithfulness and tests it by tricking her into adultery and Semele desires to question Jove with whom she is adulterously involved. Although there are also stories of successful love and truly honourable pursuits, the epic is heavily weighted towards the unsuccessful. Failure, deterioration, and decline predominate and even proper relationships—Orpheus and Eurydice (10.1-63), Daedalus and Icarus (8.183-235), Picus and Canens (14.320-434)—are often doomed. Indeed, the first reference to *amor* in the *Metamorphoses* clearly illustrates this expansion of definition and the poet's interest in what is improper or unacceptable (1.130-131):[10]

> in quorum subiere locum fraudesque dolusque
> insidiaeque et vis et *amor sceleratus habendi*.

Finally, and most importantly, the themes of metamorphosis and *amor* are often intertwined as love or passion is itself transformed into another and sometimes more destructive emotion. This changed emotion, in turn, is often directly responsible for the failure and downfall of the characters involved and that failure often materializes as changes of various kinds.

Once the meaning of metamorphosis and *amor* are thus expanded, they may be found in a vast majority of episodes in the *Metamorphoses*. As themes, they are often reinforced by motifs relevant or appropriate to the episodes in which they appear. It will be the purpose of what follows to show how Ovid uses the themes of *amor* and transformation in his version of the myth of the witch Medea and how he employs the literary motif of magic to illustrate and emphasize his theme and purpose.

II

Ovid's account of the adventures and misadventures of the witch Medea exemplifies the varied nature of the *Metamorphoses*. At the same time, it illustrates Ovid's skillful mixture of the themes of improper and forbidden

[10]The text used throughout is P. Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphosen*, commentary by M. Haupt, Vol. I (Books 1-7), reprint of the 9th edition (1915) by R. Ehwald with additions by M. von Albrecht. It will be referred to later as Haupt-Ehwald.

amor and of the psychological metamorphosis and deterioration of the main character in the episode as a result of *amor* and other strong emotions. In presenting Medea's transformation, Ovid draws on her traditional portrayal as a witch and symbolizes her change by her progressively greater interest in and pursuit of magic and evil.

The Medea narrative may be divided into three major episodes: Medea and Jason, Medea and Aeson, Medea and Pelias. In each episode, Medea's character changes. In each, her change of character is precipitated by *amor* of one kind or another. In each, the change marks a deterioration of her personality and a descent into evil. As the myth progresses, she moves from woman in love who uses magic to aid her lover, to wicked witch out to destroy everything and everyone around her as she destroys her human self.

In general, Ovid's version of the encounter of Jason and Medea can be described as a story of misdirected love and its unfortunate results. Since love of this sort is a major theme in the *Metamorphoses*, the poet concentrates on those parts of the encounter between Jason and Medea which emphasizes it. Thus, although the voyage of the Argo could well have provided Ovid with material for countless fantastic episodes, it is largely dismissed.[11] Instead, focus is placed on Medea and her uncontrolled passion for the Greek hero (7.9-10):

> concipit interea validos Aeetias ignes
> et luctata diu, postquam ratione furorem
> vincere non poterat . . .

Medea is shown here as possessed by love's fires over which she has no control.[12] Her introduction is abrupt and no mention is made of her traditional powers.[13] Thus, at this early stage of the narrative, she is presented as a mortal woman who is struggling but powerless in the face of a powerful passion which she herself does not understand (11-13). In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the object of her passion is improper. Jason is her father's enemy. Medea's conscience, therefore, tries to intrude on her passion as she fights to conquer her *amor* for Jason and is battered by conflicting but entirely human emotions: her father's commands are too harsh

[11]Mention is made of the Argo as the first ship to seek, on unknown seas, the golden fleece (6.721) and of the adventures of Jason and the Argonauts before they reach Colchis (7.1-6). Missing are any details either of those adventures or of Jason's initial encounter with King Aeetes which is dismissed in a single couplet (7-8). By contrast, the negotiations between Jason and Aeetes in Apollonius of Rhodes (3.167-196; 299-431) illustrate important aspects of Jason's character. On the brevity of Ovid's treatment, see W.S. Anderson, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: Books 6-10* (Oklahoma 1972) *ad* 7.2-5.

[12]Although Ovid typically presents love in this manner, the emphasis on lack of control may hold a deeper significance here and may point to Ovid's direction of emphasis away from Medea's magical prowess since witches traditionally have the power to control love's forces. This may be seen in such elegiac poems as Tibullus 1.2, 1.8; Propertius 4.5; Ovid, *Amores* 2.1. In addition, the magical documents are in large part devoted to control or instigation of love and sex.

[13]This is in sharp contrast with Apollonius who immediately labels Medea κούρην Αἰήτεω πολυφάρμακον (3.27).

(14), she fears for the life of the stranger (15-16) and cannot explain these fears. Again and again, she attempts to expel these new and frightening feelings as she recognizes and agonizes over the impropriety of her love: *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor* (20-21). Medea is already aware that her conflict involves an improper choice and the lengthy self-castigation and debate which follows center upon a dispute between proper love for her father and fatherland and improper love for the Greek stranger (11-68).[14] At the end of her long monologue and despite numerous rationalizations (24-68), she decides that choosing the hero would be *nefas* and *crimen* (70-71). *Amor* is defeated; *pudor* and *pietas* for the moment triumph (72-73).

In all that has been presented thus far, no mention has been made of Medea's traditional magical powers. So, although she debates the possibility of offering aid to Jason, the method of that aid is not given. Indeed, the fears she expresses of encountering Scylla and Charybdis should she join Jason on his return to Greece (62-65) would be ludicrous were we forced to characterize her at this early stage as an all-powerful witch who can overcome all odds. In fact, the notable emphasis here is on her human fears and desires. Her conflict is entirely human and quite normal. Faced with a choice between two people she loves, or thinks she loves, she finds it difficult to make any firm decisions and thus wavers between the alternatives and tries to rationalize various different courses of action. In this section of the Medea myth, then, Ovid has focused his attention exclusively on Medea's conflicting loves: her proper love for her father and country on the one hand and her misguided passion for Jason on the other.

With her passion conquered (76), Medea goes to the temple of Hecate (74) where she sees Jason. Mention of Hecate reminds us of her traditional allegiance with witchcraft, but, instead of dwelling on this aspect of her nature, Ovid once again emphasizes a human motivation. At the sight of Jason, Medea undergoes an entirely human physical and psychological metamorphosis: the flames of passion are rekindled, her cheeks redden, her face glows (77-78). In her love-maddened eyes, Jason assumes the form of a god (*nec se mortalia demens/ ora videre putat*, 87-88) and she promises to help him (92-94):[15]

> 'quid faciam, video, nec me ignorantia veri
> decipiet, sed amor! servabere munere nostro:
> servatus promissa dato!'

Despite her decision, she still views this particular choice as incorrect and

[14] Anderson (above, note 6) 14, points out the similarity between Medea, Scylla, Byblis, and Myrrha who "all debate within themselves the merits of *virtus*, *pietas*, and *pudor* in conflict with *amor*." In each of the cases mentioned, the *amor* is particularly incorrect in nature: Scylla for her father's enemy (8.11-151); Byblis for her brother (9. 453-665); Myrrha for her father (10.312-518).

[15] Anderson (above, note 6) 14-15, sees this as the turning point of Medea's transformation from "virginal innocence" and the keynote of Medea's characterization. See, also, Anderson (above, note 11) *ad* 92-94.

assesses it as a deception caused by love. Her decision to aid Jason is accomplished by an illegal act,[16] the use of magical arts (98-99):

> creditus accepit cantatas protinus herbas
> edidicitque usum laetusque in tecta recessit.

Even here, though magic *is* used, it is deemphasized: no details of ritual are given nor is there any description of the type of magic employed.[17] Further, although Medea does indeed provide Jason with drugs, it is Jason himself who will use them. No mention is made of her own extensive knowledge of medicaments, or of how she acquired them in the first place.[18] 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.

Ovid next presents Jason's confrontation with the three supernatural challenges of Aeetes: the fire-breathing bulls (104-119), the army grown from serpents' teeth (120-142), and the dragon who guards the golden fleece (149-156). Against monsters of this sort, magic would be a most appropriate weapon and magic is used to combat them. The passage is weighted, however, not to emphasize Medea's magical skill but the supernormal aspects of Aeetes' challenge. As there are three challenges, so is magic mentioned three times. In the first instance, the power of drugs to shield Jason from the fire-breathing bulls is cited briefly (*tantum medicamina possunt*, 116). The second instance is more important and revealing. As she watches Jason confront the army grown from serpents' teeth, Medea reacts quite humanly indeed and quakes in fear for Jason's safety (134-138):

> ipsa quoque extimuit, quae tutum fecerat illum,
> utque peti vidit iuvenem tot ab hostibus unum,
> palluit et subito sine sanguine frigida sedit;
> neve parum valeant a se data gramina, carmen
> auxiliare canit secretasque advocat artes.

Nowhere else does Medea question her own powers. This doubt further stresses her nature as a woman in love who might worry unnecessarily

[16]On the illegality of magic in Rome, see, for example, C. Pharr, "The Interdiction of Magic in Roman Law," *TAPA* 63 (1932) 269-295; F.H. Cramer, "Expulsion of Astrologers from Ancient Rome," *C&M* 12 (1950) 9-50; R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. 1966) 95-162; R.A. Bauman, *"Impietas in Principem*: A Study of Treason against the Roman Emperor with Special Reference to the First Century A.D.," *Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und Antiken Rechtsgeschichte* 67 (1974).

[17]Again, contrast Apollonius where the magical ritual used to save Jason is detailed at some length (3.817-890; 1026-1062; 1191-1224).

[18]These aspects will be emphasized later in the narrative.

about the welfare of her beloved. Despite the additional charm she sings, however, it is neither magic nor incantation which rescues Jason. Instead, the hero himself overcomes the army by tossing a boulder into their midst and causing internecine strife. He accomplishes this without Medea's aid or advice (139-140).[19]

The third test remains: the dragon which guards the fleece must be drugged to sleep (149-158). Medea is not specifically mentioned in connection with this exploit and it would appear that it is Jason who uses herbs, doubtlessly provided by Medea, just as it is he who carries off the fleece.[20]

With Jason's victory, it now becomes clear that Medea's choice has been at best misguided. He hardly reciprocates her love; instead, he carries her off along with the fleece as another bit of spoil (157-158):[21]

> muneris auctorem secum, spolia altera, portans
> victor Iolciacos tetigit cum coniuge portus.

By labelling Medea *muneris auctorem* and *spolia*, Jason's materialistic evaluation of Medea's worth is brought to the fore.[22] There is no mention of love here and Jason will exploit Medea's worth in his subsequent treatment of her.

With their return to Greece, the first stage of Ovid's treatment of the myth of Medea ends. There is a brief transitional paragraph in which the couple is received joyfully by the Greeks (159-160). Aeson, burdened with old age, is missing from the crowd. Here Jason's exploitative nature reveals itself and his earlier evaluation of Medea as *spolia altera* (157) becomes clear. In his eyes, she is valuable property, a powerful being who is capable of restoring youth to Jason's father at the hero's request. He will continue to take advantage of her skills (164-168):

> 'o cui debere salutem
> confiteor, coniunx, quamquam mihi cuncta dedisti
> excessitque fidem meritorum summa tuorum,
> si tamen hoc possunt (quid enim non carmina possunt?)
> deme meis annis et demptos adde parenti!'

Several points are worth noting here. First, it becomes clear that Jason is

[19]In Apollonius' version, Medea advises Jason to throw the stone (3.1056 ff.). For a comment on this problem, see Haupt-Ehwald *ad* 139.

[20]Anderson (above, note 11) *ad* 155-159, attributes the magical act to Medea. The text is not specific: third person singulars are used without mention of a specific subject for the magical act. These, however, are connected by *et* with Jason's removal of the fleece (*et auro/ heros Aesonius potitur spolioque superbus*, 155-156).

[21]There is no mention of Medea's murder of her brother to stay the pursuit of her father's navy. This, again, emphasizes Medea's nature as human and basically good.

[22]*Cum coniuge* is quasi formular and, given the strength of *muneris auctorem* and *spolia altera*, bears little weight and surely does not reflect any real emotion, love, or loyalty on Jason's part.

indeed capable of affection. In this case, that affection is directed towards his father Aeson. By pointing out this filial devotion, Ovid creates a marked contrast between it and his lack of feeling towards Medea. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, it reminds us of Medea's own abandonment of filial love in favor of the hero and recalls the impropriety of her earlier choice. Secondly, the worth of Medea is again assessed materialistically by Jason who recognizes that she is responsible for his salvation, that he owes her a debt, and that she is capable of providing him with further remarkable favours. This, too, accents the misguided nature of Medea's love. Finally, and perhaps of greatest significance, Jason dismisses Medea's human qualities and focuses on her value as a witch. It is with the latter appraisal—and perhaps because of it—that Medea will be forced to revert to her former magical self, a self which she—and Ovid—have thus far sucessfully underplayed.

Her transition or transformation to witch is not yet complete, however. She has neither metamorphosed into the wicked witch of other tales, nor has she abandoned her love for Jason. Once again, she is motivated by misguided love (169-178):

> mota est pietate rogantis
> [dissimilemque animum subiit Aeeta relictus;][23]
> nec tamen adfectus tales confessa '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 revocare tuis, modo diva triformis
> adiuvet et praesens ingentibus adnuat ausis.'

It is noteworthy that Medea still exhibits some of the remorse which characterized her earlier. In addition, she recognizes Jason's act as *pietas*, a quality which she herself had abandoned on his behalf. A link is thus formed between the two sections of the narrative. The repeated mention of gifts in both sections may also be regarded as a link between them. Finally, although Medea will resort to magic, she is still concerned with the right and censures Jason's request for a transfer of years from himself as *scelus* and not permitted (*nec sinat hoc Hecate*, 174). She will not yet pursue a totally evil course. Her magic will be used for good and, more specifically, for the good of Jason and at his request. Her transformation to witch is only partially complete since she will act neither wickedly nor independently. In fact, she is coerced, as it were, to assume a role which she had until now attempted to repress.

In contrast to the sparse mention of magic in the Jason-Medea episode,

[23]Line 170 is bracketed by Heinsius.

there follows a lengthy description of Medea's ritual preparations (179-293).[24] The ritual is divided into four distinct stages: in the first (179-191), Medea prepares and purifies herself; in the second (192-219), she invokes the proper magical divinities; in the third (219-237), she embarks on a journey to collect ingredients for the rejuvenating potions; in the fourth (238-293), the actual rejuvenation of Aeson and specific preparations for the ritual take place. By concentrating at length on magical ritual in this passage, the poet has altered his perspective. This changed perception marks, too, a shift in Medea's character.

Each of the four stages of the ritual, in fact, marks a particular stage in Medea's change from woman to witch. Thus, in the purification ritual, Medea undergoes a physical metamorphosis of sorts and some attention is paid to her appearance and dress. The description seems accurately to reflect the usual appearance of witches—flowing hair and robes, bare feet—and it marks physically the beginning of Medea's transformation. Since she is performing a purification ritual, she also seems to be symbolically purging the more human aspects of her nature.

In the second section, Medea's incantation, she surrounds herself with witches' gods and is further steeped in the accouterments of magic. This invocation also includes a list of Medea's awesome powers (199-215) and it is the first time that such powers have been attributed to her even though magic had been used earlier. As the incantation continues, Medea takes credit for those previous magical acts and for Jason's heroic conquests, including putting the guardian-dragon to sleep (210-214). This marks a departure from the earlier account where credit for the latter feat is at best ambiguous. Finally, the incantation recalls Medea's supernatural ancestry (208-209).[25] The second section, then, marks a further step in the development of Medea as a witch figure. In this section, however, she still relies on the aid of the gods to provide her with the appropriate and potent herbs (215-219).

Section three, Medea's search for herbs, takes her change to witch one grade further. Here, at last, she is on her own as she ranges the world over in the chariot of her grandfather, the Sun. Her great skill and power are also stressed (*necque erant tacti nisi odore draconeslet tamen annosae pellem posuere senectae*, 236-237).

The fourth and final section describes the actual ritual performed to achieve the rejuvenation of Aeson.[26] It is in this section that she foregoes her human nature and changes into a witch, albeit one still concerned with a beneficial act. This complete change is symbolized in two ways. First, there is a reiteration of her magical concerns. This time, however, the in-

[24]For a detailed summary and explanation of the ritual procedure, see F. Bömer, ed., P. Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphosen*, Vol. III (Heidelberg 1976) *ad loc*.

[25]It was Jason who had earlier been concerned with his ancestry (96). That this is now Medea's concern may reflect the shift of attention away from Jason as hero/protagonist to Medea.

[26]It is interesting that the sacrificial elements most closely resemble those performed by Odysseus with Circe's instructions in *Odyssey* 11 (20 ff.).

fernal and savage aspects of magic predominate and there is an incantation to the infernal powers (248-250). Medea is again described, but this time is compared to a Bacchant (257-258). She engages in gruesome rites and concocts a particularly noxious potion composed both of herbs and of parts of various fantastic creatures (259-274). Finally, now a barbarian with more than mortal power (*his et mille aliis postquam sine nomine rebus/ propositum instruxit mortali barbara maius*, 275-276), she tests her brew (275-281). Her more savage nature manifests itself even further in the actual rejuvenation of Aeson as she slits his throat, drains his blood, and replaces it with her powerful drugs (285-293). To add to the spectacular nature of this achievement, Bacchus witnesses the act and asks Medea to perform the same for his nurses (294-296). The now barbarous Medea has achieved something not only more than mortal (*mortali . . . maius*, 276), but more, too, than what a god can do.

The second manifestation of Medea's progressive change from woman to witch may be found in the position of Jason within this episode. Whereas Jason's exploits and heroic conquests are the center of attention in the first part of the tale, here he is relegated to the background and Medea's powers are stressed. In fact, Medea twice symbolically rejects Jason in this segment of the myth. In the first instance, she pushes off his embrace at the outset of the rejuvenation procedure (238-241):

> constitit adveniens citra limenque foresque
> et tantum caelo tegitur refugitque viriles
> contactus statuitque aras de caespite binas,
> dexteriore Hecates, ast laeva parte Iuventae.

Although this rejection of Jason's embrace (*viriles contactus*) is in accord with proper ritual, it may also represent, on another level, the beginning of her desertion of Jason and her abandonment of her love for him. About half-way through the description, Jason is once again symbolically rejected (255-256):

> hinc procul Aesoniden, procul hinc iubet ire ministros
> et monet arcanis oculos removere profanos.

On a simple and obvious level, this is again in accord with proper ritual procedure which requires that the witch perform her rite in solitude. On another level, however, it may again represent Medea's abandonment of her relationship with Jason, a relationship to which she owes her human qualities.[27] As the magical arts become more important to her, as her powers are rediscovered, as she becomes more passionately involved in a pursuit of them, her more human passion for Jason is rejected. Eventually, the rejection will lead to hate and the wicked actions for which Medea is famous.

[27]The request that Jason remove himself along with the other attendants may be interpreted, as well, as another attempt by Medea to protect him.

Her transformation continues in the final episode of Ovid's version of her myth. Medea's next adventure involves the brutal murder of Pelias (297-349). It is linked with the preceding episode by the telling lines at the beginning of the segment (297-299):

> Neve doli cessent, odium cum coniuge falsum
> Phasias adsimulat Peliaeque ad limina supplex
> confugit . . .

Whereas earlier Medea had been fooled by her love for Jason (*nec me ignorantia veri decipiet, sed amor*, 92-93), it is Medea who is now deceitful herself. Evil leads to evil. Once humanity has been abandoned, once witchcraft has been performed, the practitioner becomes so involved that for the first time she takes the wicked initiative.

Medea's murder of Pelias is linked to what precedes it, too, by the very nature of her deceitful plans: she will fool Pelias' daughters by promising to rejuvenate their father as she did Aeson. Indeed, the ceremonies she performs closely resemble those accomplished on Aeson's behalf (285-321).[28] But when Pelias is to be introduced into the inferno, Medea wickedly and deceitfully omits the recipe for youth and the king, asleep because of her drugs, is chopped to bits by his own daughters. Filial love, a major concern for Medea in her debate and self-castigation before aiding Jason and in Jason's request on his father's behalf has thus been transformed into impiety and is itself changed and perverted as Pelias' daughters act out of a false sense of devotion. Beneficial magic has turned destructive as the rejuvenation rite is turned up-side-down. And Medea has changed from woman to witch, as love is transformed to cruelty and hate, piety to impiety, filial devotion to patricide.

Although one might think that it was on Jason's behalf that Medea murdered Pelias since he was, after all, Jason's enemy of long standing, no mention is made of this motive nor of her love for Jason. Instead, she would appear to be caught up in a love for her own power and driven by it to crueller and more wicked acts. Her estrangement from Jason, originally pretended by Medea as part of her deception of Pelias' daughters, may now be real. From this time forward, Jason is virtually absent from the narrative, and the witch Medea, no longer human, stands in the foreground, wreaking havoc on Pelias and his kin, soaring in her chariot to the ends of the earth (350-390), and finally touching down again at Corinth. By now her abandonment of her human nature is complete, and she is totally transformed into a wicked witch. She has been responsible for a grotesque and vile patricide. She has wandered to those parts of the world where fantastic metamorphoses have occurred. Her destruction of her own

[28]Compare, for example, the following details: as Aeson's throat was slit to drain him of his blood (285-287), so does Medea slit the throat of an ancient ram to demonstrate her skill (312-315); as Aeson drank her brew and was thus restored (287-293), so is the ram plunged into a boiling, drug-filled pot whence he emerges a kid again (316-321).

human family is a logical and expected outcome of her previous brutal savagery (391-397).[29] Her transformation could not be more thorough. From innocent virgin madly in love with a handsome hero whom she aids, she turns, by gradual stages, into the wicked object of her lover's attempted vengeance. No blame is attributed to Jason in this version for his marriage to Creusa. It is Medea who had first deserted him to pursue her wicked ends. Further, the Medea who comes to Corinth is hardly the woman Jason married. Her improper loves have caught up with her. Her pursuit of the magical arts and her increasing obsession with them have transformed her and led to the deterioration and destruction of her human self.

To further emphasize this total transformation, Ovid continues her story. Welcomed and taken as bride by Aegeus, she attempts yet another filicide and provides her benefactor with the poisons to murder his son Theseus (398-423). After the frustration of this plan, Medea flees on a magical cloud of her own creation (*effugit illa necem nebulis per carmina motis*, 424).

Although Medea does get away in the end, her story is marked by failure despite her remarkable powers and perhaps because of them. Although she succeeds in rescuing Jason and continues to use her skills on his behalf, she fails dismally to win his love. Although she tries to lead a normal life, as indicated by her actions early in the story, she again fails and deteriorates into a wicked witch who incurs her former lover's animosity. Finally, she fails even in the administration of a magical potion, and Theseus, whom she has tried to murder, not only escapes, but continues to heroic glory. All that remains for Medea is to disappear forever.

Ovid's Medea, then, exhibits several thematic elements common to the *Metamorphoses* as a whole. First, the story begins with the *amor* of an individual—Medea—for an object—Jason—an *amor* which she knows is *nefas* and *crimen*. In choosing Jason, she abandons a proper *amor* for father and fatherland. Secondly, the pursuit of the forbidden ultimately leads to the downfall and deterioration of the pursuer. Thirdly, the downfall assumes the form of a metamorphosis both in the principal character's psyche and in the object of her interest. Since Medea is traditionally a witch, her transformation is symbolized by her involvement in various magical acts, and each act marks a stage in the development and transformation of her character. Thus, at the beginning of the narrative, where her humanity is stressed, magic is used only minimally and to save Jason alone. She then progresses to an act of beneficial magic performed at Jason's request and, during its performance, is caught up in it. Her obsession with and pursuit of magic translates itself first into an act of harmful magic not instigated by Jason; then into the murders of Jason's new wife, the

[29]Ovid usually avoids retelling a story already current and well-told in the same way as the popular story. The theme of Euripides' play, and probably of his own, is therefore given very short shrift.

destruction of Corinth,[30] and the infanticide of her own children; and, finally, into the virtually unmotivated attempt on Theseus' life. Woman turns to witch, love turns to hate, the pursuer to the pursued, kindness into murder, as Ovid weaves his tale of *amor*, metamorphosis, and magic.[31]

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[30]Seneca picks up and elaborates upon Medea's destruction of Corinth (*Medea*, 879-890). Seneca's poetic purpose, however, is quite different and the cataclysm is used to illustrate the extent of destruction which a great person's *ira* can cause on the world around him.

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