

Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7.180-293: Medea rejuvenates Aeson, Jason's father (translation from the Loeb edition)

There were yet three nights before the horns of the moon would meet and make the round orb. When the moon shone at her fullest and looked down upon the earth with unbroken shape, Medea went forth from her house clad in flowing robes, barefoot, her hair unadorned and streaming down her shoulders; and all alone she wandered out into the deep stillness of midnight.

Men, birds, and beasts were sunk in profound repose; there was no sound in the hedgerow; the leaves hung mute and motionless; the dewy air was still. Only the stars twinkled. Stretching up her arms to these, she turned thrice about, thrice sprinkled water caught up from a flowing stream upon her head and thrice gave tongue in wailing cries. Then she kneeled down upon the hard earth and prayed: "O Night, faithful preserver of mysteries, and ye bright stars, whose golden beams with the moon succeed the fires of day; thou three-formed Hecate, who knowest our undertakings and comest to the aid of the spells and arts of magicians; and thou, O Earth, who dost provide the magicians with thy potent herbs; ye breezes and winds, ye mountains and streams and pools; all ye gods of the groves, all ye gods of the night: be with me now. With your help when I have willed it, the streams have run back to their fountain-heads, while the banks wondered; I lay the swollen, and stir up the calm seas by my spell; I drive the clouds and bring on the clouds; the winds I dispel and summon; I break the jaws of serpents with my incantations; living rocks and oaks I root up from their own soil; I move the forests, I bid the mountains shake, the earth to rumble and the ghosts to come forth from their tombs. Thee also, Luna, do I draw from the sky, though the clanging bronze of Temesa strive to aid thy throes¹; even the chariot of the Sun, my grandsire, pales at my song; Aurora pales at my poisons. You dulled the bulls' flames at my command; you pressed under the curved plow those necks which had endured no weight. You turned the savage onslaught of the serpent-born band against themselves; you lulled the watcher who knew no sleep, and beguiling the defender sent the golden prize back to the cities of Greece. Now I have need of juices by whose aid old age may be renewed and may turn back to the bloom of youth and regain its early years. And you will give them; for not in vain have the stars gleamed in reply, not in vain is my car at hand, drawn by winged dragons." There was the car, sent down from the sky. When she had mounted therein and stroked the bridled necks of the dragon team, shaking the light reins with her hands she was whirled aloft. She looked down on Thessalian Tempe lying below, and turned her dragons towards regions that she knew. All the herbs that Ossa bore, and high Pelion, Othrys and Pindus and Olympus, greater than Pindus, she surveyed: and those that pleased her, some she plucked up by the roots and some she cut off with the curved blade of a bronze pruning-hook. Many grasses also she chose from the banks of the Apidanus, many from Amphrysus. Nor were you, Enipeus, left without toll; Peneus also, and Spercheus gave something, and the reedy banks of Boebe. From Euboean Anthedon she culled a grass that gives long life, a herb not yet made famous by the change which it produced in Glaucus' body.

And now nine days and nine nights had seen her traversing all lands, drawn in her car by her winged dragons, when she returned. The dragons had not been touched save by the odour of the herbs, and yet they sloughed off their skins of many long years. As she came Medea stopped this side of the threshold and the door; covered by the sky alone, she avoided her husband's embrace, and built two turf altars, one on the right to Hecate and one on the left to Youth. She wreathed these with boughs from the wild wood, then hard by she dug two ditches in the earth and performed her rites; plunging her knife into the throat of a black sheep, she drenched the open ditches with his blood. Next she poured upon it bowls of liquid honey, and again bowls of milk still warm, while at the same time she uttered her

incantations, called up the deities of the earth, and prayed the king of the shades with his stolen bride not to be in haste to rob the old man's body of the breath of life.

When she had appeased all these divinities by long, low-muttered prayers, she bade her people bring out under the open sky old Aeson's worn-out body; and having buried him in a deep slumber by her spells, like one dead she stretched him out on a bed of herbs. Far hence she bade Jason go, far hence all the attendants, and warned them not to look with profane eyes upon her secret rites. They retired as she had bidden. Medea, with streaming hair after the fashion of the Bacchantes, moved round the blazing altars, and dipping many-cleft sticks in the dark pools of blood, she lit the gory sticks at the altar flames. Thrice she purified the old man with fire, thrice with water, thrice with sulphur.

Meanwhile the strong potion in the bronze pot is boiling, leaping and frothing white with the swelling foam. In this pot she boils roots cut in a Thessalian vale, together with seeds, flowers, and black juices. She adds to these ingredients pebbles sought for in the farthest Orient and sands which the ebbing tide of Ocean laves. She adds hoar frost gathered under the full moon, the wings of the uncanny screech-owl with the flesh as well, and the entrails of a werewolf which has the power of changing its wild-beast features into a man's. There also in the pot is the scaly skin of a slender Cinyphian water-snake, the liver of a long-lived stag, to which she adds also eggs and the head of a crow nine generations old. When with these and a thousand other nameless things the barbarian woman had prepared her more than mortal plan, she stirred it all up with a branch of the fruitful olive long since dry and well mixed the top and bottom together. And lo, the old dry stick, when moved about in the hot broth, grew green at first, in a short time put forth leaves, and then suddenly was loaded with teeming olives. And wherever the froth bubbled over from the hollow pot, and the hot drops fell upon the ground, the earth grew green and flowers and soft grass sprang up. When she saw this, Medea unsheathed her knife and cut the old man's throat; then, letting the old blood all run out, she filled his veins with her brew. When Aeson had drunk this in part through his lips and part through the wound, his beard and hair lost their hoary grey and quickly became black again; his leanness vanished, away went the pallor and the look of neglect, the deep wrinkles were filled out with new flesh, his limbs had the strength of youth. Aeson was filled with wonder, and remembered that this was he forty years ago.