

Commentary on Book 7 of Ovid's
***Metamorphoses* lines 164-261**

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Abstract

This literary commentary focuses on the character of Medea as presented by Ovid in lines 164-261 in book 7 of his *Metamorphoses*. Through his linear chronology of the Medea myth, Ovid moves away from the tragic tradition with its unity of time and place, allowing him to explore Medea's metamorphosis. The passage I have chosen to comment upon deals with Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson which functions as the start of Ovid's transformation of Medea from a young girl who has fallen in love with Jason, into her persona as a witch, barbarian, and murderer. Within this commentary I explore how Ovid's presentation of Medea in this passage foreshadows Medea's final transformation through allusion to other literary, his representation of witchcraft and magic, and links to other women within the *Metamorphoses*.

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Introduction

1. Medea in literary tradition

Medea's appearances in literature can be dated back certainly as far as the 7th or 8th century BCE¹. The story of Medea varies greatly across sources. She appears in the *Corinthiaca* attributed to the 8th century poet Eumelus as the heir to the city of Corinth². In Hesiod's *Theogony* (700-730 BCE) he establishes her as the daughter of Aeëtes (956-62) and then recounts her escape from Colchis and subsequent marriage to Jason (992-1002). The story of her poisoning Creon and flight from Corinth appears in *Oechaliae halosis* fr. 4 before it does in Euripides' *Medea*, although in *Oechaliae halosis* her children are left behind rather than murdered. In *Naupatica* she appears again as Jason's helper, fleeing her father's palace and taking the golden fleece with her (fr. 9 K). This occurs again in Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode*, (247-250) and book 4 of Apollonius's *Argonautica* before Ovid's treatment of the myth in his works.

It is not just the story of Medea that varies, but also how she is portrayed by different authors across different genres. Hesiod implies that she is a goddess, including her in a group of immortal women who marry mortal men:

ὄσσαι δὴ θνητοῖσι παρ' ἀνδράσιν εὐνηθεῖσαι
ἀθάναται γείναντο θεοῖς ἐπιείκελα τέκνα.

Th. 968-969

¹ Braswell (1988, pp.6-23) gives a comprehensive overview of the Argonautic myth prior to Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode*. While not focused specifically on Medea, he does highlight her appearances and variations on her myth. See Dworniak-Jarych (2025) for a detailed description of Medea in Greek literature and variations on her myth.

² See Braswell (1988, pp.10-11) for further details on the role of the *Corinthiaca* of Eumelus within the Argonautic tradition and Dworniak-Jarych (2025 pp.13-14) on Medea's role. See West, 2002 for discussion of the authorship and dates of the *Corinthiaca*. West argues that it cannot have been composed prior to the mid sixth century BCE.

While Pindar does not portray her as a goddess, she is nonetheless powerful and holds an elevated status. In the *Fourth Pythian Ode* she has the role of a seer or a prophetess; not immortal but still someone who is not only knowledgeable in healing arts but also a mouthpiece for the gods, or “a diva who has both magical song and drugs at her disposal” (O’Higgins, 1997, p.111).

In the *Argonautica* she steps further away again from divinity. While Clauss (1997) debates whether she could be considered a hero in Apollonius’ epic, he eventually concludes that she fills the role of helper-maiden, one that as Clauss (1997, p.156) observes is a combination of other female helpers of epic poetry: Circe, Calypso and Nausicaa³.

In arguably her most famous portrayal, as the eponymous protagonist of Euripides’ play, Medea is not a youthful princess or helper-maiden, but a tragic figure. Her divine lineage is present, demonstrated through her departure on her grandfather’s chariot (1321-1322), but her power here is of a destructive nature, used to harm rather than to heal. O’Higgins (1997) convincingly argues that in Pindar’s *Fourth Pythian Ode*, Medea is a victim of male appropriation of female power, evidenced through Medea’s abandonment of her family and use of magic both for Jason’s gain rather than her own. In Euripides we see the outcome of this, and her struggle to regain the power she has been stripped of.

Across literature, Medea’s acts of murder are not limited to that of her children. As Dräger observes (2006, p.546), the story of her brother’s murder appears in Pherecydes, and that while in *Arg.* 4.421 Medea does not kill Apsyrtus herself, she lures him into a trap where he is killed by Jason. Medea is also held responsible for the murder of Pelias, Jason’s uncle, by his daughters in Sophocles’ *Rizotomoi* and Euripides’ *Peliades*. Graf (1997, pp.25-26) further notes instances of human sacrifice in variations of the Medea myth. While she is an unwilling

³ See n on 177-178

participant in Dionysius Scytobrachion, she participates compliantly in Dracontius, whom Graf suggests is drawing on a 4th or 3rd century tragedy.

This commentary focuses on Medea's preparations for the rejuvenation of Aeson at Ovid *Met.* 7.164-296. Although it does not feature in more popular recounts of the myth such as Apollonius or Euripides, this element of the myth as told by Ovid appears as far back as the 7th century BCE in *Nostoi* fr. 7. As ever there are variations to be found, and in Pherecydes FGrH 3 F113 and Simonides Fr548, it is Jason that Medea rejuvenates, not Aeson.

2. Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Following his successes in elegy and prior to his banishment from Rome in 8CE, Ovid penned his *Metamorphoses*. The poem represents an ambitious attempt to retell mythological stories from, as he himself states, Earth's creation to Ovid's own time (*Met* 1.3-4). Mythology was not unfamiliar to Ovid, as evidenced by the frequent references in his *Amores*, *Ars amatoria* and the stories of women from mythology in *Heroides*. However, *Metamorphoses* marks a new direction in Ovid's work as he departs from elegiac couplets and a focus on love. As is often the case with Ovid, it is hard to define the genre of the work. The length of the poem, the hexameter and the chronological structure indicate an epic work, but as Coleman notes, the subject matter and the lack of plot continuity cannot be described as epic (1975, pp.461-462).

From its title, and its opening (*In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora* (1.1-2)) one can see that transformation is a key theme within the *Metamorphoses*. The nature and the cause of the transformations vary widely across the vast number of myths told in the poem. Often, they involve a physical transformation and the intervention of a deity, be it through anger, jealousy, lust or benevolence. However, this is not always the case. At times there is physical transformation but no immortal involvement as in the Tereus episode or in the case

of Hecuba. At times there is no obvious physical transformation but rather an emotional or psychological one as with Daedalus and indeed, Medea.

However, transformation is not the only thing Ovid is interested in, but rather how to put a new spin on an old myth. As Galinsky well states, Ovid has a “deliberate tendency to tell a given story differently from the versions of earlier writers” (1975, p.5). This has already been thoroughly demonstrated in his *Heroides* but occurs on a much larger scale in *Metamorphoses* with over 250 myths retold (Galinsky, 1975, p.4). This is no less evident in Ovid’s retelling of the Medea myth, which has been so thoroughly explored in earlier work.

3. The Ovidian Medea before *Met.* 7.164ff

Medea is a clear figure of interest for Ovid. In addition to her story taking up almost half of book 7, in central position within his fifteen book *Metamorphoses*, she also was the focus of his lost tragedy, as well as letter 12 of the *Heroides*⁴. Additionally, while Medea is neither the author nor the intended recipient of *Heroides* 6, she is certainly prominent in the text.

Heroides 6 contains Ovid’s least sympathetic depiction of Medea. Its narrator, Hypsipyle, describes Medea as *barbara...venefica* (19), and *barbara paelex* (81), detailing her savage behaviour. She notes both the elements of her witchcraft that would seem more commonplace to a Roman audience (such as *carmina novit* (83); *deducere lunam nititur* (85-86); *passis...capillis* (89)) to those that are certainly concerning: *per tumulos errat* (89); *certainque...colligit ossas* (90); *simulcraque cera figit, et miserum tenuis in iecur urget acus* (91-92). Hypsipyle’s comment *et quae nescierim melius* (93) implies she is capable of much worse. Moreover, she alludes to the crimes that Medea has already committed as well as those that the audience knows a future Medea will commit:

Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus.

⁴ Assuming Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 12. For arguments for and against see Hinds, 1993 and Knox, 1986.

*spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros
corpora, pignoribus parceret illa meis?* (128-130)

In *Heroides* 12 we see Medea in the form of the rejected lover of elegy. As Boyd states, “Medea takes advantage of the elegiac form of the epistle, exploiting it in order to portray herself as a defenceless victim” (2019, p.75). Medea uses the letter to first present her younger, love-struck self: *sic cito sum verbis capta puella tuis* (92); *virginitas... praeda* (111).

Like Hypsipyle, Medea describes herself with her loosened hair, *comas adversas* (63), but rewrites it as a sign of her distress and the pain of love, not her witchery. As Newlands notes, “the letter plays upon the notion of Medea as the abandoned woman, a sympathetic elegiac type, and not as *pharmaceutria*” (1997, pp.179-80). Medea provides further rebuttal to Hypsipyle’s attack on her character. Here, she is reluctant to help Jason at first and needs persuasion from her sister (65-66). A clear contrast to Hypsipyle’s claims that Medea acts out of a desire for personal glory (6.99-100).

However, Medea does not sustain her role as a distressed victim or an elegiac lover. Boyd well notes that:

“She uses the close of her letter, therefore, to look forward to a more elevated destiny, as a figure of tragedy or of epic... With her concluding promise of “something greater” (*nescioquid maius*), Ovid’s Medea foresees an epic narrative in which, upon killing her children, she will begin her heroic career” (2019, p.79).

In this we have a clear nod towards her forthcoming role in *Metamorphoses* where Ovid will use the epic genre to narrate the Medea myth in its entirety from Colchis to her disappearing act in Athens.

Outside of the *Heroides* references to Medea appear frequently in Ovid's other elegiac works⁵. Allusions to her are often a stand in for deception, destruction or a love gone wrong. A notable example comes in *Ars Amatoria* 3 where she appears among a group of women who are disappointed by treacherous men:

*Phasida iam matrem fallax dimisit Iason:
Venit in Aesonios altera nupta sinus.* (3.33-34)

In *Met.* 7 Ovid faces the challenge of recounting the whole of the Medea myth in a linear way, rather than tackling a portion of it; something we see neither in his other works on Medea, nor in earlier literary tradition which tends to take place either during the Argonautic episode⁶ or later on in the myth as in Euripides. He therefore must tackle the transformation from a young girl into a witch, murderess and jilted lover.

Prior to Medea's arrival in Colchis, Ovid has created a sympathetic portrayal of the lovelorn and confused princess. Through her soliloquy (7.11-7.71), we have an insight into Medea's feelings towards Jason and her divided loyalties as she is split between her love for Jason and her duties as a daughter. The scene in Colchis is also where we see the very first but rather understated glimpse of Medea's use of magic as she hands over herbs to Jason (7.98-99) and later utters incantations (7.137-138).

Ovid passes quickly over the return of the Argo to Iolchos (155-158) and in doing so omits the morally dubious events on the Argo's return to Greece, most notably the murder of Apsyrtus. And so instead of arriving in Greece as someone who, at best, following the Apollonian tradition, has had a hand in setting up her brother's murder, and at worst has

⁵ For a comprehensive list of examples of allusions to Medea in Ovid's *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Remedia Amoris* and *Fasti* see Boyd, 2019 pp.87-88.

⁶ For example, Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode* or Apollonius' *Argonautica*

committed a barbaric blood crime, she still initially maintains her innocence and piety in a way which diverges from earlier literary works⁷.

Much has been made of the swift transformation of Medea's character from this first self-conscious use of magic to the version of her we are presented with once she and Jason have arrived in Greece. Anderson notes that she "has very little to do with the love-torn girl we have watched earlier" (1972, p.262) and instead insists that here we are seeing someone who is already confident in her witchcraft. Kenney (2024, p.55) asserts that image of the lovesick girl has already dissolved and is replaced by that of the malevolent witch by the time they arrive in Thessaly. Newlands criticises Ovid's abrupt jump from his "sympathetic portrayal of Medea as a love-sick maiden to a tragi-comic account of her career as an accomplished *pharmaceutria* (witch) and murderess" (1997, p.178) and further claims that:

"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 motives for her deeds" (1997, p.186).

As Clauss (1997, p.18) rightly notes, similar criticism has been both levelled at Apollonius's portrayal of Medea between books 3 and 4 of *Argonautica* and successfully countered by scholars. I would argue that while the condensed linear nature of Ovid's retelling does mean that the transformation is swift, and Medea's powers as demonstrated from 7.179 do certainly exceed anything evidenced earlier in the book, it is harsh to say that there is little consideration of her feelings or motives.

⁷ Dräger (2006, pp.546-547) highlights Apoll. Rhod. 4.421ff where Medea plays a role in her brother's murder by luring him into a fatal trap. Hypsipyle also references Medea's murder of her brother in *Heroides* 6 129-130.

Commentary on *Metamorphoses* 7.164-7.261 (using the edition of R.J. Tarrant's *Oxford Classical Text*)

164-178 *cum... ausis*: Jason has returned to Iolcos with his new wife, Medea. Having seen the potential of her powers through her help in obtaining the Golden Fleece in Colchis, Jason now turns to her again and asks for help in rejuvenating his father.

Ovid's choice in including the rejuvenation of Aeson is an interesting one. Ovid, as Newlands (1997, p.178) notes, is treating in detail material that is largely suppressed in other earlier tellings of the myth. Tupet (2009, p.401) claims that the Medea myth, even in its account of the enchantments used to aid Jason against the bulls or the armed men, does not involve a transformation that is comparable to those achieved by the gods in other episodes. She convincingly argues that in order to include this myth alongside the other metamorphoses, Ovid is limited to using the obscure tale of Aeson's rejuvenation as the principal transformation. Otis (1970, p.169) equally claims that Medea does not undergo any metamorphosis. Anderson contrastingly states that "we watch her degenerate progressively from maiden into fearsome witch without experiencing physical metamorphosis" (1963, p.15). I would agree with Anderson in his view over Otis' that the main transformation is Medea's psychological transformation. As Libatique states, the story "starts subjectively with a young girl in love and culminates in an impersonal mythological abstraction" (2015, p.70). Although I would argue that we will see some elements of physical transformation too, and the Aeson episode marks the start of Medea's transformations.

164 *Aesonides*: Ovid's use of the patronymic here sets the tone for lines 164-168. Anderson (1972, p.263) well notes that this shows a special awareness of the father, and Jason's speech is one of filial devotion, that shows a level of concern for him so great that he is willing to do whatever necessary to help him, even at the detriment to his own life. This may come as something of a surprise in terms of Ovid's characterisation of Jason. In both

letters of the *Heroides* there is little to recommend his character, having abandoned two women and his children with them both. Ovid does portray him in a positive light at points in the *Metamorphoses*. He is described as *claro* (7.5), and Medea questions

*Quem, nisi crudelem, non tangat Iasonis aetas
et genus et virtus?* (7.26-27)

Although we do not see what he has done to deserve this reputation. Ovid tells us that the Argonauts *multaque perpessi* (7.5) but is vague about details. Even as Jason completes the tasks set by Aeetes to win the fleece (7.100-158) his character is flat. It is Medea's emotions and reactions that are described by Ovid. Outside of this speech Jason appears to be a somewhat one-dimensional character.

164-168 *o cui...parenti*: Despite his clear desire to help his father, Jason's address to Medea lacks sincerity, as he seems to fumble over his words that are filled with false flattery.

Kenney (2024, p.56) aptly describes Jason's preface to his request as "ponderous and circumlocutory". He addresses her as *o cui debere salute* (7.164) and while this highlights the debt owed by him, it is also clearly aimed at winning her compliance by reinforcing her role as a helper-maiden. The placement of *confiteor* (7.165) at the start of the line gives the impression that Jason is submitting or conceding to Medea. This is further reinforced with his remark *mihi cuncta dedisti* (7.165) and finally by his reference to Medea as *coniunx* (7.165). Although referring to her as *coniunx* is ostensibly a demonstration of his love and devotion, there is also a sense of reciprocation required, now he has married her⁸. The language Jason uses here is a sharp contrast to her designation by the narrator as *spolia altera* (7.157) and demonstrates Jason's somewhat underhand techniques. Curley well notes the contrast

⁸ See 7.91 *promisitque torum*: Jason has previously used marriage as a means of getting what he wants from Medea.

between the portrayal of Medea and Jason's marriage in Euripides where the marriage constitutes a betrayal on Medea's part of her father and household (*πατέρα καὶ δόμους προδοῖσ' ἐμούς*, 483), and then Jason's marriage to his new bride which in turn is a betrayal of Medea and their children:

“In Ovid, *coniugium* brings Medea to Jason's house, where she is obliged to assist in the rejuvenation of his father: *tum sic Aesonides, “o cui debere salutem | confiteor, coniunx”* (164–5). It is ironic that Jason should emphasize both his marriage to Medea and her assistance on the voyage, when in the tragedy he downplays the importance of both” (2013, p.122).

Ovid's reader, with their knowledge of Jason's easy abandonment of Medea and his children in the Euripidean tragedy, are unlikely to be taken in by Jason's flattering words.

Rosner Siegel calls the encounter of Medea and Jason “a story of misdirected love and its unfortunate results” (1982, p.234). In Ovid, the only real love Jason demonstrates is towards his father, and not his wife.

Alongside his flattery of her deeds, Jason also highlights the potential power she has. While the first half of line 167 *si tamen hoc possunt* might sound uncertain, the following *quid enim non carmina possunt*, reminds us that he has firsthand experience of Medea's abilities, and, again with enthusiastic flattery, demonstrates his faith in what they can do. Medea's previous spells have clearly made an impression on Jason. We see a contrast between this and Medea's own previous lack of conviction where in 7.137-7.138 she adds additional spells to her magic as she fears they will fail:

*neue parum ualeant a se data gramina, carmen
auxiliare canit secretasque aduocat artes.*

Jason clearly still sees Medea as someone who can be manipulated through the appearance of love and false flattery. As Rosner-Siegel well notes, (1982, p.238) it demonstrates Jason's materialistic assessment of Medea in his recognition of what she has done for him previously and her value in what she is able to provide for him. The fact that Medea is in some way receptive to this flattery stands in opposition to the idea that Medea no longer resembles the young girl in Colchis.

There is a sharp contrast between Jason's lengthy build up at 7.168 when Jason finally makes his "crisply phrased request" (Kenney, 2024, p.56). The whole request is given in a single line perhaps designed to catch Medea unaware. The imperatives *deme* and *adde* are demanding, and with *meis* and *parenti* split across the line, there is another reminder that Jason's real devotion lies with his father, and not Medea. As with the use of *Aesonides*, this can be seen as a sign of the patriarchal society from which Medea is excluded. Although while she is excluded, her presence and powers are needed to uphold it. The male appropriation of female power seen by O'Higgins in Pindar is here too in Ovid.

169 *nec tenuit lacrimas*: Anderson (1972, p.263) picks up on the stage direction-like quality of this phrase. Although Jason does appear to genuinely care about the fate of his father, the image of Jason, a hero who has overcome enormous obstacles, being unable to hold back his tears rings insincere. It reads as just another way to manipulate Medea into doing his bidding. One is inclined to think of Jason's future on the stage in Euripides and his attempts to manipulate Medea again.

169 *pietate*: This act of piety performed by Jason further plays on the confused emotions Medea highlights in her soliloquy: she is torn between her love for Jason and her duty to her father: *prodamne ego regna parentis* (7.38). Here *nec tenuit lacrimas* (7.169) shows her emotional response to Jason's request and *mota est pietate* (7.169) recalls 7.72

where she refers to her own actions as *nefas* and *crimen*, revealing her still conflicted feelings of duty towards her father. As Rosner-Siegel (1982, p.238) astutely notes, she recognizes Jason's act as *pietas*, a quality which she herself had abandoned on his behalf. This thought of her father may be what moves her, rather than Jason's insincere flattery.

Boyd highlights *pietas* as "a "buzzword" that evokes first and foremost the masculine world of epic values, especially for a public raised on the *Aeneid*" (2019, p.24). This is clearly apparent in *Metamorphoses* as Ovid plays on this theme throughout the Medea episode as well as in its surrounding myths. Just as the themes of *pudor* and *amor* link Medea's story to those of Scylla, Byblis, Myrrha and Atalanta (Otis, 1970, p.173) so does the theme of *pietas*. Medea's story and those of the women who surround her in books 6, 7 and 8 are linked through the shared themes of marriage, duty to their fathers, and death (Newlands, 2013, p.180) and the theme of *pietas* in particular links Medea closely to the story of Procne in book 6.

While Procne has not defied her father through her marriage, the theme of devotion to a father is clear. When Philomela leaves with Tereus, her father urges her to return: *si pietas ulla est, ad me, Philomela, redito* (6.503). And as with Medea, Ovid links the idea of *pietas* to murder. Procne rejects her duty towards her children: *sed simul ex nimia mentem pietate labare/ sensit* (6.629-630) and towards her husband: *scelus est pietas in coniuge Tereo* (6.635) as she concludes that the greater duty is to her sister and that she must commit infanticide to avenge her sister. As Medea will also do later, Procne, by depriving Tereus of his heirs, rejects the patriarchal world and its values, and like Medea, seeks to reclaim power that has been taken by men.

Larmour (1990, p.132) convincingly argues that Ovid uses the Tereus episode just before Medea's to bring in the motif of child-killing without having to retell the best-known parts of

the Medea story over again, and that this *contamination* creates a link between the two stories. While the connection in terms of motif is clear, the Medea and Procne episodes diverge in terms of motivation: “although both Medea and Procne resort to the same type of violence, in the case of Procne the dilemma she faces concerns not erotic jealousy but the importance of family bonds” (Manitoni, 2018, p.198). Ovid’s reference to Jason’s piety invites the reader to consider what Medea’s relationship with him may have cost her in terms of her own family bonds at this point in the narration.

Otis rightly argues that “the transformation of Procne’s character... is solely due to the fatal libido of Tereus. It is this that destroys her humanity” (1970, p.211). We will see too that Medea becomes a victim of Jason’s libido. However, Ovid’s depiction of her witch-like nature and separation from other mortals already puts her humanity into question. It could be for this reason that Ovid does not dwell on the killing of her children. Indeed, at the point of infanticide, Ovid places the moral judgement on the weapon that Medea uses, rather than the figure herself:

*sanguine natorum perfunditur impius ensis,
ultraque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma. (7.396-397)*

To the other side of Medea’s story, in book 8, Ovid places that of Scylla and her father Nisus. Anderson links the stories of Medea and Scylla (as well as Byblis and Myrrha) as they “debate within themselves the merits of *virtus*, *pietas* and *pudor* in conflict with *amor*” (1963, p.14) Rosner-Siegel adds to this that “in the cases mentioned, the *amor* is particularly incorrect in nature” (1982, p.236). This certainly calls to mind Ovid’s previous inclusion of Medea with women who have chosen the wrong sort of love in *Ars amatoria*. As with Procne, the theme of divided family loyalty is at play and there are parallels between Medea and Scylla. Medea and Scylla are linked by the betrayal of their fathers for the love of a foreign

man. Again, the *pietas* that Medea sees in Jason's request is contrasted with Scylla who states that she has *impia laesi* (8.128).

Ovid's use of *pietate* here also points to Medea's future corruption of *pietas* and filial affection through the murder of Pelias. Otis rightly states that the influence of Jason's *pietas* towards Aeson gives his rejuvenation "a moral colour that is obviously laid on for contrast with the impious pseudo-rejuvenation and murder of Pelias" (1970, p.173). This is supported by Gildenhard and Zissos who note "the perversion of *pietas*" (2013, p.109) as Pelias' daughters are tricked by Medea into murdering their father. Segal further states that "a son's plea of *pietas* moved Medea to use her magic to restore Aeson's youth (169); now she manipulates the *pietas* of Pelias' reluctant daughters to impel them to the patricidal deed" (2002, p.18). Ovid initially refers to each daughter as *pia* (7.339) but through Medea's urging they become *impia* (7.339).

170-171 *dissimilemque... tales*: Ovid moves from Jason's perceived piety to Medea's reaction to it. Anderson (1972, p.263) points to *dissimilemque animum* in line 170 as Medea defining herself as *impia*. At this point it is linked only to her guilty conscience as she has abandoned her father, rather than anything more malicious. We see in this and also in *nec tamen adfectus tales* (7.172) shame at abandoning her father modelled on Apollonius' Medea αἰδοῖ ἐεργομένη (3.469) although Ovid's Medea does not let her shame hold her back and manages to push aside thoughts of her father. In fact, her use of *coniunx* in line 172 suggests that she has resolved the guilt that she felt in lines 7.69-70:

*coniugiumne vocas speciosaque nomina culpa
imponis, Medea, tuae?*

171-173 *quod...uitae*: Medea's response to Jason's request shows clear surprise. Anderson (1972, p.263) points out the abrupt start to Medea's speech, indicating the

sharpness of her objection. She begins with *quod* on line 171, followed by an enjambement onto the next line, and ending the clause dramatically part way through line 172 with the delayed *scelus*. The phrase *excidit ore tuo* almost seems to exempt Jason from having said this wicked thing, as if Medea cannot believe Jason has come up with the suggestion of reducing his own life. However, as with the nature of Medea's character, there is also debate over what is motivating her response. Libatique (2015, p.78) reads it as emotional in-character text with Medea showing her tenderness for Jason. This is demonstrated through her use of the affectionate *coniunx* and her horror at the wicked idea, *scelus*, of removing any time from Jason's life. This point is supported by Anderson's suggestion that for Medea it is a 'sin' that Jason should diminish his own life (1972 p.264)⁹. Her further suggestion as to how to rejuvenate Aeson therefore appears to be motivated by her love for Jason. Similarly, Manuwald (2013, p.128) notes that Medea's first uses of magic (in Colchis and then to rejuvenate Aeson) are done out of love for Jason. These arguments therefore appear to demonstrate that at this point in the narrative Medea is still the same love-torn girl seen in Colchis, and that Ovid has not yet moved away from this representation of her. As Rosner-Siegel states, "she has neither metamorphosed into the wicked witch of other tales, nor has she abandoned her love for Jason" (1982, p.238).

While it is true that Medea does still appear to love Jason at this point, there are other motivations at play. Segal well states that her initial rejection of Jason's plea comes from an unwillingness to interfere with the normal course of nature and that "she behaves ... as if she were the guardian of the established world order" (2002, p.15). This is supported by

⁹ In opposition to Medea's moral indignance, we can also see in her use of *scelus* further foreshadowing of Medea's transformation and future crimes. Medea's use of this word here signals her indignation as Segal (2002, p.17) notes, but its repetition in 7.340, again describing the murder of Pelias by his daughters, marks her own crime and the revelation of her darker side.

Anderson's suggestion (1972, p.167) that *posse* emphatically placed at the start of 7.173 shows Medea to be capable of the undertaking but unwilling.

While Newlands is aligned with Rosner-Siegel and Anderson in her view that Medea is initially moved by "Jason's filial piety" (1997, p.187) she concludes that Medea's revised offer of help is not motivated by love, but rather by ambition, aptly suggesting that Medea "wants to test her powers as a witch" (p.187). While Tupet (2009, p.402) also agrees that her love for Jason and transference of filial affection onto her new father-in-law explain why she chooses to undertake Aeson's rejuvenation, she claims that it is only once she has decided to take on the project, that she begins to consider the potential to demonstrate her skills, and through this Ovid prevents Medea's character from appearing as a third-rate mercenary.

Newlands' proposal certainly appears to be the more convincing as Medea immediately turns to magic and to the supernatural elements that stand out in the lines which follow.

174 *nec sinat hoc Hecate*: Medea's close relationship with the goddess Hecate has been established by Apollonius (3.528ff). In *Metamorphoses* Medea has visited her altar (7.74) and Jason has made an oath by her sacred rites (7.94-95) but this is the first point we see Medea making direct reference to the goddess. Consequently, this passage gives the audience the first glimpse of Medea's relationship with Hecate and her deference to the deity. This, therefore, is where her objections come from, rather than any concern over shortening Jason's life. As Kenney (2024, p.57) rightly points out, even a goddess like Hecate would not be allowed to tamper with the lifespan of a mortal as allotted by the fates. Therefore, Medea is aligning herself with Hecate in her moral view of Jason's request (Gildenhard and Zissos 2013, p.101). Indeed, we note that throughout her attempt to rejuvenate Aeson, Medea appeals to the fates at no point, but instead a mixture of Hecate, Iuventa and chthonic gods.

This gives a sense that Medea does not relate to gods and fate in the same way other mortals do and is moving in a different sphere to them.

175 *experiar maius dare munus*: Rather than outright deny Jason's request, Medea offers something greater. There is a contrast between the modest use of the subjunctive *experiar* which appears to imply Medea's uncertainty in her ability, and the confident alliterative emphasis on the *maius ... munus* that she hopes to give. Here we can see again, the girl in Colchis who added extra prayers, fearful that her magic would fail, moving towards a practitioner of far more ambitious magic. We are hereby returned to the Medea that we saw at the end of *Heroides* 12 and her epic promise of greater deeds to come. Hinds states that the line "sustains that dark obliquity as to the coming crimes" (1993, p.41) and so the use of *maius* in *Metamorphoses* 7 gives the audience cause to think about what else Medea is capable of. Kenney, indeed, sees it as indicative of "divine or demonic possession" (2008, p.363) that he sees as a feature across Ovid's Medeas, citing *Med. Fr. 2* Lenz *feror huc illuc uae plena deo* alongside these two examples. There is a hint of something more ominous too as the reader may also recall once again Procne¹⁰ who persuades her husband to allow Philomela's ill-fated visit with the words *magni mihi muneris instar/germanam vidisse dabis* (6.443-444).

176 *arte mea soceri*: While *experiar* (7.175) and then *temptabimus* (7.176) may appear to suggest Medea's modesty, and perhaps a joint effort including Jason, the emphatic placement of *arte mea* at the start of line 176 reveals Medea's true intentions. Clauss (1997, p.175-6) well notes that Apollonius' Jason is in no way equipped to succeed in his quest without Medea's force, and we have the same impression here. Although Medea hints at a 'we' in *temptabimus* it is eclipsed by the *mea*. We see here too a glimpse of the author

¹⁰ See n on 169

coming through in his work. Wise states that “for Ovid, the power to transform reality is the power held in common by magician and poet” (1982, p.20). In *arte mea* the reader is reminded of *arte mea capta est, arte tenenda mea est* (*Ars. am.* 2.12).

177 *non annis reuocare tuis*: Ovid’s use of litotes here comes across as overly dramatic, perhaps even comic. It has the ring of the dramatic reveal of a cheap magician.

177 *diua triformis*: With *diua triformis* Medea references the goddess Hecate for the second time in this speech. With the number three being closely linked with magic¹¹, reference to Hecate’s triple form is appropriate. Tavenner (1916, p.139) highlights Tibullus 1.5.15-16 as another example, but also *Aen.* 4.511. This brings one of several opportunities which invite the reader to think of Virgil’s Massylian priestess¹² and acts as a foreboding reminder of the future of Jason and Medea’s relationship.

177-178 *non...ausis*: The focus here is on Medea’s skill, and her reference to Hecate, *modo diua triformis*, is left until the end of the next line. It seems therefore that the goddess’ permission is a secondary thought. While Medea acknowledges the need for Hecate’s help, *modo... adiuuet et praesens...adnuat* (7.177-178) she also describes her plan as *ingentibus... ausis*. This encloses *adnuat*, the permission required from the goddess, and therefore appears to overshadow it. Kenney (2024, p.57) notes the hubristic connotations of these words that end Medea’s speech. Tupet (2009, p.15) however, lists *audax* as one of the more common epithets assigned to Hecate, and so, through her use of *ausis* perhaps she is hoping to link herself more closely to the goddess¹³.

As Kenney (2008, pp.365-369) rightly observes, Ovid’s Medea overshadows Jason. In Clauss’ discussion on the role of Apollonius’ Medea, he discusses whether or not that Medea

¹¹ See n on 189 for the use of three in this episode.

¹² See nn on 179-180, 183, 190-191 and 192-198 for other references to the Massylian priestess.

¹³ See n on 174 for Medea’s alignment with Hecate.

“usurps the role of the hero of the Argonautic expedition” (1997, p.149). He argues that Medea is clearly more resourceful than Jason, and demonstrates terrifying power, (notably when they encounter Talus) Apollonius ultimately places her into the role of ‘helper-maiden’. However, he concedes that this is due to Jason’s own lack of skill and the need for someone who can help him in quest that he cannot complete by himself. While Ovid’s Medea certainly starts on a similar path, playing the helper-maiden role in Colchis as she aids Jason in his trials in Colchis, and, like Scylla next to her in book 8, initially plays into the Tarpeia type, it is here that Medea takes a step away from that role. Jason is of limited interest in this passage, having a minor role to play once they leave Colchis while Medea takes centre stage. Therefore, in Medea’s final discourse with Jason, Ovid has begun to transform her from an impressionable wife, shocked at her husband’s suggestion to reduce his life, into a witch who is confident in her ability to undertake great feats and ready to do so.

179 – 185 *tres... gradus*: Narration now moves away from Medea’s in-character speech to narrator focus and at the same time Medea transitions from the young girl into a more other-worldly figure as we see her preparations for rejuvenating Aeson. Gildenhard and Zissos (2013, p.121) describe her as an interstitial character as she straddles the realm between mortal and immortal. We see this demonstrated in a number of ways: like Pindar’s Medea, she has a close relationship with the gods. We see how she demands the attention of Hecate (7.194-199) as well as Proserpina and Pluto (7.249). As in Euripides (1321-1322), she is descended from the Sun god (7.208-209) with easy access to his chariot. Ovid even describes her work as *propositum mortali maius* (6.275). It is at this point in the narration that her links to the supernatural begin to come through.

179 *tres*: Ovid begins his description of the preparations for Medea's ritual. The line starts with a ritualistic *tres*, immediately setting the scene for magic¹⁴.

179-180 *ut cornua... orbem*: The fact that Medea also waits for the full moon to appear before beginning her preparations also adds to the impression of her as a witch as typically portrayed in Roman literature. We see particularly in *Aeneid* 4, as Dido prepares to curse Aeneas, many of the same motifs that appear in this scene. The priestess who performs the rites on Dido's behalf has also gathered the necessary provisions in moonlight: *falcibus et messae ad lunam quaeruntur aënis/ pubentes herbae* (*Aen.* 4.513-514). Similarly, at 7.227 Medea will also use a *falcis aenae* to harvest her herbs. Ovid's scene is reinforced with his repeated references to the fullness of the moon, *efficerent orbem* (7.180), *plenissima fulsit... luna* (7.180-181) and *solida... imagine* (7.181). More than just being "congenial for witchery" (Anderson, 1972, p.264), Kenney (2024, p.58) links *solida...imagine* back to the necessity that Hecate is *praesens* (7.178) for the preparations noting that she must be in her full form to be present. Given the links between Hecate's three formed nature and the phases of the moon as well as to the goddesses Diana and Luna this is certainly a reasonable conclusion.

182 *egreditur...recinctas*: With the verb at the start of the line and the use of the present tense, the focus is returned to Medea's actions from Ovid's description of the setting. Medea leaves the palace *uestes induta recintas*. The enclosing order of the phrase gives a pleasant image of the loosened clothing flowing around Medea as she steps out. Having seen how Medea's mindset has become more aligned with her witch-like behaviour by the end of her speech to Jason, Ovid now gives her an outward appearance to match. Rosner Siegel (1982, p.239) well notes that this scene marks a physical start to Medea's transformation.

¹⁴ See n on 189-190 for the use of three.

183 *nuda... capillos*: Alongside her flowing clothes, Medea appears *nuda pedem*, *nudos umeris infusa capillos*. Again, the enclosing order of her uncovered hair surrounding her shoulders gives a vivid impression of her wildness. We see a similar depiction of Medea in *Arg.* 4.43: *γυμνοῖσιν δὲ πόδεσσιν ἀνὰ στεινὰς θέεν οἴμους*. But there is a contrast between Apollonius' Medea who is fleeing her father's palace and Ovid's Medea who is emerging with confidence. Ovid presents us with a motif typical of a witch in Roman literature, following the tradition that bindings should be loosened to allow the flow of magic according to ritual requirements. Anderson (1972, p.264) and Kenney (2024, p.58) point to other instances of unbound clothing or hair linked to ritual in *Metamorphoses*. Firstly, Themis' order in book one that Pyrrha and Deucalion should cover their heads and loosen their clothes (1.381-2) and Pyrrha and Deucalion's acquiescence to this before carrying out the ritual (1.398). And secondly, Telethusa and Iphis as they approach Isis' altar *passis...capillis* (9.772). There is a parallel between the first of these scenes and Medea in that the intent behind both acts of magic is to prolong and extend life. While Pyrrha and Deucalion are attempting to repopulate the earth and so extend the life of mankind, rather than that of just one man, they are not in control in the way that Medea is. Pyrrha and Deucalion are uncertain about the steps that they are taking whereas Medea's confidence is growing quickly. Moreover, while they are successful in their goal, the change happens *superorum numine* (1.411). In contrast, Medea is in control of her situation and her powers. Outside of *Metamorphoses* Ovid presents other examples of women in a similar state. In the *Heroides*, Ovid gives us a trio of women with unbound hair, including Medea as presented through the words of Hypsipyle. These women are far more terrifying than the suppliants presented in *Metamorphoses*. In *Heroides* 5 we have Cassandra *diffusis...comis* (114) as she prophesises for Oenone the destruction that Helen will bring. In *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle speaks scathingly about Medea's unnatural hobbies as she informs Jason that his new wife *per tumulos errat*

passis distincta capillis (91). Finally, in *Heroides* 7, Dido claims that her ghost will stand before Aeneas *tristis et effuses sanguinenta comis* (70). The repeated references to death and destruction associated with these women tie in much more closely with the anticipated behaviour of Medea in book 7.

We may also recall Horace's *Satires*:

*Vidi egomet nigra succinctam vadere palla
Canidiam, pedibus nudis passoque capillo,
cum Sagana maiore ululantem:* (1.8.23-25)

As in *Heroides* 6 we have an uncomfortable presentation of witches. Alongside the bare feet and loose hair, the howling and ritualistic sacrifice of a lamb also parallel Medea's later actions (7.190 and 7.244). But Ovid uses the similarities to provoke a sharp contrast¹⁵.

Although Candida and her accomplice Sagana may appear to be proficient witches in their dress and actions, they achieve little before they are scared off. Here Medea is at the very beginning of her transformation into a witch but as we shall see, she actually achieves her aims.

There are also clear allusions to the *Aeneid* and Virgil's description in book 4 of both the priestess Dido has employed, *crines effuse sacerdos* (4.509), and Dido herself, *unum exuta pedem vinclis, in veste recinta* (4.517). Here too, the comparisons are more apt than those in *Metamorphoses*. First, the link to a priestess who invokes the goddess Hecate, as Medea will do, and who gathers her ingredients in moonlight with a bronze sickle, as Medea will do. Virgil's Dido, however, is more representative of who Medea will become. We see the presence of Dido in other women that Ovid presents in his *Heroides* who becomes an ominous model¹⁶. The Ovidian reader is therefore prepared as here too, as the archetype of

¹⁵ See n on 199-209 for a similar comparison with Dipsas.

¹⁶ See, for example, Fulkerson 2005 pp.26-29 for her discussion on how Phyllis has modelled herself on Dido.

the rejected lover and a woman from a foreign land, she foreshadows the fate of Jason's barbarian wife. Dido attempts to use magic to curse Aeneas and his descendants following his abandonment of her. Medea will use her magic to kill Jason's future wife once she too has been abandoned.

184-185 *fertque...gradus*: Ovid completes his description of the now transformed Medea's entrance onto centre stage. Beginning line 184 with *fert* again puts the focus of the action onto Medea and accords a certain confidence to her. This is followed by a somewhat eerie description of how she moves. In a triple chiasmic structure Ovid describes her *vagos...gradus* as she moves *mediae per muta silentia noctis*. The superfluous addition of *muta* to *silentia* implies an unnatural stillness to the night as Medea moves through it. Beginning line 185 with *incomita* emphasises the solitary nature of her ritual. The overall impression we have of Medea is an uncomfortable one; a solitary figure, barefoot, with flowing hair and robes, gliding through the night.

185-191 *homines...terra*: A highly formulaic scene outlining the sleeping world. Contrasting the sleeping world with one restless figure is a well-known topos in epic poetry seen in works as early as Homer's *Iliad* (2.1-2). Matthews (2008, 78-79) well notes the sleeplessness of leaders in Greek and Roman epic. We also see sleeplessness in epic caused by emotional worries (*Argonautica* 3.744-753; *Aeneid* 4.522-531; and even in *Metamorphoses* 10.368-377).

The parallels with Apollonius' Medea who is awake while the world around her sleeps (3.744-51) and Virgil's Dido (4.522-28) are particularly prominent. While Apollonius and Virgil begin their scenes with the conventional reference to night (AR 3.744 *νὄξ μὲν*; Verg. *Aen.* 4.522 *nox erat*) Ovid jumps straight in with those who are slumbering. Anderson suggests that this is Ovid toying with our expectations (1972, p.265) which is apt given that

Ovid plays with the formula. Matthews (2008, p.77) notes that the Dido episode is one of the most elaborate examples in Latin literature, dedicating 6 lines to describing the still natural features and slumbering birds and animals before revealing unhappy Dido who is still awake. Apollonius, likewise, gives 8 lines to the sleeping world, ending with Medea awake and wrestling with her feelings. Ovid reduces this to three lines and begins *homines uolucresque ferasque* before moving on to the more naturally silent hedgerows, branches and the air all of which are quiet and still, before his final revelation that it is the stars alone that are awake and Medea is left unnamed.

Ovid's Medea subverts the model not only in the construction of the scene, but also by rejecting the role of an epic heroine. She is not kept awake out of worry, concern or duty, and instead is using the nighttime for magic placing her in a position of control.

Ovid places a keen emphasis on silence in this passage. We find: *silentia noctis* (184), *soluerat alta quies* (186), *nullo cum murmure* (186), *silent fronds*, *silet umidus aer* (187) and even the stars who are not asleep hint at quiet with their sibilance: *sidera sola* (188). Medea stands in contrast to this. We have a tricolon of living things that are loosened in sleep: *homines uolucresque ferasque/ soluerat* (185-6), but Ovid applies the same verb to Medea as she unleashes a series of wails: *ternisque ululatibus ora soluit* (190-191). The gentle build up creates a sharp and dramatic contrast as Medea begins to speak.

186 *alta quies*: We see here a similarity to *Aen.* 6.522: *dulcis et alta quies placidaeque similima morti*. Horsfall (2013, p.376) points back to *Od.* 13.79 and *Lucr.* 3.465-6 *altum...soporem* as examples forerunners of the phrase. Ovid's reader would perhaps note the similar expression and while he makes no mention of death, make the connection, again hinting at Medea's ominous future.

189-190 *ter... ter... ternis*: The repetition of three appears commonly in Roman prayers and tricolon of three shows clear effort made to ensure her prayer is received well and is perhaps particularly appropriate when praying to *triceps Hecate* (7.194). Ovid has previously used this formula with regards to Medea's magic: *uerbaque ter dixit* (7.153). Here we see its development with three lots of three, and Ovid moves from somewhat understated *uerba* to *ululatibus*. Clearly this greater act of magic requires greater noise. Tavenner (1916) well notes the Roman belief in number 3 to cure ailments, but also its role in love magic and furthermore its use by the gods (especially in Ovid) when restoring mortals to life. The triple repetition of three here is therefore particularly appropriate as rejuvenation of Aeson seems to straddle all three areas.

189 *ter sumptis flumine crinem inrorauit aquis*: Anderson (1972, p.266) cites pouring water over hair as a purificatory rite, and Kenney states that running water is obligatory for lustral purposes (2024, p.59). However, Tupet (2009, pp.21-22) in her discussion on the importance of running water specifically, as part of magic rituals, notes that while this rite is analogous to religious ones in the Roman world, Ovid is unique in applying it to magical practice; it appears only in this scene and in the purification of Aeson (7.261). Moreover, she comments that in moistening her hair three times, Medea follows the same religious ritual that Ovid sets out for Quinta Claudia in his *Fasti*: *ter caput inrorat, ter tollit in aethera palmas* (4.315). She further notes that this rite does not appear in Greek literature as magical practice before Apollonius, therefore the scene draws a direct line from *Argonautica* 3.1201-5 where Jason purifies himself following Medea's guidance¹⁷.

190-191 *ternisque ululatibus ora soluit*: This clause is rich in literary allusion and demonstrates another step in Medea's transformation. Anderson (1972, p.266) highlights that

¹⁷ See n on 246-247

the *ululabatis* used to describe the three shrieks for attracting the attention of the gods are reminiscent of the howling nymphs in *Aen.* 4.168. We therefore are encouraged to draw a link between Medea and the ill-fated relationship of Dido and Aeneas and so are prepared for Medea's future portrayal as a jilted lover. This is also reinforced through the connection to the Massylian priestess engaged by Dido who *ter centum tonat ore deos* (*Aen.* 4.510). Newlands well argues that "she reveals her distance from the world of ordinary mortals by filling the nocturnal silences with ritualistic triple howlings" (2013, p.187). Therefore, Medea is not only the unhappy bride and the author of the curse upon her betrayer but also a supernatural force like the Nymphs. Rosner Siegel suggests that "in performing a purification ritual Medea symbolically purges the more human aspects of her nature" (1982, p.239). This suggestion is evident in Medea's wild howls.

The howling also foreshadows Medea's future deeds. As Kenney (2024, p.59) argues, there is a parallel to Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi* where Medea invokes Hecate 'howling and shrieking' with the motif transferred from the Pelias story to Aeson which encourages us to think of Medea's next crime.

192 *nox*: Ovid's subversion of expectations continues in Medea's prayer. It begins with *nox*. We have seen Ovid playing with the narrative formula of *nox erat* in lines 185-188¹⁸. The *nox* that was missing from line 185 appears here instead at the start of her prayer and is transformed into a deity.

192 – 198 *nox...adeste*: The gods Medea addresses range from natural features such as *astra, luna, aurae, uenti, montes, lacus* to more conventional and expected deities such as *Hecate* and *Tellus*. Ovid finally ends with *omnes nemorum, dique omnes noctis*. As Tupet

¹⁸ See Anderson 1972 p.265

well notes, Ovid's magical invocations demonstrate particular originality, and here specifically the number of gods that Medea calls upon:

“Ovid systematically increases his apostrophes. Without a doubt, the various deities he references represent demons of the air, winds or particular places that are mentioned in papyrus and magic tablets; without a doubt, magicians take care to call upon a large number of gods. But they content themselves with more brief and shorter formulas. We do not see such complete and methodical lists” (2009, p.17. Translation mine).

If we compare this again with Virgil's priestess, and her invocation of the gods, Tupet's statement appears true. She calls on 300 gods before naming Erebus, Chaos and Hecate specifically; a much shorter list than Medea's. Dido too, is vague in her prayer: *tum, si quod non aequo foedere amantes curae numen habet iustumque memorque, precatur* (*Aen.* 4.520-521). However, rather than a methodical list, Medea's approach demonstrates Ovid's playful tone. In reference to the items added to Medea's cauldron (7.264-276), Newlands states “the excess detail is part of the humor of Ovid's portrayal of Medea as a witch” and that “this hyperbole establishes his segregation as narrator from Medea... 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” (2013. p.187). I feel that this is true here too. In contrast to Virgil's priestess, Medea starts with the specifics and after an extensive list finally ends in *dique omnes nemorum, dique omnes noctis* which could read as though she has run out of names or has become bored of listing gods, but for the balance in the line. The repetition gives both the impression of a religious prayer, and a pleasing sense of rhetoric, especially when concluded with the imperative *adeste*, demonstrating her imperious belief that the gods will do her bidding. Medea's confidence in addressing this large number of gods, the

commanding rhetoric with which she does so and the underwhelming end to the list add to the sense of Medea as an interstitial figure, who even in her prayers is above other mortals¹⁹.

Medea has a complex relationship with the gods she addresses. Her words demonstrate control but also request help in a way that feels suitable for the epic genre. *Nox arcanis fidissima* implies in some way that night is a servant entrusted to guard her secrets but in *fidissima* we also have a nod to Jason's future infidelity, and so perhaps Medea must rely on her immortal support more than mortal. Hecate is *adiutrix*; Medea needs her to accomplish what she has set out but there is a sense that perhaps Hecate is taking on the helper-maiden role to Medea's epic heroine.

199-209 *quorum... adest*: The progression of Medea's metamorphosis is obvious in this passage. Wise states that Medea's prayer "anticipates the first major instance of her transforming power" (1982, p.20) and we see this to be true as she now demonstrates her power over four of the deities she has called upon: *amnes, uentos, montes* and *Luna*. This seems to feed into the almost dismissive tone she has in the start of the prayer.

Kenney states that it is "less a prayer than a self-aretaology, a proclamation of Medea's powers and a comprehensive catalogue of the miraculous feats commonly attributed to witches" (2024, p.59). This is true to an extent, evident through the shift in subject at line 199. Medea is no longer addressing the gods but turns to describe her own achievements emphasised by an extensive string of first-person verbs: *uolui, sisto, concutio, pello, induco, abigo, uoco, rumpo, moveo, traho*. Libatique rightly suggests that this adds to Ovid's portrayal of Medea as "self-interested or distant" but also, like Wise suggests, Medea's evolution into someone more powerful (2015, pp.79-80).

¹⁹ See n on 179-185.

However, much like the ritualistic repetition at 7.198, we find similar in *nubile pello/nubilaque induco* (7.201-202), and alliterative repetition in *uentos abigoque uocoque/uipereas rumpo uerbis* (7.202-203). The rhythm and repetition, if not the content, give her speech the feel of a prayer or incantation.

As for her deeds being commonly attributed to witches, certain of them such as drawing down the moon are found frequently across Greek and Roman literature. Kenney (2024, p.61) notes the appearance of this in both Virgil and Propertius. He also highlights other similar catalogues of magical powers seen in Apollonius, Seneca, Apuleius, and Virgil. Spaeth states that “the witch’s control of the natural world is an inversion of the “natural” order of things, whereby men through their association with culture have control of the world. The ancient authors presented this inversion as profoundly threatening” (2014, p.45). This is certainly debatable. As with Ovid’s list of deities, the list of magical feats he attributes to Medea is far more extensive than most. Kenney (2008, p.383) for example, highlights that Ovid vastly expands the list of powers ascribed to her in *Arg.* 3.531-533. Again, Newland’s suggestion that Ovid’s hyperbole brings about an element of humour is apparent.

Ovid’s readers would see an obvious comparison between Medea and the drunken *lena* Dipsas in *Amores* I. Their powers overlap in the following ways: making rivers flow back to their source, gathering clouds in the sky, and waking the dead from their tombs. Tupet (2009, p.380) notes that Ovid takes pleasure in ridiculing the old woman, therefore, we could infer that like Dipsas’ exaggerated list of tricks, Medea’s is not to be fully believed. There is an extra element here in that Medea’s are given in the first person, not reported based on spurious rumours, that gives a sense of overinflated ego. We also see criticism of very similar magical rites elsewhere in Ovid:

*Nec mediae Marsis finduntur cantibus angues,
nec redit in fontes unda supina suos,*

*et, quamuis alisquis Temesaea remouerit aera,
numquam Luna suis excutietur equis.*

Med. fac., 32-42

Here, Ovid explicitly warns against trusting in the types of claims that Medea is making which may lead his readers to a certain scepticism.

However, Ovid does give credibility to Medea's claims. Firstly, the reader knows that Medea's skills have already helped Jason succeed in his quest which Medea reminds us of (7.201-214). Jason's use of magic also lends credibility to Medea's claims. Wise (1982, p. 20-21) aptly notes the parallels between Jason's language in his prayer:

*verbaque ter dixit placidos facientia somnos,
quae mare turbatum, quae concita flumina sistunt (7.153-154)*

and the feats that Medea has achieved in hers:

*concussaue sisto,
stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello
nubilaue induco, ventos abigoque vocoque (7.200-202)*

The similarity in the prayers lend legitimacy to Medea's words. We are also reminded of Jason's statement *quid enim non carmina possunt* (7.167). In his list of her achievements, Ovid draws attention to the contrasting nature of her powers hereby showing that her spells really can do anything.

It is the appearance of the chariot at the end of her prayer (7.219) that is the overwhelming piece of evidence for Medea's power as the gods do indeed do her bidding.²⁰

²⁰ See n on 217-221.

203 *vipereas...fauces*: A chiasmus showing Medea's power over snakes at first glance might not be impressive in comparison to her other accomplishments, but it may lead us to think of Medea's command over the serpents that draw the chariot.²¹

204 *uiuaque saxa*: Tupet explains what an astonishing feat Medea has achieved (2009, p.387). Rather than bringing rocks to life and enabling them to move, Medea is moving rocks that are attached to the earth by a living root that have never been displaced from their point of origin. Plumpe (1943, pp.2-3) highlights that other instances of living rock in *Metamorphoses* (e.g. 5.316-7, 13.810-12) are found in places frequented by the children of deities. In Medea's claim we once again have her suggesting her supremacy not only over nature, but the gods and goddesses associated with it.

206 *manesque exire sepulcris*: We see Medea raising the dead, an act horrifying to a Roman audience and indeed to Medea herself at 7.174 if her reaction to Jason's request is anything to go by. Here too is a reminder of both Hypsipyle's claims in *Heroides* 6 (89) and Apollonius' Medea who wanders in search of corpses (4.50-55). While Hypsipyle uses it as evidence of Medea's bad character, this Medea lists it as an accomplishment; a further demonstration of Medea's transforming nature. In just over 30 lines she has gone from shock at the suggestion of altering a lifespan to claiming she has raised the dead.

208-209 *currus... uenenis*: Medea ends her list on an audacious note, where again she is determined to display her supremacy over the gods. The ability of witches to bring about eclipses is demonstrated here in Medea's claim *currus quoque carmine nostro pallet avi* (7.208-9), suggesting not just power over the sun, but her Titan grandfather too who, ironically, she later relies on for a chariot. Kenney (2024, p.62) highlights that Aurora is also a relative of Medea and that through her *uenenis*, which carries the meaning of both spells

²¹ See n on 217-221.

and poisons, the verb *pallet* robs her of her usual rosy epithet. We also see here a hint to Medea's use of poison in the deaths of Glauce and Creon.

210-217 *uos...dabitis*: Medea moves on from examples of her own power with a list of Hecate's deeds. The first-person verbs of the middle portion of her prayer are now replaced with second-person verbs *hebetastis*, *pressistis*, *dedistis*, *sopisitis*, *misistis* and *dabitis*. Segal (2002, p.14) states that when Medea carries out the sacrifice (7.243-245) Ovid virtually eliminates Jason who carries out a similar sacrifice in *Arg.* 3.1200ff. This seems to be the case here too, as Jason's part in the events in Colchis are glossed over. Libatique (2015, p.80) rightly highlights Ovid's use of the dative of advantage *mihi* (210) as evidence of Medea's self-focus. Although Medea acknowledges Hecate's role here, it still ends on Medea being in control. The use of the future tense with *dabitis* firmly implies that Hecate will do Medea's bidding.

217 *neque...frustra*: The first clear indication that the gods are firmly on Medea's side and are willing to do her bidding. *Micuerent sidera* calls back to 7.188. The stars, the only thing awake alongside Medea, are on her side and accomplices in her magic.

217-221 *neque...habenas*: Kenney (2024, p.62) notes the theatrical or even pantomime quality of the end of Medea's speech as the stars twinkle out their support for her. The litotes in *neque... nec...* adds drama to her assertion, and finally, her statement that her grandfather's chariot has arrived, *currus adest*. The enjambement that separates this last phrase from the description of chariot in line 218 gives it directness and we see that her imperious *adeste* (198) has been complied with. Moreover, by having Medea announce its arrival as part of her speech, gives Medea a further sense of control over the situation. It is as though the arrival of a chariot pulled by dragons merely meets Medea's expectations rather than being something

unique or unprecedented. This calm reaction again compounds the impression we have that Medea is growing ever more at ease operating on a plane above mortals.

The theatrical quality is further reinforced, as Anderson (1972, p.268) well notes with the stage direction-like statement *aderat... currus*. The drama here naturally reinforces the link to Euripides' climactic scene and further developing the idea of Medea's transformation. Curley also notes how the reference to Euripides reminds us of her growing power and movement towards divine power. In Euripides it is her position above Jason on the stage that marks her out as no ordinary mortal. At this point in Ovid's story, she has not yet reached that point, but the foreshadowing is there. As Curley states, "the implications for her humanity, especially in the wake of her earth-shaking prayer, are no less dire" (2013, p.122).

However, more than the Euripides' play, one might argue that we are put in mind of Medea as she appears on the red-figure calyx-krater where she is depicted driving on the chariot²².

Medea appears powerful and in control, the same qualities that she has exuded in her speech.

The image of the sun surrounding her is indicative of the backing of the gods, just as the shining stars have shown their support while her chariot arrives here in Ovid's text. This impression is given again in lines 220-221 as Ovid describes Medea ascending into the chariot and taking up the reins. Anderson (1972, p.268) compares the scene to driving horses through Ovid's use of *frenata*, *manibus* and *agitavit*, and notes that the action, for Medea, is an ordinary one. This can be seen in other elements of these lines too. The verb *permulsit* gives the impression that she is treating the dragons almost like pets (although perhaps reminds us also of Medea's youth), and *leues...habenas* implies that Medea only needs a very light touch to be able to control them. This again mirrors the calyx-krater where Medea seems to have only a very light grip on the reins.

²² See image 1, appendix 1

However, Ovid's retelling of Medea's story once again diverges from the more established tradition, with the chariot not waiting until the end of Medea's time in Corinth but instead making an early appearance in Iolcos. As Kenney well states, Ovid "now invents a totally new role for it in a scenario which will successively reflect Medea's domination both of nature and the narrative and then of the poet's ultimate control of his creation and everything in it" (2024, p.63). Contrastingly, while Tupet is clearly in agreement that Ovid's treatment of the rejuvenation of Aeson is certainly unique, she proposes that Medea's journey through the air is a call back to earlier, perhaps Cretan, folklore: "one could think that Medea's journey, flying through the air to look for regenerative plants, recalls that of rain-filled clouds which bring revival and fertility to nature" (2009, p.405. Translation mine). And so, Ovid's introduction of the chariot can be seen as both unique in its role in the myth of Medea, but at the same time symbolic of much older storytelling.

222-232 *sublimis...Glauci*: Ovid describes in meticulous detail Medea's nine-day journey to gather the ingredients she requires to complete Aeson's rejuvenation. It is not only the early arrival of the chariot that makes Ovid's Medea in the *Metamorphoses* stand out against Euripides's, but also her use of flight. Curley notes that "Medea covers the most ground of any tragic hero or heroine in the *Metamorphoses*" (2013, p.122) but again it is not the journey that readers familiar with the myth of Medea would expect. While Ovid entirely glosses over the events of her voyage from Colchis to Iolcos that Apollonius Rhodius gives extensive treatment to in his *Argonautica*, he devotes 12 lines to describing Medea's flight around Greece to collect plants. It is clear from this that Ovid's interest is in developing the transformation of Medea rather than just retelling the myth. Buxton (2013, pp.114-5) points out that in Euripides and Seneca, Medea appears above the stage merely preparing to fly off. However, in Ovid, we see her flight to gather herbs and then a second flight from Iolcos to Corinth after the daughters of Pelias have murdered their father. Seeing Medea actually in-

flight highlights again the seemingly easy control Ovid's Medea has over her situation, despite her recent hesitancy. Hardie (2022, 12) aptly notes Ovid's use of *sublimis* and the characteristic use of the 'view from above' as a marker of sublimity. Here too, we therefore see another step in Medea's transformation towards a quasi-divine status.

We also see that through flight Ovid differentiates her not only from other Medeas, but also other women in the *Metamorphoses* upon whom flight is forced against their will. Buxton rightly states that "flight constitutes for Medea an alternative to the different form of escape represented by metamorphosis" (2013, p114). Medea chooses to use flight to meet her needs, firstly in gathering herbs and secondly to escape to Corinth. In both instances she is in control. However, if we look at the women either side of Medea in *Metamorphoses*, Procne and Philomela in book six, and Scylla in book eight, they are transformed into birds and must take to flight to avoid vengeance. None of these women have any control over the powers of flight that they are given, which comes to them through a permanent physical transformation. In contrast, Medea is at ease in flight and benefits from its advantages without the disadvantage of physical metamorphosis.

Not only is Ovid's use of the chariot new, but the scene of Medea gathering herbs that it leads into is also unusual. Tupet (2009, p.404) notes that, while a poet might explain how they have been procured, typically the necessary herbs and ingredients required for making potions are already in place at the time magic rituals begin as seen for example in Verg. *Aen.* 4.512 or in the post Ovidian Luc. *Bel. Civ.* 6.530-563 and 6.667-684. Ovid, however, once again toys with narrative expectations by interrupting the rites mid-ceremony and prolonging the scene. Ovid's description of how the ingredients are gathered also buck the established format. Again, Tupet (2009, p.60) notes that there is an abundance of detail in Latin literature as to how plants ought to be gathered in preparation for magic rites, including dress, gestures, ritual requirements such as chastity, and instruments that ought to be used. Here Ovid is

unusual in that he covers how the herbs are gathered as part of the ceremony, and goes into great detail about the expedition, but actually comments very little on the rituals of the process. This may appear to be unexpected given that he conforms to these expectations in his description of Medea's appearance at 7.181-182 and his precise outlining of how Medea performs the required rituals at 7.240-250. However, as we have seen, Ovid avoids repetition in favour of exploring less familiar territory²³. Tupet (2009, p.404) well suggests that what Ovid is really interested in is the journey itself and the opportunity to use the accumulation of geographical names as a map of the whole region of Thessaly as seen from up above. Through this journey Ovid again takes the opportunity to show Medea's on-going transformation. Newlands notes that "the girl once fearful of traveling across the sea to Greece is now transformed into a witch fearlessly crisscrossing the Mediterranean world" (1997, p.191) and Tupet (2009, p.61) highlights that Ovid deliberately picks places that are wide-ranging and difficult to access which have an air of mystery. The remote locations chosen therefore demonstrate Medea's newfound confidence.

222-223 *sublimis...angues*: Kenney suggests that the emphatic positioning of *sublimis* reflects "an exaltation that is not merely of the body" (2024, p.63). This argument well describes the psychological transformation we see in Medea. Hardie (2022, 12) notes the surprising use of the passive *rapitur* and aptly argues that rather than referring to Medea, it is the audience or poet who are swept away. We see through *despicit* that as she surveys the land below her, and through her decisive action in *adplicat angues*, Medea is firmly in control.

223 *certis regionibus*: Kenney suggests this refers to "places she had earmarked" (2024, p.63). Earmarking places to find appropriate herbs clearly implies a prior knowledge of the area. This may seem out of character for Medea who has travelled little before leaving

²³ See n on 169

Colchis, however, we have previously learnt from Apollonius that Hecate has taught Medea how to use plants that the land produces (3.528-30) and that she is used to going and searching for roots (4.50-54).

223 *angues*: Ovid's use of *angues* may recall line 203 and Medea's claim that *uipereas rumpo uerbis*. The firm power she believes she has over snakes is replicated here with her easy mastery of the dragons.

224-227 *et quas... aenae*: While Ovid might omit some information about the ritual gathering of herbs, he does show us Medea's care and attention to detail during the actual process. He highlights the precise mountains whose peaks provide the necessary ingredients (*Ossa... Pelion... Othrys... Pindus... Olympus*) and the methods used to pick them. We see in *partim... partim* that Medea pays attention to the correct way to gather the different herbs. Some need to be pulled up by the roots which were believed to possess magic (Anderson, 1972, p.269), others cut at the stem. Medea clearly enjoys the task with *placitas* emphasised by the alliteration on *perspicit* and *partim* and Kenney well notes that the further alliteration on *radice reuellit* shows her concentration on the work at hand (2024, p.69). In *curvamine falcis aenae* we see a return on Ovid's part to more traditional elements of witchcraft with the use of bronze tools.²⁴

228-233 *multa... Glauci*: Medea moves on from mountains to visiting a number of riverbanks and shorelines (*Apidani... Amphrysi... Enipeu... Peneos... Spercheides... Boebes... Euboica... Anthedone*). Just as Ovid had his audience focus on the locations Medea visits through detailing the height of the mountains (*altum Pelion, Pindo maior Olympus*), he

²⁴ See Tupet, 2009, p.36 for more detail on the ritual use of bronze in Virgil and Seneca, and the use of bronze in cauldrons as well as sickles.

now gives the rivers and shores the same treatment by highlighting the watery qualities (*undae, iuncosa*) of these places.

228-229 *multa quoque... multa quoque*: The anaphora here reminds the audience of Medea's vast undertaking. She has already expressed that this piece of magic will be a greater work than she has completed before and this is backed up by the quantity of ingredients she is gathering.

228 *placuerunt*: Just as we saw in line 226, she is taking great care over the individual plants she chooses to gather. This is also another reminder that while ostensibly Medea is helping Aeson at Jason's request, she is relishing the process and the opportunity to challenge herself.

228 *gramina*: Here again we perhaps see a reference to *Dipas*. Ovid states that she *scit bene quid gramen...valeat* (*Am.* 1.8.7-8). Medea too knows the value of the grasses she is gathering, seen through the dragons' reaction to merely their smell, and then eventually through Aeson's successful rejuvenation.

229 *neque eras immunis*: Kenney (2024, p.69) notes that Medea is levying tribute from her territories. This also recalls lines 197-198 in her prayer:

*quaeque magos, Tellus, pollentibus instruis herbis,
auraeque et venti montesque amnesque lacusque*

The earth and the mountains have yielded their herbs to Medea and now it is the turn of *amnesque lacusque*. Kenney states that the apostrophe in line 229 is for variety and metrical convenience but again it leads to this line echoing the impression given in 197-198. Medea has previously informed the reader that nature is her helper, and now Ovid reminds the reader of this again.

229-230 *neque... nec non... nec non*: Again, Ovid is showing us Medea's care through the use of anaphora and litotes. He highlights just how far and wide she is travelling to pick exactly the correct herbs and grasses.

232 *uiuax... gramen*: Anderson (1972, p.270) suggests that the grass is assigned the adjective *uiuax* here as a reference to *gramine contacto* (13.936) where caught fish, having touched the grass, once again become lively. The adjective *uiuax* is doubly appropriate as it will now be used by Medea to restore youth to Aeson.

233 *nondum... uulgatum*: Kenney (2024, p.65) and Anderson (1972, p.270) both note Ovid's nod to his future telling of Glaucus' tale (13.898-968), and that the grass is not yet famous for its transformative power as Ovid has not yet made it famous: a typically Ovidian brag given that the myth of Glaucus' transformation was already well established long before *Metamorphoses* with Aeschylus' lost play *Glacus Pontius* and indeed Glaucus' appearance in *Argonautica* among others.²⁵ Moreover, as Kenney points out, chronologically, Glaucus' transformation must have happened before Medea arrived at Euboea. Even if, as Ovid claims, the plant was not yet famous for Glaucus' transformation, it must have had some sort of fame if knowledge of it has reached Medea.

234-235 *nona dies... nonaque nox*: Medea's labour for nine days and nine nights demonstrates a determination and commitment to her task. Once again, the question of whether she acts in this extraordinary way out of love for Jason and desire to aid his father, or to demonstrate her superhuman power could be raised. However, as Ovid's narrative at this point has focused entirely on Medea and her craft for well over 50 lines now, the question is perhaps redundant.

²⁵ For more on the myth of Glaucus see Beaulieu, 2013.

The number nine specifically brings Medea back to ritualistic patterns of three as we saw in lines 189-90 and Kenney (2024, p.65) points to other iterations of the number nine, including Oceanus and Tethys' purification of Glaucus through nine chants (13.234-5), and Medea's aunt, Circe, going even further by uttering nine incantations three times (14.58). This repetition of the number nine here leading into line 236 where the power of the herbs compels the dragons to shed their skin ends Medea's journey and returns her into the ritual ceremony that she had already begun.

235 *omnes lustrantem uiderat agros*: As Medea look down at the lands from above, she ends her journey in the same way as she began it at 7.222-223 (*subiectaque Thessala Tempe despicit*).

236-237 *neque...senectae*: Medea's journey comes to an end with her dragons shedding their skin at the mere smell of the herbs that Medea has gathered. Anderson (1972, p.270) notes that the dragons are forced to behave like ordinary snakes and this foreshadows the rejuvenation of Aeson. This is further demonstrated through Ovid's choice of *annosae...senectae* which firmly puts us in mind of Aeson trying to shed his years of old age. Contrastingly, Kenney (2024, p.65) highlights the snake shedding simile in 9.266-267 when Ovid describes Hercules' transformation from mortal to immortal. For him therefore, the shedding of skin represents transformation from mortal to immortal. In this instance it is Medea's transformation into something supernatural, rather than Aeson's rejuvenation. We are also perhaps put in mind of Jason's quest to take the fleece and how in Apollonius Rhodius the dragon guarding the fleece falls asleep due to the potent smell of the plants.

238 – 261 *constitit... lustrat*: Medea, having returned from her herb-gathering expedition now comes back to her ritual to restore Aeson to youth. While Ovid's account of Medea's herb gathering expedition has been highly original in its imagery, this passage presents

Medea in a way that is much more typical of a witch or a priestess. She follows rituals including the building of altars, sacrifices and libations that are seen commonly elsewhere in ancient literature. Tupet (2009, p.343) notes that in *Argonautica* 3.1035 Medea explains to Jason that the offering should make the gods favourable and ensure the success of magic rites. It is clear that whether her motivation is to prove her own abilities or to acquiesce to her husband's request, Medea is trying to ensure a favourable outcome by following the established protocols for such magic. While Medea's intended outcome is obviously the rejuvenation of Aeson, paradoxically, the scene is also heavy with the imagery of death and rituals surrounding the dead and necromancy, as well as magic typically associated with love. Rather than keeping his audience focused on Aeson, Ovid draws his reader's attention to the later parts of Medea's story, with a focus on love, betrayal and death.

238 *limenque foresque*: Medea stops at the doorway, and this is highlighted by the twofold reference to both the threshold and doorway. Ovid here demonstrates the significance of movement from inside to outside. Medea's rites started in 7.182 with *egreditur tectis*. Here she repeats this action to continue conducting her magic under the open skies. In this we perhaps also see the foreshadowing of death with the doorway representing a threshold between life and death. In Aeson's rejuvenation we see him move from death back towards life, but in the Pelias episode, the opposite. We may also think of Medea as a mother. Mac Mahon (2003, pp.68-69) sets out the significance of doorways in many familial rituals in the Roman world, including births, marriages and deaths. All of these are to feature in Medea's future, but of all of these, death is certainly most closely linked to Medea.

239 *tantum caelo tegitur*: Kenney (2024, p.66) rightly describes this as a striking phrase. This is apparent with the alliteration of t and vivid image of Medea alone outdoors and once again directly connected to nature. In 7.182 we saw Medea bare foot with nothing between her and the ground; here we find her with nothing between her and the sky. Being

the granddaughter of the sun god, and given her experience with flight, we feel a clear sense of connection between Medea and the sky, and her ability to exist outside of the usual norms for mortals.

239-240 *refugitque uiriles contactus*: Anderson (1972, p.270) notes that by keeping herself away from men, she is avoiding pollution and keeping herself ritually pure. Kenney (2024, p.66) also states that sexual abstinence was expected of those taking parts in such rites. We see in 7.255 Medea goes further than this, in sending away even the attendants who bring out Aeson.

240 *aras e caespite*: Anderson (1972, p.270) notes frequent use of temporary turf altars in Roman literature and Tupet (2009, p.9) points to one altar, or indeed two as here, or a ditch to collect blood for the gods of the Underworld, as standard practice in religious rituals. Through this Ovid gives credibility to the impression of Medea as a competent and well-practiced witch.

241 *dexteriore...Iuuentae*: the presence of more than one altar is explained by Medea appealing to both Hecate and also Iuventa. The goddesses are split across the line as the altars are, although the with Ovid we have the unexpected again and the order is inversed with Hecate landing on the left of the line and Iuventa on the right. Toupet (2009, p.15) highlights that while the gods of magic are generally those of the underworld, other gods are occasionally called upon for help in particular circumstances, as also seen when Apollonius' Medea appeals to Hypnos appropriately for help in subduing the dragon. Therefore, Medea's request here for support from the goddess of youth is logical given the intended outcome of her magic.

242-245 *has...fossas*: Medea conforms to standard rites to invoke the favour of the gods of the underworld. Alongside the goddesses Hecate and Iuventa, Medea is now also appealing to Pluto and Proserpina to support her endeavours.

243 *haud*: Kenney (2024, p.66) points to Ovid's use of this word as a feature of epic, appearing only once in his elegies but 53 times in *Metamorphoses*. It is clear that Ovid is making a point about the dramatic nature of this scene as Medea continues with her ritual sacrifice to chthonic gods. In Medea's actions here we see her in the heroic role again as she mirrors Odysseus and Aeneas in their attempts to visit the Underworld²⁶.

243-245 *scrobibus...cultros...uelleris atri...sanguine fossas*: Medea's ritual continues with clear links to death and the Underworld. Tupet (2009, p.403) highlights the use of ditches to catch blood offerings as traditional in the cult worship of Underworld gods. She points to parallel scenes in the *Odyssey* (11.23-37) and *Aeneid* (6.243) where the heroes make comparable offerings to access the underworld. Here, however, Ovid's readers might note the distinction between Odysseus, Aeneas and Medea in their intent. Odysseus seeks advice from the prophet Tiresias, whereas Medea seems to have little need of any help or guidance²⁷. Aeneas acts as a dutiful son who is hoping to see his much-loved father once again after death. Medea has abandoned her father and, in her actions, here is actively trying to help the father of his enemy.

Again, for a scene that the reader would expect to see more emphasis on life and youth, death is playing a heavy role. Anderson (1972, p.271) for example, notes the sacrifice of a black sheep as proper for Underworld gods. One can therefore see in this the foreshadowing Pelias' dismemberment (7.297-349), and the killing of her children.

²⁶ See n on 243-245

²⁷ See nn on 185-191, 192-198, 210-217, 217-221, 222-232, 253 and 257 for other instances of Medea's control

Tupet (2009, p.342-343) also notes the use of blood sacrifice in Tibullus 1.2 as part of a ritual to cure the poet of a love which he views as a sickness. Other similarities include the presence of the moon, and purification with sulphur²⁸. Given Medea's recent rejection of Jason in preparation for the rites (7.239-240) Ovid might be indicating that Medea's feelings for Jason have also changed here.

244-245 *facit... conicit... perfundit*: Ovid gives us a tricolon of verbs that are all short, sharp and dramatic in their action. As Kenney (2024, p.66) well states, Medea performs a condensed version of Odysseus' rites to summon the dead in the underworld, and these concise actions give the impression of a well-practiced sorceress who is confident in what she is doing. The scene has a different feel to the preceding one where Medea took care and delight in her actions in gathering herbs. We have the impression that in preparing for the ritual and gathering the herbs, Medea takes her time. Whereas in carrying out the ritual she is more perfunctory. It seems that this is the part she takes less joy in, or requires more of her focus, but, once again, we are seeing Ovid focusing on what is original and therefore interesting to him and passing over what has been done before²⁹.

246-247 *tum... lactis*: The liquids that Medea uses as part of her rituals here are commonly seen in literature relating to witchcraft, and other retellings of the Medea myth. Honey is used following the sacrifice of a lamb by Jason upon Medea's advice in *Argonautica* 3.1036. Anderson (1972, p.271) points to the use of milk and honey as an offering in *Odyssey* 11.27 as Odysseus enters the underworld but disputes the validity of *mellis* in the MSS, suggesting that *uini* would be better. However, he also points to Ovid's use of *inuergens* potentially mirroring *Aen.* 6.244. If Ovid is echoing both Homer and Virgil in

²⁸ See n on 261

²⁹ See n on 222-232 regarding Ovid's adherence to usual magical practices

their heroes' entrance to the Underworld with the sacrifice of a black lamb, then the use of *inuergens* and *mellis* are both nods to this again.

While this scene is aimed at Aeson's rejuvenation, it holds links with a number of other passages involving necromancy. Tupet (2009, p.4) highlights the use of liquid offerings, pointing to a similar scene in Heliodorus *Ethiopian* 5.14 where a mother engages in necromancy to revive her dead son. Just as Medea does, she makes liquid offerings including milk and blood but also honey. Additionally, like Medea, the woman uses both ditches and altars as part of her rites. While it is understandable that there would be common ground in rites that bring the dead to life again and those that extend the lives of the living, it is interesting that Medea uses seemingly the same process as necromancy but has previously shown her disapproval at altering a mortal's lifespan. When Jason suggested that Medea should take years from his life and give them to Aeson, her response *nec sinat hoc Hecate* (7.174) indicates her clear rejection of the idea. There is perhaps a distinction between Medea avoiding the use of her own blood, which Heliodorus' witch does, as does Seneca's Medea when she invokes Hecate's support in preparing her poisoned gifts for Jason's new bride: *manet noster sanguis ad aras* (7.808). One can question whether the addition of the witches' own blood is an addition that appears only later in literary tradition or whether in avoiding the use of her own blood, Ovid is deliberately reining in Medea's actions. There is a sense that, at this point, Medea has not yet lost her humanity.

248 *terrenaque numina ciuit*: As Kenney (2024, p.67) notes, it is certainly in character for Medea to be summoning gods, rather than appealing to them or requesting their help. We see the same self-assurance that was evidenced previously in her prayer in lines 192-219 where she showed little humility in her demand for help from Hecate, among the numerous other gods. Just as she assumed that help would be provided then by Hecate and more minor gods, she now shows, somewhat brazenly, the same expectation of Pluto and

Proserpina. However, Medea perhaps shows more respect for them, conducting appropriate sacrifices before addressing them.

249 *umbrarumque rota... regem*: Medea puts her request to extend Aeson's life to Pluto rather than to the fates whom Kenney (2024, p.67) rightly notes generally have power over a person's lifespan. Ovid, however, does not seem to be overly bothered by this detail. As previously noted, Medea appears to suggest in line 174 that even Hecate may have some say over this. In book 10 we also see Orpheus appealing to Pluto and Proserpina to return Eurydice to life, implying again they may have a role in this. However, in this case he is asking Pluto for a person who is already in the Underworld to be returned.

249 *rapta...coniuge*: The participle *rapta* reminds the reader of the story of Pluto's abduction of Proserpina (which Ovid has previously told: 5.385-571) and how she was forced to become his wife, stealing her away from her mother Ceres for months at a time. Ovid's use of *coniuge* may remind us of Jason addressing Medea in this way in line 165 and allow us to draw a parallel here with Medea who, in most tellings of the story, has been tricked into loving Jason by Venus, and has also left her family behind. However, there are distinctions in the stories. It is Pluto who is shot by Cupid's arrow in his telling of the myth, and the situation certainly becomes unhappier for Medea than it does for Proserpina. Proserpina returns to her mother each year, and her marriage to Pluto appears to be happier than that of most gods, evidenced by her appearing at her husband's side here and in book 10 where they seem united in decision making. Medea can never return to her family who now view her as a traitor. Moreover, she is subsequently abandoned by the very husband who she currently making great efforts to help.

249 *rogat rapta cum coniuge regem*: The alliteration gives a sense of solemnity which is appropriate for the introduction of these gods.

250 *fraudare*: Ovid's use of this verb gives the sense that Pluto and Proserpina are doing something wrong and that in allowing the natural aging process and death to occur they are stealing time from Aeson. In reality, it is Medea who is upsetting the natural order and will next use deception to trick the daughters of Pelias into believing they are able to do the same for their own father.

251 *placauit*: Ovid's use of this verb again recalls 7.224 although here it is Medea who is pleasing rather than something pleasing her. This gives a sense of hierarchy despite Medea's apparent bravado before the gods.

251 *precibusque et murmure longo*: This phrase sounds unusually vague given Ovid's attention to specific details in other parts of the rites and prayers. However, once again this allows Ovid to pass over material that may be repetitive and keep the pace in a way that allows him to narrate the entire Medea myth. Kenney further states that "spells were private property, jealously guarded and not to be uttered out loud" (2024, p.67) pointing to 9.300 and 14.58 giving in this second reference another parallel between Circe and her niece in matters of magic. However, this stands in opposition to Medea's earlier prayer where she heralds it with *ternisque ululatibus ora* (7.190).

252 *Aesonis effetum... corpus*: With *Aesonis* at the start of the line, the focus finally comes upon the subject of Medea's spell. Referring to Aeson through his *effetum...corpus* gives a vivid impression of the old man and gives us some context for Jason's urgent plea. He makes no mention of any illness or the physical state of his father in line 168 when he begs Medea to give years from his life to his father's and so, with Aeson's worn-out body now having to be carried out, the reader better understands his desperation.

253 *iussit*: The verb *iussit* in first place in this line shows what has now become Medea's trademark confidence since she is as at ease ordering around people as she is the gods.

253 *plenos resolutum... somnos*: The enclosing order here emphasises the sleep entirely overtaking Aeson. The use of *resolutum* gives the impression that Aeson has previously been bound or trapped in some way and is now released from whatever was causing his body to be *effetum*. One also recalls *soluerat alta quies* (186). Once again Medea is the only one awake while all others sleep. In this we see her control again.

253 *carmine*: Ovid states that Medea puts Aeson to sleep with her spell and we are reminded of the dragon that Medea sends to sleep in *Arg.* 4.145-148 with her spell, but the *stratis porrexit in herbis* in line 254 also reminds us of Jason sending the Colchian serpent to sleep *herbis* in line 149, and of course the dragons in lines 236-7 that fell asleep at the smell of the herbs Medea had picked and shed their old skin.

254 *exanimi similem*: Anderson (1972, p.271) suggests that this represents a "deathlike sleep" and so here we have another reminder of the fact that while Medea is capable of this rejuvenation and extending Aeson's life, she soon will begin to bring death too, foreshadowing in particular the killing of Pelias where she promises his daughters that she will rejuvenate him in the same way as she has Aeson.

255-556 *hinc procol... profanos*: Anderson well points to "the ritual language of priest to uninitiate" (1972, p.271). The chiasmus and repetition in *hinc procol... procul hinc* further adds to the sense of a precise ritual occurring.

255 *Aesoniden*: Ovid reminds us of the close relationship between Jason and his father, and the purpose behind the ritual. Jason and the other men are sent away, unable to witness the rites, just as Medea shunned the touch of men in lines 239-240. We see

consistency in this with other the instances of magic: Medea prays alone to Hecate when she is requesting aid for Jason in lines 7.74-5. Ovid specifically mentions the private nature of the location of the altars *quas nemus umbrosum secretaque silva tergebat* (7.75). Medea is also alone from the instant she begins this ritual. She waits until night and again Ovid emphasises her total solitude: *fertque uagos mediae per muta silentia noctis inomitata gradus* (7.184-185). Indeed, the only instance when Medea has an audience for her magic is for when she has no intention that the final outcome will achieve the desired result. She allows the daughters of Pelias to witness her rejuvenation of the ram, only so they will be convinced to undertake the unsuccessful rejuvenation of their father.

256 *oculos remouere profanos*: The enclosing word order here gives the impression of there being eyes all around and the curiosity of the men trying get a glimpse of the process.

257 *diffugiunt iussi*: The short sentence emphasises the immediate compliance of the men, which comes as no surprise: for Medea being obeyed as is now expected.

257 *passis... capillis*: Medea returns to a more witch-like appearance, as in line 183 when she stepped out with bare feet and loosened hair. It seems that Medea is appearing to conform to societal norms while in the presence of men. That Ovid only comments now on the loose hair perhaps indicates that while in the presence of the other men and Jason her hair was tied up, giving a more respectable impression. One could argue that although Medea is known for her otherness or barbarianism, she is attempting to conform. She conducts her magic privately, at the request of, but out of the view of others.

258 *bacchantum*: Anderson takes another view of Medea's behaviour: "although so far Medea has been likened to a priest, Ovid wishes us to sense fully the extraordinary un-Roman aspects of the ritual. Hence, he compares her to Bacchants" (1972, p.272). This

provides an unsettling view of Medea for the reader, and one recalls Dido in *Aeneid* 4.301-304 as she wanders, raging through the city of Carthage. However, while Medea may outwardly look like a Bacchant with her wild hair, she certainly doesn't behave like one and bears no resemblance to Dido's wild state of mind, *saevit inops animi* (*Aen.* 4.301). Rather, Medea acts with precision and a clear understanding of what she needs to do to achieve the goals of her rites. We also see a comparison between Medea and the appearance of Bacchants *Met.* 3.701-733. In both the Medea episode and the Pentheus episode we see the violent and brutal deaths of children at the hands of their own mother. However, there are significant differences in the two episodes. Firstly, and most notably, in the influence of the gods. Pentheus' mother is driven to the act under the influence of Bacchus, whereas, as Ovid has made abundantly clear, Medea is able to stand her ground when it comes to interactions with the gods. While she may request services from them, she cannot be manipulated by them like other mortals. Secondly, the death of Pentheus takes up a large chunk of the scene and is the climatic focus of the episode. The passage is both tragic, with Pentheus viciously torn apart by his relatives, and comedic as Ovid gives us the image of Pentheus lacking the arms to hold out in supplication. Again, any comparison between the Bacchants and Medea falls down here. Even at the death of her children Medea operates in a calm and controlled manner, under no other influence bar her own, and the incident is dealt with dispassionately in one single line:

sanguine natorum perfunditur impius ensis (7.396)

There is no ripping of limbs or debauchery; we see only calculated efficiency.

The reference to Bacchants also foreshadows the arrival of Bacchus himself:

viderat ex alto tanti miracula monstri
Liber, et admonitus iuvenes nutricibus annos
posse suis reddi, capit hoc a Colchide munus. (7.295-296)

Ovid's use of the word *munus* is interesting, as the sense of these lines is similar to Jason's desire to use Medea's skills to his own benefit. However, while for Jason, Medea is seen as *spolia* (7.157) Bacchus, however, recognises Medea's skill and sees it as a gift. We see a sense of respect given to Medea and her craft, as something to be gifted. In contrast, her husband Jason views Medea as a possession. Ovid demonstrates a sense of kinship between one of the most vengeful gods and one of literature's most vengeful women.

259 *multifidasque faces in fossa sanguinis*: The alliteration of the f and s sounds mimic the crackle and hiss of fire as Medea lights the torches.

259 -260 *sangiunis atra...infectas*: The description of the ditches by the altars are given in gory detail and stands in contrast to the purification that will happen in the next line.

261 *ter... flamma, ter aqua, ter sulphure* Ovid uses a double tricolon here with repetition of three; three items are used for purification, fire, water and sulphur, and all of these items are used three times. This repetition³⁰ highlights the particular significance of the ritual happening here. Anderson (1972, p.272) points to Odysseus using burning sulphur to purify the palace on Ithaca from the pollution of blood following the slaughter of the suitors (*Od.* 22.481-482). This could, therefore, foreshadow Medea's vengeance against Pelias. One could argue that through Pelias' occupation of the palace in Iolcos he is violating Jason's home in the same way that the suitors did to Odysseus'.

Ter... flamma also ties this passage to the Pygmalion episode in book ten. When Venus agrees to bring his statue to life she signals her agreement with three flames:

flamma ter accensa est apicemque per aera duxit (10.279)

³⁰ see n on 189-90 on the use of three.

The idea of bringing an inanimate object like a statue to life feels close to that of reanimating a corpse, especially as Ovid describes the stiff ivory becoming soft and warm and is potentially another reminder of the unsettling nature of Medea's magic.

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Appendix 1

Image 1



Policoro Painter. (c. 400 BCE). *Red-figure calyx-krater (mixing vessel): Medea in chariot (A); Telephos with baby Orestes (B)* [Ceramic vessel]. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH, United States. clevelandart.org