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‘Medeae Medea forem’

Rehabilitating Ovid’s Medea

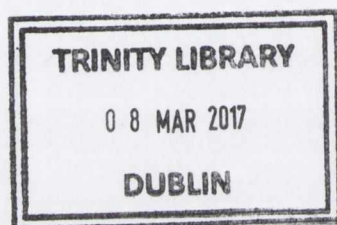


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PhD
HISTORIES
& HUMANITIES

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Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Classics

Trinity College Dublin, October 2016



Thesis 11152

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Summary

This project concerns itself with the characterisation of Ovid's Medea, as she appears in the twin letters *Heroides* 6 and 12, and in Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*. The thesis argues first that the Ovidian Medea can be read as an example of coherent and persuasive characterisation; second, that the poet depicts Medea as one consistent personality-type in both the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*. This reading stands in opposition to the prevailing scholarly assessment of Medea, which holds that she is one of Ovid's least successful characterisations, and that the poet develops her character very differently in his epic and elegiac narratives.

The premise of the thesis is that the so-called 'difficulties' with Ovid's characterisation of Medea arise from the critic's assumptions about how the heroine should think, feel and behave within the Ovidian sphere. The project argues that Medea shows consistency in her modes of thinking and reasoning across her Ovidian texts, but that this is apparent only if the reader sets out to examine the ways in which Ovid's heroine differs from those of the preceding Greek tradition. Specifically, the reading suggests that Ovid's Medea lacks the moral stature of the heroines of Apollonius and Euripides: she is self-focused and unsympathetic, driven by the desire to possess and exercise control over the other characters of her myth.

Methodologically, the project sits at the intersection of several fields of literary criticism, without deriving from any one approach. The thesis relies on a close analysis of the Ovidian texts, whilst employing aspects of different critical theories to illustrate the view of Medea's characterisation. As with much contemporary Ovidian scholarship, the reading has been heavily influenced by the traditions of feminist and intertextual criticism. However, the interdisciplinary element of the project derives from psychoanalytical and forensic theory, arguing that Ovid's depiction of Medea's personality-type shares some similarities with the modern understanding of the psychopath.

The thesis finds that Ovid's characterisation of Medea can be viewed as both consistent and plausible, if only the reader is prepared to jettison the expectation that the heroine will significantly resemble her counterparts in Apollonius and Euripides. Despite the relative unpopularity of characterisation as a topic for Classical research, a focus on the process of Ovid's construction of his heroine's literary personality enables the reader to establish a rationale for some of the most challenging aspects of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7. The reader's point of view is thus crucial to the perception either of the 'success' or the 'failure' of the poet's characters.

Acknowledgements

Perhaps unsurprisingly, for a thesis about a female character in an allegedly female-authored text, this project owes its greatest debt to a number of formidable women. Ms. Wendy Brooke instilled in me that there is no such thing as reading a text too carefully, and predicted (correctly) that I would one day love Ovid better than Virgil. Dr. Jessica Dietrich entertained my undergraduate musings about the Medea of *Heroides* 12 and encouraged me first to turn them into a PhD, and second to be brave enough to leave Australia to do it. Prof. Elizabeth Minchin introduced me to the *Heroides*, and has provided uniformly helpful advice at every stage of my academic life. Finally, Prof. Monica Gale has supervised this thesis with a masterful combination of patience and rigour, curbing my pursuit of wild tangents and managing to find good humour throughout. I think that I have learned as much about research from listening to Monica think out loud as I have from the process of writing this thesis.

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Πάντοτε χαίρετε

– ΠΡΟΣ ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΕΙΣ Α 5:16

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Introducing Ovid's Medea

If you once understand an author's character,
the comprehension of his writings becomes easy.

— Longfellow, *Hyperion*

This thesis takes as its central concern the character of Ovid's Medea, as she appears in the twin letters *Heroides* 6 and 12, and in Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*. Despite her towering profile in Greek literature, where she is the heroine of Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Euripides' eponymous tragedy, the Ovidian Medea has achieved considerably less notoriety, and therefore less critical attention from scholars. Those who have engaged with Ovid's Medea have found her to be broadly unsatisfying. *Heroides* 12 is criticised as an infelicitous depiction either of a love-sick girl or of a caricatured villain, in both cases devoid of the moral stature that piques the reader's interest in the portraits of Apollonius and of Euripides. In the epic sphere, the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is thought to lurch improbably between the overtly dutiful heroine of the early narrative and the cruel witch of the later episodes.¹ These unfavourable interpretations have resulted in a relative dearth of critical analyses of the Ovidian Medea, compared to the numbers devoted to the other women of the *Heroides*, and to the rest of the *Metamorphoses*.

Scholarship on the *Heroides* often elects to deal with Medea's letter in 'snapshot' form, by way of illustrating a connection with another poem which the critic considers to be of greater interest – for example, Phyllis' *Heroides* 2. Fulkerson (2002b) develops a persuasive interpretation of Phyllis as a reader of Medea's *Heroides* 12, yet Fulkerson's approach is representative of the scholarly tendency to read 'past' Medea in order to focus on another heroine, rather than committing to an examination of Medea herself. Spentzou (2003) is similarly emblematic: she describes *Heroides* 12 as 'one of the most fiercely disputed letters' in the collection; nonetheless, her study refers to Medea only in passing, offering detailed discussions of other heroines while Medea lurks unobtrusively in the

¹ On *Heroides* 12, see Verducci (1985), pp. 66-81, for a reading of Medea as a love-sick girl; and Jacobson (1974), pp. 120-3, for the villainous heroine. On *Metamorphoses* 7, Newlands (1997) and Liveley (2011), pp. 77-8, provide useful summaries of the perceived difficulties with Medea's epic characterisation.

background.² Analyses of the *Metamorphoses* are perhaps even more partial: an inspection of the list of passages cited from several of the most significant monographs on the epic reveals that Book 7 – especially the first half devoted to Medea – is either passed over altogether, or receives only one or two citations whereas those of other more popular books number into the hundreds.³

Surveying the landscape of Ovidian criticism at the end of the twentieth century, Myers (1999) observes that a great deal of scholarship continues to cluster around the same few texts and passages within texts.⁴ I propose that Medea is an obvious victim of this situation, particularly as regards *Metamorphoses* 7: we have an overabundance of readings of Arachne, Orpheus, Pygmalion, the Trojan story and the so-called ‘political’ passages of Book 15, yet very few on many of the other myths. As Myers argues, this focus on specific aspects of Ovid’s poetry effectively prevents the rehabilitation of other parts of the Ovidian oeuvre, which are not being subjected to the kind of close analysis which has advanced Ovidian scholarship so greatly in the last few decades.⁵ In such a critical context, the aim of this project is simple: to take a comparatively neglected Ovidian heroine and subject her to a close reading.

This project began with Stephen Hinds, whose 1993 article on the authenticity of *Heroides* 12 begins by asking: ‘How many Medeas are there in Ovid?’⁶ For Hinds, the question is but a precursor to his argument that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 can be read as reflecting the potential for a number of different characterisations across different texts and genres. Hinds takes the ‘number’ of Ovidian Medeas to be directly proportional to the critic’s ability to identify their individual silhouettes in the shifting landscape of Ovid’s poetic

² Spentzou (2003), p. 32.

³ Consider, for example, the indices of: Wilkinson (1955), Due (1974), Galinsky (1975), Tissol (1997), Hardie (2002) and Feldherr (2010). This list is indicative, serving to demonstrate that the lack of critical interest in Medea’s Book 7 spans scholarship both old and new. Wilkinson (1955), p. 149, asserts that Ovid does not re-treat material from the *Heroides* in the *Metamorphoses*, declaring that ‘the misfortunes of Medea, Dido, Laodamia and Ariadne are passed over in a few lines’. This seems an extraordinary way to dismiss the 424 lines of Medea’s myth in Ovid’s epic, yet Wilkinson’s attitude is not atypical amongst scholarship on the *Metamorphoses*.

⁴ The exception to Myers’ observation is surely the exile poetry, which began to experience a revival in the mid-1990s, and which has taken off in the years since Myers’ article. The long-overdue appearance of volumes such as Ingleheart’s (2010) commentary on *Tristia* 2 has made the exile poetry accessible to undergraduates as well as to Ovid specialists.

⁵ Useful examples here would include Knox (1986), Hinds (1987) and Keith (1992), all of which are much cited in Ovidian bibliographies as examples of innovative readings facilitated by close textual analysis, and as monographs which shaped the scholarship that followed.

⁶ Hinds (1993), p. 9.

allusions. By contrast, I wanted to find out whether it is possible to build a reading of Medea that arrives at a single, unified characterisation – counter to Hinds’ assertion that we can read the Ovidian heroine as representing in some sense all of her differing literary incarnations at the same time. It seemed to me that if we could make a case for a uniquely Ovidian Medea, distinct and separable from the Apollonian and Euripidean Medeas, then it might be possible to undermine the critical consensus that Ovid’s heroine – whether in the *Heroides* or the *Metamorphoses* – represents one of the poet’s least successful artistic creations.

Framing the discussion

This project has four principal strands. First, I develop a reading of Medea which is consistent across the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*, arguing that we have ample evidence to treat her as the ‘same’ character in both texts. Typically, scholars have regarded the Medea of *Heroides* 12 as ‘one’ heroine, and the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* as ‘another’ – two different characterisations reflecting two different moments in Ovid’s compositional life, and two different narrative frames within which his Medea is being shaped.⁷ By contrast, I propose that the notion that we are dealing with two different Medeas is a matter of poetic sleight of hand: *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 appear at first glance to be so different that we are inclined to assume that the heroines we find within them are similarly divergent. *Heroides* 12 belongs to the elegiac genre, *Metamorphoses* 7 to the epic; *Heroides* 12 is written in the first person, in Medea’s ‘own’ voice; *Metamorphoses* 7 in the third person, the voice of Ovid’s anonymous narrator. Moreover, the Medea of *Heroides* 12 is at a much later stage of her mythological life, just about to enter Euripides’ play and commit the infamous filicides; the narrative of the epic Medea opens much earlier, when the Argo has just landed in Colchis.

I suggest that these differences of genre, narration and mythological chronology have caused Ovid’s external readers to infer that the heroines depicted are as dissimilar in character as their narratives appear in form. I argue that the reader’s perception that we are dealing with two different Medeas is an illusion unsupported by a close reading of Ovid’s characterisation of his heroine within each text. In my reading, a detailed examination of ‘each’ Medea reveals a surprising degree of commonality between the two, suggesting that Ovid has conceived his heroine as depicting one stable characterisation captured at two different periods of the heroine’s mythological life, and seen from two slightly different narrative perspectives. The challenge posed by Ovid’s presentation of Medea is to successfully combine these two perspectives into one coherent reading. I imagine it like encountering a statue in a museum, when the viewer has only ever seen still photographs, taken from one angle at a time. Not until we can examine the whole object – whether sculptural or textual – can we understand how the separate, optically-flattened images fit together into a whole that is more affecting and more successful because it is integrated.

⁷ See, for example, Kenney (2001), who notes what he considers to be several key points of difference between the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7.

Second, my reading of Medea as one consistent characterisation allows me to challenge the assessment that the heroine represents one of Ovid's least successful endeavours. A significant number of discussions spanning more than a century advance the view that the Ovidian Medea – especially that of *Heroides* 12 – does not really 'make sense'.⁸ Critics have argued that Medea's apparent modes of reasoning and feeling are unclear, that they are unpersuasive, that they do not harmonise with the events of the mythological tradition – either because a heroine so cold cannot kill her children out of desperation, or because a heroine so weakly hero-dependent cannot kill out of rage and in revenge.⁹ In either assessment, scholars are more-or-less agreed that the Ovidian Medea comprises an unsatisfying jumble of characteristics. I stand in opposition to this tradition, arguing that Ovid's Medea can be said to make perfect sense if only we can find a suitable framework within which to examine her, and if we can identify a consistent thread in how Ovid depicts her. In particular, I propose that it is necessary to abandon the expectation that the Ovidian Medea will significantly resemble her predecessors – whether Apollonian or Euripidean – in order to perceive the coherence in Ovid's portrayal. I suggest that the Ovidian Medea appears to be distinctly *unlike* her earlier Greek incarnations: that she is calculating, self-focused and unemotional, but not unconvincing.

The third strand of the thesis derives from the second: I consider some possible reasons why critics are typically so unhappy with the Ovidian Medea. In the case of the *Heroides*, scholars have suggested that the poems which are most enduringly popular are those whose writers have a well-known mythological pedigree.¹⁰ This is the premise of Anderson's (1973) analysis of Dido's *Heroides* 7: Anderson finds Ovid's Dido to be 'gentler' than her Virgilian predecessor; he asserts that the reader's interest in Ovid's portrait lies chiefly in

⁸ Palmer (1898, rp 2005), pp. 386-400, is perhaps the earliest to provide a detailed account of what he considers to be the eccentricities of *Heroides* 12. Much more recent studies are similarly unfavourable in their conclusions about Medea's letter: for example, Lindheim (2003), pp. 114-33, and Davis (2012). Davis' argument proceeds from the tacit assumption that *Heroides* 12 can only be read successfully if we accept from the outset that Medea is yet to achieve any real agency or critical interest because she has already quit her Apollonian sphere, but not yet arrived in the Euripidean. For Davis, the Medea of *Heroides* 12 is literally 'nowhere'. As regards *Metamorphoses* 7, scholars such as Rosner-Siegel (1982) and Newlands (1997) are emblematic of a critical trend in which the epic Medea can only be said to make sense if we treat her as undergoing a complete personality shift across Book 7.

⁹ See here Jacobson's view (1974), pp. 121-3, that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 appears too amoral to ever become Euripides' heroine; and Lindheim's argument (2003), pp. 128-33, that Medea is totally dependent on Jason's view of her, thereby sacrificing the agency that she acquires in Euripides.

¹⁰ Barchiesi (1993) and (2001) offers perhaps the most articulate and compelling discussions of this phenomenon.

the contrast it offers with the heroine of the *Aeneid*, as one of the most influential women in Roman literature.¹¹ In the same way, Kennedy's ground-breaking (1984) treatment of Penelope's *Heroides* 1 argues virtually beyond contention that the success of the poem derives from Ovid's exploitation of the reader's self-satisfaction at knowing more of Penelope's story than she does, at being several steps 'ahead' of the Ovidian heroine because of our familiarity with Homer.

On the other hand, I observe that some of the *Heroides* do not conform to Anderson's and Kennedy's pattern, where the most popular letters are those with the most prominent literary histories. Phyllis' *Heroides* 2 must suffer from having a literary tradition that is largely lost, and yet Phyllis' poem has achieved arguably greater prominence in contemporary *Heroides* scholarship than has Dido's *Heroides* 7.¹² The same is true of Oenone's *Heroides* 5, which lacks not only a complete extant tradition, but also the element of drama which informs the majority of the epistles. In Oenone's case, there is no impending crisis to create tension in the narrative, and neither Paris' distant death nor Oenone's is even alluded to.¹³ These difficulties notwithstanding, *Heroides* 5 features in most of the recent monographs on the collection, and in Knox's (1995) edition of selected letters.¹⁴

I suggest that Phyllis' poem and Oenone's each capture the reader's interest in a different way, making up for the deficiencies of their literary traditions by being interesting on other levels. In Phyllis' case, the element of dramatic tension contributes to the success of the narrative: Phyllis draws her reader in as we watch her build herself up to suicide. Oenone's poem is slightly different, involving the reader in a game of competing literary genres, as

¹¹ Cf. Anderson (1973), pp. 60-2.

¹² See Knox (1995), pp. 111-40, and Fulkerson (2009) for an account of Phyllis' probable provenance, most likely Callimachus' *Aetia*. Knox's commentary, in particular, offers some excellent observations regarding the structure of Ovid's poem and his presentation of Phyllis as a character; these go a long way, I suggest, towards undermining the view that the *Heroides* cannot be enjoyed without the reader having detailed knowledge of the specific tradition from which Ovid is working. For two in-depth discussions of *Heroides* 2, see Fulkerson (2002b) and Lindheim (2003), pp. 89-114. Both depend in part on arguing that Phyllis reprises themes from the poems of her sister-writers, yet both also demonstrate that Phyllis' letter makes a commanding read on its own. On Dido: Barchiesi (2001), p. 42, labels her the 'least loved [heroine] in the whole collection'. See also Desmond (1993) for a study of Ovid's Dido as a hostile revision of Virgil's canonical character.

¹³ In this respect, I take issue with Knox's suggested translation of *Her.* 5.26 as 'grow straight to become my memorial' – an interpretation which suggests some awareness of impending death that does not appear anywhere else in the letter. Cf. Knox (1995), p. 148.

¹⁴ Fulkerson (2005) is a notable exception here. The only two *Heroides* which Fulkerson's monograph does not treat at all are Penelope's *Heroides* 1 and Oenone's *Heroides* 5.

the pastoral heroine finds herself in conflict with Paris and Helen, who hail from the epic genre. Thus, it seems that individual *Heroides* can achieve popularity in different ways: Dido has her powerful literary tradition, Phyllis the drama of her suicide, Oenone the struggle of a heroine against her genre.

In my view, the critical attention devoted to *Heroides* 2, 5 and 7 renders the lack of interest in Medea's *Heroides* 12 all the more surprising, since Medea appears to collect in one poem the narrative interest of all three of her sister writers. Medea possesses a literary tradition of similar stature to Dido's; she has the dramatic potential of Phyllis' poem, being about to commit murder; and she inhabits both the epic and tragic spheres in Apollonius and Euripides, giving her the generic depth of Oenone. Perhaps most perplexing is the critics' apparent lack of concern with the dramatic potential of *Heroides* 12, which I suggest is unparalleled within the collection: three of Ovid's women close their letters immediately before committing suicide, but Medea is the only heroine who exits Ovid's epistolary frame to perpetrate multiple homicide.¹⁵

Its obvious complexity notwithstanding, Medea's poem remains troublesome to its critics. I propose that there are a number of reasons why this is so, chief among them Ovid's depiction of Medea as highly self-focused. Medea's apparent lack of feeling for the other characters of her story makes her difficult for the reader to identify with or to like – a theme made plain by comparison with Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6, also addressed to Jason. In one sense, Hypsipyle's letter is less 'successful' than Medea's, in that Hypsipyle is dependent upon the hero and struggles without Jason to define her. Nonetheless, I suggest that Hypsipyle appeals more to Ovid's reader than does Medea, because we perceive that Hypsipyle sees herself in relation to other characters. Unlike Medea, Hypsipyle is easy to comprehend because she is outwardly-focused and interpersonally aware.

As regards *Metamorphoses* 7, I suggest that the same aspects of Medea's Ovidian characterisation come into play – the heroine of the epic is similarly self-focused, which jars against the Apollonian tradition especially, where we are familiar with a Medea who is

¹⁵ Cf. Phyllis' *Heroides* 2, Dido's *Heroides* 7 and Canace's *Heroides* 11. *Heroides* 9 is potentially another such letter: Deianira declares that she should not hesitate to die [*Her.* 9.146], yet Deianira's situation is slightly different, in that she only receives the news that precipitates her desire for death 'while' she is writing *Heroides* 9. The other heroines all demonstrate some consciousness from the start of their letters that they are moving towards their own deaths. Consider, for example, Dido's image of the dying swan [*Her.* 7.1-2] and Canace's sword lying ready in her lap [*Her.* 11.3-4].

genuinely distressed by Jason's probable demise. Secondly, the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* appears on the surface to shift rapidly from a naïve heroine to a callous murderer. This seems to leave the reader with two possibilities: either Medea undergoes a complete psychological change across Book 7, or Ovid has crafted a flawed characterisation. By contrast, I argue that there are enough connections between the heroine's portrayal in the earlier and later episodes of the myth to support one consistent and comprehensible view of Medea's epic personality – if we know what we are looking for.

Fourth and finally, this thesis aims to demonstrate that a reading of the Ovidian Medea – one of the least-loved characters in Ovid's corpus, although Liveley (2011) labels her also the 'most memorable'¹⁶ – can suggest alternative avenues for investigating other Ovidian characters. The comparative analyses of Penelope, Phyllis, Oenone and Hypermnestra in Chapters One and Two, and those of Scylla, Arachne, Niobe and Procne in Chapters Three and Four combine to highlight the diversity of Ovidian characterisation, even in cases where the heroines appear to be inhabiting variations on the same situation. My reading of Medea attempts to resist the tendency to homogenise literary characters according to gender or narrative situation, by analysing how different is Medea both from her canonical incarnations and from her fellow women in Ovid.

¹⁶ Liveley (2011), p. 77.

On texts: *Tristia* 3.9 and Ennius' *Medea*

Readers will observe that I am dealing only with the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7; I am not investigating the heroine as she appears in *Tristia* 3.9. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, although I consider it theoretically possible to argue for a reading of *Tristia* 3.9 as depicting the same characterisation of Medea that we find in Ovid's earlier texts, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this work. Rather than attempting to analyse all three texts in this thesis, and thereby treating each only two-thirds as thoroughly as I have been able to by focusing on two Ovidian poems, I choose instead to build a detailed reading of the Heroidean and Metamorphosean heroines, with a view to creating a sort of template for any critic wishing to test a similar model on *Tristia* 3.9.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, *Tristia* 3.9 is a very different kind of poetic work to either *Heroides* 12 or *Metamorphoses* 7. As Williams (1994) argues, the exile poetry is bound up with an exploration of Ovid's own poetic life and identity in a way that his other works are not, or at least not to the same extent.¹⁷ Therefore, the figure of Medea in the *Tristia* is less likely to represent a fully-envisioned characterisation of the heroine than it is to play a role in reflecting and embodying Ovid's own experience of exile in Tomis.¹⁸ In other words, I think it likely that the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 perform quite a different function within Ovid's texts to that of the heroine from *Tristia* 3.9. This makes the question of character comparison somewhat problematic. In my view, it is not impossible to treat the Medea of *Tristia* 3.9 as the 'same' heroine whom we observe in the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*; however, it is a different and possibly more demanding task to attempt to separate the layers of Medea-as-Ovid from Medea-as-character before commencing such an analysis. Therefore, for the purposes of this discussion, I limit myself to the heroines of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7.

As to Ovid's poetic models, readers will likewise note that I am largely concerned with the heroines of Apollonius and Euripides, and not with the Medea of Ennius. Although Ennius' tragedy must have been an influential source for Ovid, I suggest that the available fragments are too limited to enable us to advance any persuasive view of Medea's Ennian characterisation. The most substantial fragments suggest that Ennius' play strongly

¹⁷ Cf. Williams (1994) for an analysis of some of the key aspects of the exile poetry.

¹⁸ For an alternative view, Hinds (2007) offers an excellent discussion. He argues that *Tristia* 3.9 is unusual in Ovid's exilic oeuvre, being the only poem in the *Tristia* which is not overtly concerned with Ovid's life in Tomis.

resembled that of Euripides – at least in its central conflict – but any analysis of the depiction of Medea must depend on wild extrapolation, since it is not possible to develop an accurate impression of a literary personality from a few disconnected words at a time.¹⁹ For this reason, I limit the project to a discussion of the Ovidian Medea and her Apollonian and Euripidean predecessors, since we have in the *Argonautica* and in Euripides' tragedy adequate text to support an interpretation of the heroine's characterisation.

¹⁹ For an analysis of the Ennian fragments, see Jocelyn (1967), who notes the apparent similarities between Ennius' Medea and Euripides'.

Mapping the literary landscape

The landscape of Ovidian criticism has changed dramatically in the last hundred years, making Ovid arguably one of the most interesting subjects for contemporary research. Few Classical poets have experienced such a diametrical revision of repute: criticised as lightweight and shallow in one century, only to be regarded as profound and artistically sophisticated in the next. The scholastic giants of the mid-twentieth century, such as Fränkel (1945) and Wilkinson (1955), began the task of resurrecting Ovid's reputation within the world of literary studies; however, their assertions that Ovid's poetry repays close analysis were undermined by their equally strong conviction that he is a poet whose lack of depth must preclude him from achieving the literary heights of Virgil. Both critics objected strongly to the *Heroides*, finding them tedious and artificial, with Wilkinson famously comparing the collection to an indigestible plum pudding.²⁰ Their views of the *Metamorphoses* reached scarcely higher, despite Fränkel labelling it 'one of the finest poems handed down to us from antiquity'.²¹ For Fränkel and Wilkinson, the *Metamorphoses* is simply too diffuse to be taken seriously, a tour de force of Ovidian story-telling without the stylistic coherence or thematic unity that characterises the *Aeneid*.²²

Otis (1966) represented a significant step forward, in that he advanced a theory regarding the organisational rationale of the *Metamorphoses*, treating Books 6 to 11 as the 'heart' of the epic and designating its theme 'the pathos of love'.²³ Although Otis substantially revised his conclusions in his second edition (1970), the monograph is a brave attempt to challenge the assumption that Ovid's masterpiece must be as confused in its structure as its diverse stories can appear to the modern reader. On the other hand, Otis is quite as critical of the *Heroides* as are Fränkel (1945) and Wilkinson (1955), deriding the heroines' 'empty emotionalism', and singling out the epistles of Canace, Medea and Hypermnestra as the only poems worth reading for their inclusion of 'dramatic movement' in the women's myths.²⁴

²⁰ Wilkinson (1955), p. 106.

²¹ Fränkel (1945), p. 72.

²² Cf. Wilkinson's comment (1955), p. 144, that 'Virgil had now set a new standard for epic, infusing it with philosophical import, and Ovid was no philosopher'. Later, Wilkinson refers to the structure of the *Metamorphoses* as a 'jigsaw-puzzle', p. 147, assuming that Ovid lacked the critical capabilities to do anything other than assemble his tales in a linear fashion.

²³ Otis (1966, rp 1970), p. 166.

²⁴ Cf. Otis (1966, rp 1970), p. 17.

Scholarship on the *Heroides* turned a corner with Anderson's (1973) contribution to the J.W. Binns compendium on Ovid. In his chapter, Anderson argues that critics ought to stop comparing Ovid's women unfavourably with their canonical predecessors, that we should concern ourselves with what Ovid might be doing with the characters in his own right. Anderson was thus an early proponent of taking the heroines 'on their own terms', although his efforts to defend Ovid's Dido are hampered by his determination to treat the character of *Heroides* 7 as both truthful and disingenuous – 'charming' where Virgil's heroine is heroic.²⁵ Jacobson's (1974) monograph appears to answer Anderson's call to action, being the first full-length study devoted entirely to the *Heroides*, and to date the only in-depth treatment of all of the single epistles. In the tradition of Palmer's (1898) commentary, and J.N. Anderson's (1896) notes on Ovid's sources for the collection, Jacobson set out to measure the degree of Ovid's originality by mapping the poet's dependence on or departure from preceding literary sources.²⁶ Jacobson reads the collection 'psychologically', exploring the idea that Ovid was chiefly interested in character rather than plot. Jacobson's approach represented a new frontier in *Heroides* studies, serving to highlight the individuality of the Ovidian heroines, yet also passing over much of the humour and dramatic irony of the poems in favour of an unrelenting focus on the women's epistolary psyches.²⁷

At the same time in *Metamorphoses* studies, Due's monograph *Changing Forms* (1974) attempted to recapture an image of Ovid's ancient reader, moving away from the criticisms of Otis (1966) and Wilkinson (1955) to present a view of Ovid as a poet engaged in ironic dialogue with Virgil and Horace. Despite the difficulties of Due's reading – encapsulated in the declaration that his study deals only with 'historical facts' – Due propelled the scholarly conversation forward by observing that the only truly relevant reading of a poem lies in how it is understood: that is, in how a reader chooses to interpret a poem. Galinsky's (1975) volume pursues themes raised by earlier scholars, performing a comparative analysis of Ovid's Trojan material and Virgil's *Aeneid*, and using this to argue for the unity

²⁵ Cf. Anderson (1973), pp. 60-2, where he contrasts Ovid's Dido against the 'grandeur' of Virgil's heroine, who is 'majestic' at the point of her suicide. By contrast, Anderson argues that Ovid's portrait of Dido is 'humane and courtly'.

²⁶ Jacobson's (1974) analysis follows Ovid's infamous assertion at *Ars Am.* 3.345-6: *vel tibi composita cantetur epistola voce: / ignotum hoc aliis ille novavit opus.*

²⁷ A second problem with Jacobson's work – in my view the more significant – is noted by Kennedy (2002), p. 219, in his essay on the *Heroides* in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*. Kennedy observes that Jacobson's book is 'pervaded by a profound sense of disappointment', and this is indeed the most noticeable feature of the monograph: Jacobson fails to like *any* of Ovid's epistolary women, and seems as a result irrevocably committed to his negative conclusions.

of the Ovidian epic as centred in its inherent variety. Galinsky echoes Otis (1966) in concluding that love, not metamorphosis, is the theme of the poem, and like Otis he is interested in the origins of Ovid's stories rather than in Ovid's unique treatment of them. For the reader concerned with Medea's Book 7, 1976 saw the appearance of the third volume of Bömer's commentary on the *Metamorphoses*, begun in 1969. Bömer's approach to Book 7 – as to all of the *Metamorphoses* – is vastly more detailed than Anderson's (1972) earlier commentary on Books 6 to 10; neither, however, is much concerned with examining the place of Medea either within Book 7 or within the central pentad of the epic.

Vessey (1976) continued the gradual redefinition of criticism on the *Heroides*, offering an important antidote to Jacobson's (1974) dour discussion by focusing on the role of humour and irony in the collection. Vessey theorised that 'the poet at play is not necessarily the poet trivialised', an observation that seems to presage much of the Ovidian scholarship soon to appear.²⁸ In 1981 Sabot devoted nearly a hundred pages to an analysis of the *Heroides* in that year's volume of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, taking up Anderson's (1973) challenge to resist pejorative comparison of the Ovidian heroines with their earlier incarnations.²⁹ Sabot is largely sympathetic to Ovid's women, arguing that Ovid manipulates his heroines' characterisations to create 'des êtres nouveaux', an implicit criticism of Jacobson's persistently negative treatment of the poems.³⁰ Like Otis (1966), Sabot observes that virtually all critics who dislike the *Heroides* make an exception for at least one of them, signalling the extent to which the prominence or popularity of a poetic work is determined by the reader's individual temperament.³¹

The 1980s fostered an explosion of interest in the topic of epistolarity, which was particularly beneficial to scholarship on the *Heroides*. Altman's (1982) monograph ranks alongside that of Kauffman (1986) as important studies exploring the tension between presence and absence in epistolary narratives, thereby drawing novel comparisons between ancient and modern manifestations of epistolarity.³² In the same vein, Kennedy (1984)

²⁸ Vessey (1976), p. 94.

²⁹ The *ANRW* article represents a re-working and a further development of the chapter on the *Heroides* from Sabot's (1976) monograph dealing with Ovid's early works.

³⁰ Sabot (1981), p. 2610. Sabot does, however, agree with Jacobson (1974) that Ovid is chiefly interested in exploring the psychology of his characters.

³¹ Sabot (1981), p. 2553.

³² Cf. Kennedy (2002), who credits critics such as Altman (1982) and Kauffman (1986) with kick-starting interest in the *Heroides* by expanding the critic's understanding of the epistolary form more generally. On the ancient side of the epistolarity debate, Rosenmeyer (2001) is a more current study that repays careful attention.

fashioned a turning-point in *Heroides* studies with his influential discussion of Penelope's *Heroides* 1: Kennedy argues persuasively that the success of the poem turns on Ovid's reader being able to divine when Penelope is supposed to be writing, relative to the mythological chronology as established by Homer. By focusing scholars' attention on the sense of satisfaction we derive from knowing more of Penelope's literary history than does Ovid's heroine herself, Kennedy reveals hidden layers of irony in Ovid's poem, and thus sets the scene for much of the intertextual criticism that has developed since.

Verducci (1985) produced one of the most controversial treatments of the *Heroides*, not wholly dissimilar to Kennedy (1984) in her assertion that critics should acknowledge the extent to which Ovid frustrates his readers' expectations of his heroines and of his texts. Verducci challenges the views of Jacobson (1974) and other critics before him that the *Heroides* are a series of monotonous whinges, arguing for a reading based on the tension between Ovid's use of wit and of serious revision in his treatment of canonical myths. Most significantly for the purposes of this discussion, Verducci advocated that Hypsipyle and Medea be read as having swapped literary personalities – Hypsipyle becoming Medea-like in her obsessive hatred of her rival, while Medea achieves only the colourlessness afforded to Apollonius' Hypsipyle.³³ Verducci's readings are ambitious and entertaining, yet she seeks to reform the critic's view of Ovid's poetic abilities by ridiculing his heroines, an unhappy sacrifice that perhaps reflects the difficulty of defending the *Heroides* at that time.³⁴

Moving back to the *Metamorphoses*, Knox (1986) evaluated some of the generic implications of Ovid's epic, arguing against Heinze (1919) and Otis (1966) that Ovid owed much more to the elegiac tradition than to the epic. Knox's study was unusual in departing from the preoccupation with Ovid's relationship to his epic predecessors; nonetheless, Knox propounds a view of genre as essentially immutable, with epic and elegy each having clear boundaries. In contrast, Hinds (1987) discusses the Persephone myth in *Metamorphoses* 5 and *Fasti* 4 from a standpoint that treats genre as dynamic. Hinds contends that Ovid is both epic *and* elegiac, by way of illustrating a view of the poet as an artist interested in self-commentary and in the prosecution of poetic practice. Both Knox

³³ Verducci (1985), pp. 56-85.

³⁴ Cahoon (1988) offers a valuable commentary here. Cahoon's review of Verducci (1985) points out that Verducci has very much fallen into the trap identified by Anderson (1973) – that of choosing to evaluate the epistolary heroines solely in terms of their appeal to a male-dominated literary tradition.

and Hinds employ close readings of Ovidian texts to support their innovative arguments – a practice that has since become indispensable in Ovidian studies. Solodow (1988) belongs to the tradition of Due (1974) and Galinsky (1975), being chiefly concerned with Ovid's interaction with Virgil. Importantly – and setting him apart from Knox (1986) and Hinds (1987) – Solodow rejected structural interpretations of the *Metamorphoses*, arguing that the only constant in Ovid's work is variety, with metamorphosis the sole recurring thread in the epic.

As with the *Metamorphoses*, scholarship on the *Heroides* turned towards genre and intertextuality.³⁵ Barchiesi (1987) advocated the collection's significance in opening 'new windows' onto stories already completed, arguing that Ovid sought neither to subvert nor to parody epic and elegy, but rather to probe the conventions of each from a vantage point outside the canonical myth.³⁶ Rosati (1992) pursued Barchiesi's interest in Ovid's attitude to genre, tracing Ovid's use of elegiac topoi in the *Heroides*, and examining the Ovidian formation of the elegiac ego.³⁷ Spoth (1992) belongs to the same school, being the first monograph to focus exclusively on the elegiac aspects of the *Heroides*. Spoth analyses all of the single epistles except Hypsipyle and Sappho, making his study unusually comprehensive even today; moreover, he challenges the idea that the characterisations of Ovid's women have to be seen to change throughout their epistolary narratives – an important forerunner of this project's reading of the Ovidian Medea.

In 1993, Barchiesi returned to the intertextual angle, demonstrating that the *Heroides* can be shown to involve the reader in a sort of conspiracy with the author against the character. Barchiesi's discussion posits a reading of Ovid's poems as engaged in a sophisticated conversation with other texts; nonetheless, Barchiesi regards the letters themselves as 'naive, sentimental fictions' whose chief interest derives from Ovid's treatment of the generic implications of his decision to recast figures from earlier myths.³⁸ Hinds (1993) takes the critical debate somewhat further, arguing against Knox's (1986b) assertion of the inauthenticity of *Heroides* 12. For Hinds, the 'evidence' for or against a particular

³⁵ Casali's chapter (2009) in the Blackwell *Companion to Ovid* gives a useful overview of the relationship between intertextual scholarship and Ovidian studies more broadly.

³⁶ Readers should note that Barchiesi (1987) was reprinted as an English translation in Barchiesi (2001).

³⁷ Rosati (1985), (1988) and (1989) are also relevant here – it is interesting to trace the development of Rosati's view of Ovid's use of genre over time. The 1985 study on Phaedra suggests that Rosati, like Knox (1986), considered genre to be largely fixed in its nature; the 1992 article shows a greater degree of fluidity in the interpretation of Ovid's epistolary poems.

³⁸ Cf. Barchiesi (1993), p. 350.

scholarly viewpoint is often a matter of the critic's willingness to accept having our expectations of a text met only in part or not at all. In advocating for a connection between *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7, Hinds promotes a less proscriptive approach to the *Heroides* as a collection, and offers a precedent for this project's aim of reading Medea as one consistent characterisation. On the other hand, the growing prominence of intertextual approaches served to shift the critical debate away from considerations such as characterisation, creating an interpretive gap within Ovidian studies and leaving space for readings such as this one.

Alden Smith (1994) is sometimes overlooked in bibliographies on the *Heroides*, yet his article is an influential precursor to the monographs of the early 2000s. Alden Smith takes a gendered approach, arguing for the efficacy of reading the *Heroides* as evidence of the heroines' 'own' interpretations of events from their mythological pasts. He treats Ovid's women as showing personal 'growth' between their different poetic texts, a view that both complements and contrasts with Rosenmeyer's (1997) analysis of the *Heroides* and the exile poetry, which focuses on the inherently constructed nature of the women's epistolary realities. Common to both Alden Smith's discussion and Rosenmeyer's is the view of the elegiac heroines as 'playing characters' within their own epistolary worlds, an approach very different from Bessone's (1997) commentary on *Heroides* 12, which deals almost exclusively with the generic and intertextual echoes between Medea's letter and Euripides' tragedy. Meanwhile, Farrell (1998) proffers a reading of the *Heroides* as built on a dichotomy between women as writers and men as readers; in Farrell's terms, Ovid's women are truthful and guileless in contrast to the duplicity and self-service of their men. Farrell's analysis combats the view of the women as a homogenous group, arguing that the heroines are more dissimilar than they are alike – a concept that challenges the readings of Alden Smith (1994) and Rosenmeyer (1997).

Discussion of the *Metamorphoses* moved along similarly diverse paths: Tissol (1997) attempted to recalibrate the debate about Ovid's structure and style. Through an examination of Ovid's use of humour in the epic, Tissol asserts that the poet aimed to be both subversive and disturbing, aims which are reflected in Ovid's deliberately haphazard poetic style and narrative organisation. Tissol takes metamorphosis to be the binding theme of the epic, and his view that an evaluation of Ovid's narrative structure is imperative has shaped my own reading of Book 7, which I discuss in Chapter Four. However contentious Tissol's conclusions – his reviewers, for example, are diametrically opposed – his

monograph makes an important case for treating Ovid as a serious poet and the *Metamorphoses* as a poem of profound substance.³⁹ Wheeler (1999) focuses on Ovid's manipulation of his audience throughout the epic, examining the *Metamorphoses* from an overtly narratological standpoint.⁴⁰ Wheeler's focus on performance rather than on narrative sets his study apart from the dominant thread of intertextual studies, such as those collected in Hardie's (1999 ed.) *Ovidian Transformations* volume, which incorporates a number of influential essays on the reception and interpretation of the epic: Keith on epic masculinity, Liveley on 'resistant' readings, Gildenhard on Ovid's appropriation of tragic figures and Farrell on the interaction between poetic 'body' and poetic text. Wheeler's second monograph (2000) maintains its narratological focus, while turning to Ovid's narrative dynamics – asking what mechanism drives the poem forward from one episode to another. Wheeler, too, has influenced my discussion of *Metamorphoses* 7 in Chapter Four.

The growing quantity of scholarship on the *Heroides* fairly doubled in the new century, begun with Landolfi's (2000) monograph on the epistolary lament. Although dealing with only a few of Ovid's heroines – including Medea – Landolfi's study is noteworthy for its inclusion of heroines who have historically been less popular, including Phaedra and Oenone. Jolivet (2001) also attempts a reading of some 'unloved' heroines, such as Deianira, but Jolivet's monograph is significantly weakened by covering some of the same ground as earlier critics – for example, Casali (1995, 1995b) on *Heroides* 9 – and by declining to advance any coherent view either of the collection or of the individual poems surveyed. Hardie's *Poetics of Illusion* (2002) embraces the whole of the Ovidian corpus, providing close readings of specific episodes rather than taking a unified approach. Unusually for analyses of the *Heroides*, Hardie focuses on the paired epistles – Acontius / Cydippe and Leander / Hero – which sets him apart from the monographs soon to follow.⁴¹

Lindheim (2003) shares a small commonality with Hardie (2002), in that both apply Lacanian theory to the analysis of Classical texts. Lindheim's monograph examines the single *Heroides* from the point of view of the women's epistolary desires: she argues that

³⁹ Cf. Morgan (1998), who is thoroughly unconvinced by Tissol's focus on Ovid's wit and humour; he contrasts with Newlands (1999), who is extremely positive about Tissol's contributions to the Ovidian debate.

⁴⁰ It is perhaps worth noting here that Barchiesi (2001b) labels Wheeler's monograph the most detailed account of Ovidian narratology to date.

⁴¹ The only single epistle that Hardie (2002) analyses is Laodamia's *Heroides* 13.

all of the women fail to capitalise on the position afforded them by the univocal epistolary format, instead choosing to fashion themselves according to what (they think) the hero wants. Spentzou (2003) approaches the collection from a related standpoint, using a French feminist framework to suggest that the single letters can be read as a ‘discourse of subversions’ in which the heroines struggle fruitlessly to escape the bonds of the male-authored literary tradition.⁴² Unlike Lindheim, Spentzou treats the women as predominantly truthful, in contrast to Lindheim’s focus on the women’s construction of epistolary personalities designed to appeal to men.

Fulkerson (2005) fits into the feminist school with Lindheim (2003) and Spentzou (2003) – all three monographs decline to subordinate the study of the heroines to a discussion of Ovid’s authorial poetics. However, Fulkerson produces rather different readings of the collection by treating the heroines as an interpretive community – women whose letters are shaped in the context of their sister-writers’ epistolary concerns, in a sort of time/space vacuum that allows all of the women and all of their writing to exist simultaneously. Although Fulkerson neither attacks nor overtly revises much of the scholarship on the collection, her analysis demonstrates that innovative readings of the *Heroides* can be achieved through the adoption of a radically unexpected viewpoint; in this respect, this project’s approach to Medea owes much to Fulkerson’s work. As with the intertextual critics, however, the growth of feminist scholarship altered the interpretive framework of the *Heroides*, being concerned with the construction of gender rather than of character, and thus creating space in the debate for my focus on Ovidian characterisation. At the other end of the critical spectrum, meanwhile, lies Davis’ (2006) political reading of Ovid’s amatory works: he treats the women of the *Heroides* as products of a uniquely Augustan social environment, committed to an Augustan paradigm of faithful marriage.

The last ten years in *Metamorphoses* criticism has brought forth an exciting array of approaches. Brown (2005) follows on from Brown (1999) to pursue the thread of Ovidian reception, offering provocative modern readings of some of Ovid’s most challenging figures, including Pygmalion and the Procne-Philomela duo. Salzman-Mitchell (2005) shares Brown’s preoccupation with difficult characters, using a framework of gaze theory to argue that some of the *Metamorphoses*’ most controversial women – Medea, Scylla, Arachne, Byblis and Myrrha – are marginalised by their forceful appropriation of the

⁴² Cf. Spentzou (2003), p. 3.

powerful gaze usually reserved for men. Johnson (2008) takes the theme of problematic readings still further, analysing Ovid's treatment of the relationship between the poet and his audience. Through an examination of poetic contests – the Emathides and the Muses, Orpheus, Arachne and Minerva – Johnson offers a political reading of the epic as a poem bound up with Ovid's experience of living under Augustan ideology. Pavlock (2009) moves back into the arena of reception studies, although with a similar focus on the roles of the fictional audience and by extension the Ovidian reader. Pavlock treats only transgressive characters – Narcissus, Medea, Daedalus, Orpheus and Ulysses – whom she reads as analogues for the poet attempting to subvert the conventions of the epic genre. Pavlock's monograph is unusual, both in considering Medea's Book 7 at some length, and in highlighting the interpretive significance of binary oppositions in Ovid's poem: male versus female; powerful versus disempowered; fluid bodies versus fixed identities.

Feldherr (2010) takes a narratological approach to the epic, arguing that the poem is built on a number of competing perspectives, and on Ovid's ability to persuade his reader to shift between these differing viewpoints as and when it suits him. Feldherr's analysis is subtle and ambitious, drawing out several different dimensions of Ovid's poem and asking what effect such a text might have on a Roman audience's understanding of their relationship to literature of their own epoch. However, like Hardie (2002), to whom he is much indebted, Feldherr's monograph is more in the nature of collected observations than a unified thesis. Approaching the poem from a totally different angle is Vial (2010), whose vast monograph seeks to redress the lack of scholarly focus on metamorphosis as a thematic concept. Vial's text is extremely dense, incorporating a number of complex readings but without drawing these together into an overarching web of interpretive ideas.⁴³

Fratantuono's (2011) commentary would seem to stand in opposition to works such as Feldherr (2010) and Vial (2010): Fratantuono's thesis is that 'madness' is the foundational theme of the *Metamorphoses*, linking Ovid's poem to Virgil's *Aeneid* before it and Lucan's *Bellum Civile* after. Fratantuono asserts that Ovid's driving concern is philosophical, rather than political or literary; he refuses to concede that the *Metamorphoses* is partly a poem about the writing of poems, which places his commentary in an entirely different interpretive sphere from much of the preceding scholarship on

⁴³ In my view, Vial (2010) makes some perplexing analytical choices: she devotes a whole section to the role of magic in the *Metamorphoses*, yet she, too, handles Medea's myth only in passing.

genre, intertextuality, irony and other topics linked to the nature of narrative texts.⁴⁴

Perhaps surprisingly, Kenney's (2011) *Fondazione Valla* commentary resembles Frantantuono's in more than one respect. Like Frantantuono, Kenney all but ignores critical theory; and like Frantantuono, Kenney views the *Metamorphoses* as a poem the central preoccupation of which is humanity, rather than overtly political or artistic considerations. Kenney also devotes significant space to the women of Ovid's epic, a change which is as welcome as the cultural shift that is implicit in these two volumes: it is once more acceptable to posit a reading of Ovid as being concerned with something other than the demonstration of his own literariness.

The contemporary Ovidian critic thus finds himself in a very fortunate position: the scholarship of even the last ten years provides much food for thought.⁴⁵ On both the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*, some significant work has been done in article format, maintaining the momentum of critical interest by tackling smaller issues that contribute to the wider literary landscape. Although it seems invidious to cite only a selection, Liveley (2008), Bolton (2009), Davis (2012), Murgatroyd (2014) and Drinkwater (2007, 2015) spring to mind as studies of the *Heroides* that have highlighted the enduring appeal of the collection and the need for ongoing research in a variety of guises. On the *Metamorphoses*, Von Glinski's (2012) monograph focuses on simile as a way of interpreting Ovid's treatment of changing bodies and identities, while the field is amply served by no fewer than four compilation volumes on Ovid published since 2000. Hardie (2002 ed.), Weiden Boyd (2002 ed.) Knox (2006 ed.) and Knox (2009 ed.) between them assemble the most influential Ovidian scholars of our age, with particular benefits, in my view, for the reader of the *Metamorphoses*. I suggest that it is much to be celebrated that, rather than creating the impression that there can be nothing left to say about Ovid, these critics have between them demonstrated the need for ever more comprehensive and innovative research.

⁴⁴ Cf. Frantantuono (2011), p. xvii.

⁴⁵ Readers will observe that this discussion does not use gender-neutral vocabulary: I refer to Ovid's external reader as 'he' throughout. Whilst I understand the reasons why some scholars – particularly those of the feminist school – prefer to use expressions such as 's/he' to describe the reader, this terminology seems incongruous in my own text, since it does not conform to the way in which I was taught to write. I anticipate that my views on this matter may change as I become more experienced as a scholar, and I trust therefore that readers will accept my use of 'he' as reflecting the particular time-period in which this project has been developed. The vocabulary is chosen to reflect as accurately as possible the voice of the writer, rather than to defend a particular critical position.

On Methodology

Methodologically speaking, this is an eclectic project; the discussion finds itself at the intersection of a number of fields of literary criticism, without subscribing exclusively to any particular model. In the preface to his 1987 study of the Ovidian Persephone, Hinds observes that some critics are still unwilling to subject Ovid to the sort of close reading that his texts demand, and this is the premise from which my analysis commences.⁴⁶ I centre my arguments around a close reading of Medea's Ovidian narratives, and employ a range of aspects of different critical theories to help me organise and articulate my views of the text. Like Spentzou (2003), I take the view that theory ought not to be an end in itself; it is a tool which allows the development of a clearly-defined reading, but which should not dictate the reading that is to be found.⁴⁷

Unsurprisingly, for a thesis about a female character inhabiting the most female-centric text in the Ovidian corpus, this project is descended from the strong tradition of feminist scholarship that has developed in Classics since the 1970s. Of great influence to me – as to most women Classicists of my generation – has been the infamous 1990 issue of *Helios*, in which Phyllis Culham theorises about rejecting the critical centrality of the literary text, as an object which is (almost always) male-authored and which is therefore at best a masculine representation of an authoritative reality for the women of literature. Mary-Kay Gamel's (1990) counter-attack regarding the inherently constructed nature of all literary texts, whether purporting to depict a male or a female reality, offers an invaluable counterpoint to Culham for any scholar of the *Heroides*, where we are wrestling with a minimum of two layers of representation: how the heroines are representing themselves within their story worlds, and how Ovid represents the heroines representing themselves.

The kind of opposition explored in Culham's article and Gamel's – between the author constructing and the character being constructed – has shaped the presentation of my analysis of *Heroides* 6 and 12. I divide the discussion into two parts: the first prioritises the view of the heroines obtained from within the story worlds, looking at how the women seem to be presenting themselves to the hero. The second part examines the way in which we can chart Ovid's manipulation of his heroines' self-portrayals. Only by considering the two levels of artistic representation together, and by identifying the extent to which they

⁴⁶ Cf. Hinds (1987), p. xi.

⁴⁷ Cf. Spentzou (2003), pp. 6-8.

reinforce each other, can we arrive at a properly rounded reading of the Ovidian Medea, which is exactly the kind of critical circumspection advocated by the contributors to *Helios* 1990.

In the same vein, I have taken direction from the work of scholars such as Alison Sharrock (1991, 1991b, 1991c), Maria Wyke (1987, 1994) and Sharon James (1997, 1998, 2003), using their arguments in the field of elegy to shape my response to the Ovidian Medea. Sharrock, Wyke and James all explore the notion of elegiac *puellae* as representations of women created – and therefore controlled – by male artists. This approach first demonstrated to me the potential value of an analysis of the Ovidian Medea centred around her characterisation: we need to be able to answer the question ‘how is Ovid depicting his Medea?’ before we can have another kind of conversation about the text more broadly. This, it seems to me, is the point that Sharrock and a number of other scholars are making about elegy, asking what use it is to investigate the conventions and ideologies of a genre without a complementary focus on the literary figures being created within that genre. Virtually all of the available scholarship on the Ovidian Medea emphasises comparison with the portraits of Apollonius and Euripides. However, if we seek to break new ground regarding the character of Ovid’s Medea and her role within the Ovidian corpus, then we have to commit to an examination of the heroine herself and of how her artist appears to be crafting her – just as Sharrock, Wyke and James proposed for the advancement of elegiac criticism.

In relation to recent Ovidian scholarship, this project has most in common with the monographs of Spentzou (2003) and Fulkerson (2005) on the *Heroides*. Both advocate taking Ovid’s heroines ‘on their own terms’, rather than commencing their analyses from a point of view that privileges the concerns of the poet and of the literary tradition above those of the writing women. Although a similar approach to *Metamorphoses* 7 has never been applied, I transfer the same principle to my discussion of Medea’s epic incarnation, following in the tradition of studies such as Liveley (1999) and Keith (2000), which both assert the value of re-reading texts in the epic genre from an overtly feminocentric point of view. Unlike these scholars, however, I am not especially concerned with the gendered aspects of the Ovidian Medea. I am interested in how Ovid represents Medea as a *character* rather than as a specifically female figure; in this respect, my study is enabled by the tradition of feminist scholarship that has gone before, which argues that critics need to take women characters seriously, but this project is not itself a feminist analysis.

In particular, I suggest that the Ovidian Medea benefits from a discussion which treats her from a non-feminist standpoint, since feminist approaches tend to emphasise the similarities between literary heroines, rather than their individuality. As I argue in subsequent chapters, Medea appears to be very unusual amongst Ovid's literary women; thus, a focus such as mine on characterisation allows Medea's atypical Ovidian personality to come to the fore, whereas an overtly gendered analysis may be forced to subordinate these aspects of the heroine to a discussion of Ovidian femininity. Spentzou (2003) offers an important illustration here: her French feminist model, depending on Kristeva's 'speaking subject' and Cixous' 'écriture féminine', reads the *Heroides* as a group of women trapped within a world of female-only writing by the male authors of the dominant literary tradition. Ironically, it is Spentzou's critical framework which dictates that the *Heroides* be read as subversive, created out of a position of powerlessness. In my view, Spentzou's feminist angle does Ovid's epistolary women a disservice, by suggesting that the defining features of the *Heroides* are the heroines' marginalisation and disempowerment, rather than their distinct and individual epistolary personalities.

In comparison with Spentzou's, this thesis is perhaps best labelled 'post-feminist' – a term used by Fulkerson (2005), whose approach is concerned as much with the heroines as communicators as it is with their identities as literary women.⁴⁸ Although I share the trepidation of Spentzou and of other feminist scholars regarding the difficulty of recovering a 'female reality' from a collection such as the *Heroides*, where the heroines' words are mediated by a male poet, I do not consider this an insuperable problem in the case of this project. Given that I am evaluating Ovid's presentation of Medea as a literary personality, the poet's manipulation of his heroine's gendered self need not be a primary consideration of this analysis. In the end, therefore, I part company with the likes of Culham (1990), however much altered I have been by the realisation that I, too, having been raised in an era of supposed 'gender equality', was thoroughly conditioned to read according to male-authored power dynamics. Unlike some of the prominent feminist scholars of literature in the English language – the so-called 'gynocritics' – I do not concede that Ovid's role as Medea's ventriloquist undermines the value of Medea's text as a whole.⁴⁹ At least, I do not believe that it prevents the critic from developing a persuasive

⁴⁸ Cf. Fulkerson (2005), p. 5. Fulkerson's elaboration of the ways in which her study differs from preceding feminist approaches is particularly illuminating, I suggest, for critics wishing to identify the aspects of the text in which they themselves are most interested, pp. 5-7; 15-16.

⁴⁹ See here, for example, Gilbert and Gubar's ground-breaking (1979) *The Madwoman in the Attic*. In much the same school, I suggest that Showalter (1985 ed.) is a particularly illuminating volume,

reading of Medea's Ovidian characterisation, and for the purposes of the present study that is enough.

In common with the vast majority of contemporary scholarship on Classical literature, this thesis is also indebted to the field of reader-response criticism, which has redefined the way in which critics evaluate their relationships to literary texts. Iser (1978) argues for a model in which the reader and the text between them create meaning in a narrative; he regards the text as a discrete literary object over which the reader has some measure of influence, in that the reader responds to it based on his own previous experiences of text, but which the reader cannot entirely control. Despite the enduring influence of Iser's work, I disagree that it is always possible to treat the text as an independent entity apart from any specific reading. This is particularly problematic in the case of *Heroides* 12: which text would Iser take to be the 'authoritative' one to which the reader responds? Would it be Ovid's text, in which the poet records a version – that is to say, a *reading* – of Medea's concerns; or Medea's 'own' letter, which Ovid's external reader cannot access except through the lens of Ovid's interpretation of it?

Iser's model seems to present us with a circular problem of interpretive priority, which in my view is largely resolved by Fish (1980), who argues that the reader is the chief creator of meaning within a narrative. This project takes direction from Fish's assertion that the perceived qualities of a text are significantly influenced by what the reader chooses to make of them; in other words, by what the critic goes looking for when he reads the text.⁵⁰ This principle forms the basis of my argument that the characterisation of the Ovidian Medea can be said to make complete sense, if only we can find an appropriate vantage point from which to study Ovid's portrayal. Following on from Fish's analysis – and before him that of Booth (1961) – I propose that if we readers are able to change the angle from which we approach Medea's poems, then aspects of the narrative which have hitherto been regarded as problems with the actual content of Ovid's text resolve themselves into some semblance of order. Put simply, the act of seeking out a coherent and rational explanation for Ovid's Medea is perhaps the very thing that allows us to find one.

incorporating a wide variety of discussions by critics including Gilbert and Gubar. Cf. also Kolodny (1976) and (1980).

⁵⁰ Schweickart (1986) provides a useful summary of the Iser/Fish divide, particularly for critics studying female characters in female-authored texts.

If there is one single volume from which this project derives its greatest influence, it is Fulkerson's (2005) monograph on the Ovidian heroine as author. Like Fulkerson, I consider a good deal of *Heroides* scholarship inherently reductive in its determination to measure the 'success' of the heroines' letters according to the heroes' failure to return; and like Fulkerson, it seems to me that the concerns of Ovid's epistolary women are 'man-centred only on the surface'.⁵¹ Fulkerson's discussion lies firmly in the realm of reader-response criticism, since she examines the women of the *Heroides* as an internally-cohesive community of writers. This approach has affected my own reading in two ways: first, it has strengthened my belief in the diversity of the characters of Ovid's epistolary collection rather than in their homogeneity; second, Fulkerson's analysis supports my view of Medea's *Heroides* 12 as a poem that betrays a complex epistolary agenda, having very little to do with desire for the return of the hero. Although I do not treat Ovid's elegiac heroines as self-conscious readers of each other's poems, Fulkerson's approach offers an approximate reflection of the process of reading which I argue has been detrimental to the study of the Ovidian Medea thus far. Fulkerson suggests that the Ovidian heroines are aware of each others' letters, and that they often 'misread' aspects of the other poems according to the peculiarities of their own situations – such as Phyllis, who concludes that suicide must be the appropriate reaction to her own abandonment, because it appears to mirror Dido's circumstances and response.⁵²

Therefore, in demonstrating that the *Heroides* can be read as poems from which the readers – whether real or fictitious – extract only the significance that suits them, Fulkerson's study confirms the possibilities of my own approach to Medea. I argue that the critic will find in Ovid an Apollonian or a Euripidean Medea if that is what he sets out to find; however, we perceive a uniquely Ovidian style of heroine if only we resolve to look for one. Fulkerson's model has been criticised because it appears to work better for some letters than for others, and because it does not attempt to tackle the whole collection.⁵³ I do not regard this as a fundamental problem: in line with my conviction that Ovid's women are more dissimilar than they are alike, I do not concede that the most important critical consideration ought to be finding a framework that can unify the collection. Nor does such an approach determine whether an individual reading – such as mine of Medea – is useful or persuasive.

⁵¹ Fulkerson (2005), p. 5.

⁵² Cf. Fulkerson (2005), pp. 23-39.

⁵³ See, for example, the criticisms of Bessone (2007) and Kennedy (2007).

This project is likewise the product of intertextual criticism, which has taken Ovidian studies by storm in the last three decades. Ovid is a poet of exceptional intertextual acuity, as Hinds (1987, 1993) so persuasively argues; Barchiesi (1987, 1993, 2001) has been similarly influential in demonstrating that the number of possible interpretations of Ovid's poetry is limited chiefly by the reader's expectations of the text – the harder we look, the more we find to challenge us. A number of intertextual scholars, however, and Barchiesi is perhaps the best example here, are of the view that the key interest of Ovid's poetry lies in its interaction with its predecessors. In his 1993 article on the *Heroides*, Barchiesi argues that the success of the collection lies in Ovid's exploitation of his readers' relationship to the 'master fiction[s]' of the literary tradition – the dominant versions of the heroines' myths which hover in the back of readers' minds when we encounter Ovid's poems.⁵⁴ Although Barchiesi's views have been instrumental in advancing the study of the *Heroides* and of Ovidian poetics more generally, I do not agree that the most significant or most interesting intertexts are necessarily those between Ovid and the preceding literary tradition.

In this respect, my discussion applies the principles of intertextual criticism rather differently to most other studies of Ovid's characters. Whereas Barchiesi and others have conditioned scholars to focus on intertexts between Ovid and his literary forebears – a sort of conversation between poets – I suggest that in the case of Ovid's Medea it is equally beneficial to explore the intertextual relationship between different narratives each belonging to the Ovidian corpus. The study is therefore both *intertextual* and *intratextual*: Medea inhabits two different Ovidian texts, separated by genre and chronology – both compositional and mythological – yet she appears in another sense to inhabit the same textual landscape all along, since I argue that Ovid depicts her as one stable characterisation spanning diverse poetic environments. Here, my approach owes much to Fowler's (1997) compelling defence of intertextual studies generally, in which he argues that the reader is inseparable from any perceived set of intertexts, and that intertexts are always changing, along with the readers of a poem. Like Fowler's, my analysis proceeds on the basis that there can be no fixed number of intertexts within a narrative, just as there can be no fixed set of readings. The project is therefore as much a product of Barchiesi's assertion that it is the critic who limits the available readings of Ovid as it is a departure from Barchiesi's focus on the relationship between Ovid and the literary canon.

⁵⁴ Barchiesi (1993), p. 346.

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, the project draws on the field of psycho-analytical criticism. I am wary of any approach to a text which appears to function by explaining away any and all complexities within the narrative; this, I think, can happen where the critic chooses his brand of psycho-analytical theory and uses it to shape the reading of the text according to what the psycho-analytical model says he ought to be finding.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding, I remain convinced that psycho-analytical approaches to Classical literature can be of value, if applied with circumspection and with a keen eye to avoiding as much as possible the charge of anachronism. My thinking in this area owes much to Brooks (1984), who argues both bravely and lucidly that psycho-analytical and literary criticisms are natural bed-fellows, since each field seeks on some level to expose or explain something fundamental about the literal world, so that the patient or reader can better understand the phenomenon under discussion, and his own reactions to it. Brooks sees psycho-analysis and literature as having the same end. However contentious the underlying principle, I suggest that Brooks' model can be useful when we as critics are confronted by an aspect of a literary text – such as Medea's complex Ovidian characterisation – which appears to defy our field's typical methods for dissecting and discussing it.⁵⁶

On the *Heroides*, Lindheim (2003) is the most recent critic to take an overtly psycho-analytical approach to the collection.⁵⁷ Lindheim's focus is Lacanian, and I find that her study falls into exactly the trap that I identified earlier – that of choosing to read every aspect of the *Heroides* as being about the thwarting of the heroines' romantic or sexual desires, because these are the parameters dictated by the Lacanian framework. Lindheim's critical model is arguably more limiting than it is expansive in its possibilities. In contrast with Lindheim, I incorporate an analysis of the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 that derives from forensic psychiatry. In examining Ovid's characterisation of his heroine against some of the criteria for psychopathy – the

⁵⁵ See here Janan (2004), who raises some valid concerns about Hardie's use of a Lacanian framework in his 2002 monograph. For a contrasting view on Hardie's critical models, see Feldherr (2003).

⁵⁶ An excellent and up-to-date example of psycho-analytical criticism in the Classical field is Zajko and O'Gorman (2013 eds.). The volume is largely Freudian in its interpretive slant, and devotes perhaps more space to Virgil than to other poets; nonetheless, the chapters collectively demonstrate the currency and innovation of psycho-analytical approaches to complex texts.

⁵⁷ There are, of course, earlier critics whose discussions have leant towards the psycho-analytical: Haley (1924) is a fascinating example, in that Haley approaches the *Heroides* from the point of view of the early twentieth century concern with 'neurosis', a psychiatric concept that has undergone substantial shift since the 1920s.

psychiatric condition that centres in the subject's inability to experience emotion – I propose that we find a helpful framework in attempting to answer the question 'does Ovid's Medea make sense in how she appears to think and feel?'

Importantly, I do not argue, as the early psycho-analytical critics did, that Ovid's Medea 'is' a psychopath; rather, that an examination of the typical personality traits of a psychopath can allow us to perceive that we do not *have* to regard Medea as implausible or inexplicable in Ovid's treatment of her. Moreover, the notion that Ovid may be depicting Medea as sharing certain of these unusual psychological hallmarks can provide a rationale for some of the more challenging aspects of Medea's characterisation – for example, her persistent self-focus in the face of other characters' suffering. The aim of my blend of critical models, then, is to enable me to build a coherent reading of the Ovidian Medea as one consistent characterisation across her epic and elegiac incarnations.

Structuring the argument

The thesis comprises four chapters. Chapter One is the first of two devoted to *Heroides* 6 and 12 – the letters of Hypsipyle to Jason and Medea to Jason. In this chapter, I am concerned with the heroines' self-presentations as viewed from within Ovid's story worlds. I argue that the women portray themselves according to opposing principles: Hypsipyle is a reactive heroine, driven by the opinions that she believes other characters hold of her; Medea is independently active, the controlling force of her own narrative and relationships. I suggest that the poems depict Hypsipyle as hero-focused, in contrast to Medea who is self-focused. The chapter has four parts. First, I identify the central or most important character in each letter, arguing that the heroines' dissimilar focuses reflect their differing personalities. Next, I examine the figure of Jason, observing that the hero serves a markedly different purpose in each of the two narratives, consistent with the view that Ovid characterises his heroines in opposing ways. Third, I analyse the women's interpersonal relationships more generally, concluding that the portrait of Jason forms a template for the heroines' interactions with other characters. Finally, I contrast the agency of Medea's epistolary identity with the passivity of Hypsipyle's, arguing that the acting / reacting dichotomy strengthens the reader's interpretation of the heroines' self-focused and hero-focused personalities. The chapter also includes two comparative analyses, of Penelope's *Heroides* 1 and Phyllis' *Heroides* 2, in which I observe that both heroines seem quite dissimilar to Medea, whose epistolary characterisation becomes even more intriguing by comparison.

Chapter Two continues the analysis of *Heroides* 6 and 12, this time from the point of view of the poet and his external reader. I suggest that Ovid's epistolary framing of the women's narratives enhances the view of their characters that I develop in Chapter One. Again, the chapter has four sections. To begin, I focus on epistolary purpose: what does each heroine allege that she is trying to achieve, and does the narrative context of Ovid's poem support this? Next, I examine the imagery of the women's narrative spaces, arguing that Ovid's spatial organisation of the poems supports my reading of Medea as a character in control of her own narrative, and of Hypsipyle as a heroine controlled by others. In section three, I take a different approach, analysing some of Medea's most extreme behaviour through the lens of forensic psychiatry. I suggest that Ovid's characterisation of Medea could be said to reflect a personality with psychopathic tendencies; in turn, this enables me to refute the recurring allegation that Ovid's Medea appears inconsistent or unconvincing in her

epistolary incarnation. Finally, I argue that Ovid exploits the epistolary form to enable him to dramatise aspects of his heroines' personalities which are not conducive to the ways in which the women are attempting to represent themselves. In my reading, this double-edged narrative technique allows Ovid to highlight for his reader the very same aspects of the heroines' characterisations which I have identified throughout the two chapters. Chapter Two incorporates a further two comparative analyses – Oenone's *Heroides* 5 and Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14, poems which share certain similarities with Medea's *Heroides* 12, and yet which achieve a very different effect on Ovid's reader.

In Chapter Three, I turn to the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, arguing that we can identify in Ovid's epic heroine the same self-focus, the same unemotional bargain-based thinking that has characterised our reading of Medea in *Heroides* 12. These observations support my view that Ovid depicts the 'two Medeas' as one and the same character. The discussion focuses on three episodes from Medea's Book 7: the heroine's opening monologue, the rejuvenation of Aeson and the murder of Pelias. In the monologue, I argue that Ovid illustrates Medea's concern with self-promotion, if necessary at the hero's expense; this separates the Ovidian Medea from her Apollonian predecessor. The rejuvenation of Aeson intensifies the theme, as we perceive Medea's love of being acknowledged to be more talented and more powerful than others. In the case of Pelias, Medea's capacity for cruelty comes to the fore, reprising an important aspect of Medea's elegiac characterisation. To conclude, I return briefly to the concept of the psychopathic personality, observing that Ovid's depiction of the escalation of Medea's behaviour in Book 7 corresponds to the typical criminal trajectory of the psychopath, whose actions rarely show a diminution of extremity. Taken together, I suggest that we have a clear connection between the heroines of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 – the same heroine captured at two different moments in narrative time.

Chapter Four functions as an extended conclusion, drawing together some of the different threads of my reading of the Ovidian Medea. Here, I address in detail the dormant debate about the authenticity of *Heroides* 12. Furthermore, I draw out one possible reason why scholars are traditionally so critical of the elegiac Medea; namely, Ovid's selection of the heroine's moment of composition, which brings her into conflict with the heroine of Euripides. Next, I offer a rationale for the composition of Medea's myth in *Metamorphoses* 7 – a historically neglected topic. I observe that Ovid's structural presentation of the narrative appears to offer indirect support for my reading of the heroine's characterisation.

I take a similar approach to the heroines of Books 6 to 10 of the *Metamorphoses*, suggesting that we can read Medea as one of a number of female characters whose narratives are conditioned by the women's explorations of their desire for notoriety, for influence or for control over their own stories. In the concluding section, I make some observations about characterisation as a topic for literary criticism, placing the project in the context of some recent work on Classical characterisation, and arguing that we can use my reading of Medea as a template for developing readings of other Ovidian characters, particularly those which frustrate straightforward interpretation.

A key contribution of this project, then, is to begin redressing the imbalance in critical attention to which the Ovidian Medea has thus far been subjected. Medea has traditionally been neglected by scholars, and yet my analyses demonstrate that we *can* arrive at a coherent and persuasive reading of her Ovidian characterisation, if only we look carefully enough and are prepared to have our expectations challenged by Ovid's unusual treatment of a canonical heroine. In other words, I am engaged in the rehabilitation of a literary character considered by some to be beyond saving.

Linked to my concern with the figure of Medea is the question of characterisation, which is an aspect of Classical texts that nowadays receives relatively little critical attention. As noted briefly earlier in this introduction, characterisation is a useful point of view from which to study a narrative, since it evaluates different aspects of poetic competence to other critical frameworks. Intertextual and feminist approaches, for example, tend to flatten out and simplify literary characters, owing to their concern with the resemblance between one text and another, or between one female figure and another. By contrast, examining a narrative with a view to the presentation and development of its characters enables the critic to more easily identify what makes literary figures individual; in turn, I propose that this approach suggests to the scholar new and unusual readings by virtue of focusing the reader's attention on aspects of the text which may have been hitherto overlooked.

Following on from the importance of poetic characterisation, this project also has implications for the expanding range of interdisciplinary frameworks available to the contemporary Classicist. The field of forensic psychiatry, although traditionally alien to Classics, can assist the critic in shaping innovative responses to Classical narratives, assuming that the scholar has identified a suitable combination of forensic model and literary text. Given that no Ovidian scholar could reasonably challenge the assertion that

Ovid's poetic choices are sometimes radical, often unexpected and always complex, then I think we cannot avoid confronting the conundrum of the Ovidian Medea. After all, none of Ovid's other female characters merits so many separate re-tellings. I would like to know, therefore: what is so special about Medea?

CHAPTER ONE

plus est Medea noverca:

Reading the Medea of the *Heroides*

This is the first of two chapters concerned with Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 and Medea's *Heroides* 12. In this chapter, I analyse the poems from a vantage point inside the Ovidian story world, examining how the heroines present themselves as characters. I argue that Ovid constructs the women according to opposing principles: Medea as an active, controlling personality, Hypsipyle as a reactive heroine who is driven by the opinion of others. In my reading, Hypsipyle is hero-focused whereas Medea is self-focused.

I explore four aspects of the letters which illustrate my interpretations of Medea and Hypsipyle. First, I ascertain who is the most important character in each letter, and what the heroines' dissimilar focuses reveal about their epistolary identities. Next, I consider the figure of the hero, arguing that the women's divergent portrayals of Jason reflect the hero's differing role in each heroine's poem. Thirdly, I discuss the women's attitudes to interpersonal relationships more generally, observing that the portrait of Jason forms a template for interactions with other characters.

Finally, I consider the agency of Medea's epistolary identity versus the reactivity of Hypsipyle's, arguing that the dichotomy between acting and acted upon is key to the reader's understanding of the women's characters. This chapter also includes two comparative discussions, of Penelope's *Heroides* 1 and Phyllis' *Heroides* 2. I propose that analysing Medea alongside other women of the *Heroides* enables the reader to perceive how atypical is Medea's poem, even within the wider context of Ovid's elegiac collection.

1.1 The Centre of the Narrative

This section introduces the theme of the opposition between Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 and Medea's *Heroides* 12. I argue that identifying the central character in each poem allows us to perceive the heroines' strikingly dissimilar priorities and personalities. In my reading, Hypsipyle's narrative is centred around Jason, to the detriment of Hypsipyle herself.

Heroides 12, on the other hand, presents Medea as the most important character in the poem, relegating Jason to the background. Two elements of each letter illustrate this point. First, the poems' opening couplets, where the heroines reveal very different approaches to the topics of speech and memory – Medea claiming unambiguously her role as narrator of her own story, while Hypsipyle parrots the narratives of others. Likewise, the secondary narrators of each poem: in *Heroides* 6, the *hospes* exposes Hypsipyle's isolation from her hero; in *Heroides* 12, the figures of Jason and of Medea's small son support the view that Medea is the most dominant character in the narrative.

Speech and Memory

From the opening lines of *Heroides* 6 and 12, Ovid emphasises how dissimilar are his two heroines. Through careful framing of each woman's narrative, Ovid conveys to the reader that Hypsipyle is dependent on the approval of the characters around her, and in particular of Jason, whereas Medea's personality is the opposite, appearing to be self-driven and unconcerned with the opinions of others. Consider the beginning of Medea's *Heroides* 12:

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

Yet I remember that I, the queen of the Colchians, was at leisure for you when you sought my skill that it might bring you help! Then the sisters who allocate the threads of mortal living ought to have wound off my spindles. Then I, Medea, would have been able to die well. Whatever life I have led from that time has been a punishment.¹

[*Her.* 12.1-6]

Here Ovid positions Medea as the powerful centre around which the narrative revolves. The introductory *at* is a striking commencement: it implies that the writing heroine can contain herself no longer, as though *Heroides* 12 forms but one part of a pre-existing train

¹ Translations from Latin are my own; where included, translations from Greek texts are cited.

of thought.² The reader's impression is that Ovid has created a character whose personality extends beyond the boundaries of his poem, a heroine whom we are meeting just at the moment when she chooses to speak. The adversative connotations of *at* indicate that Medea is offering an alternative to a contradictory account, inserting her own view of events so as to set the record straight.³ I suggest that Ovid depicts his Medea from the very first as a heroine preoccupied with the articulation of her own concerns.

More interesting is Medea's choice of *memini* to frame her account. Hinds (1998) explores the verb's function as an 'Alexandrian footnote', designed to communicate the writer's familiarity with earlier literature and thereby drawing him into a tradition of interlinked authors, all reading and responding to each others' work.⁴ *Memini* thus seems singularly appropriate to the *Heroides*, where the poems appear to be in conversation with each other as well as with their preceding traditions.⁵ However, *memini* occurs in only six of the 14 single epistles, and then only once in each missive.⁶ Significantly, Medea is the only heroine to employ the verb in recalling an action of her own.⁷ In *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle refers to Jason's actions immediately before quitting Lemnos [*Her.* 6.64]; Briseis repeats a slave woman's words at *Her.* 3.101; Oenone remembers a place she shared with Paris before his betrayal [*Her.* 5.23];⁸ Hermione dwells upon the kidnap of Hippodamia at *Her.* 8.75; and Ariadne's memory is of her lost betrothal to Theseus [*Her.* 10.91].

² Several scholars note the abruptness of Medea's opening words. Cf. Jacobson (1974), p. 114; Knox (1986b), p. 209; Bessone (1997), p. 62.

³ For an alternative view on Medea's opening line, see Bessone (1997), pp. 62-3. Bessone focuses on the resemblance between *Her.* 12.1 and the depiction of Virgil's Dido at *Aen.* 4.1: *at regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura*. For Bessone, p. 62, the echo of Dido 'sottolinea...l'alta tensione tra regalità e amore'.

⁴ Cf. Hinds (1998), pp. 1-16, where he outlines his approach to the topics of intertextuality and allusion in Roman poetry. Hinds' discussion further develops the arguments of Conte (1986), whose *Rhetoric of Imitation* offers perhaps the most influential account of this literary phenomenon. For a complementary analysis of Ovid's use of memory in his oeuvre, see Miller (1993).

⁵ Fulkerson (2005) provides the most comprehensive discussion on this point.

⁶ Although *memini* occurs twice in Hermione's *Heroides* 8, I take this as one occurrence, since the repetition serves to highlight the tension between Hermione's wish to forget and the invasive presence of the memory. Cf. *Her.* 8.75-6: *vix equidem memini, memini tamen: omnia luctus / omnia solliciti plena timoris erant*.

⁷ Verducci (1985), p. 71, notes of Medea's use of *memini*: 'there is no other letter in the *Heroides* whose organization is so dominated by the narrative of past events recalled from the vantage of the present'. Bessone (1997), p. 63, likewise observes Medea's preoccupation with remembrance, labeling it the heroine's 'ossessione del ricordo'.

⁸ I include *Her.* 5.23-4 as per Knox's 1995 text. Palmer (1898, rp 2005) omits these lines as spurious, but I defer in this case to Knox.

I suggest that the *memini* of *Heroides* 12 is significant for two reasons. First, it appears at the very start of Medea's epistle, thereby achieving greater poetic impact than in the other letters, where the verb is buried amongst the heroines' reminiscences. Second, Ovid permits Medea to use *memini* self-referentially, drawing the reader's attention to the heroine's new-found role as narrator of her own story. Taken together with the verb's programmatic placement, the effect is to position Medea as the story-teller most visible to the reader, making an unequivocal statement of her ownership of the narrative. The first-person account enables Ovid to depict Medea as having successfully bridged the gap between poet and character: we briefly lose sight of Medea as an Ovidian construction, being encouraged instead to focus on her confident appropriation of her recollections. In the other *Heroides*, *memini* serves to highlight the heroines' helplessness, because it signals to the reader of a past which has been taken *from* the women without their consent.⁹ In Medea's case, *memini* draws our attention to a narrative of the heroine's own creation, to a past which is about to be given up *by* Medea of her own volition, as we know from the narrative traditions of Euripides and of Ennius. In this interpretation, Medea's *memini* offers an indication of the heroine's self-appointed authorial power – a reclamation of her past, and of the right to construct it according to her will and her memory.¹⁰ Thus the image of Medea as a writer and an active character is foremost in the reader's mind, even before we have been introduced to the substance of her account.¹¹

Ovid strengthens the reader's impression of Medea in the next few lines: the heroine describes herself as having 'leisure' for Jason (*vacavi*), juxtaposed with the responsibility-laden title *regina*.¹² Such a characterisation of Medea contrasts sharply with Apollonius, where the heroine is described in this early section of the myth either as *παρθένος* or as

⁹ An arguable exception here would be Oenone, whose *Heroides* 5 I discuss in Chapter Two. I suggest that, in Oenone's case, the use of *memini* is slightly more hopeful than it is for the other women, because Oenone is recalling an incident which acts within the narrative to create a link between the heroine's past and future. Oenone's 'Alexandrian footnote' is not solely concerned with a recitation of loss, but speaks also to the possibility of hopeful change which is not dependent on the absent hero. In this respect, my reading of Oenone differs from those of Lindheim (2000) and Drinkwater (2015), whose focus is on Oenone as a heroine of the pastoral genre.

¹⁰ Spentzou (2003) is a crucial study here, in terms of looking at how the women of the *Heroides* construct their pasts. See, in particular, Spentzou's chapter on the heroines' 'landscapes of lost innocence' (2003), pp. 43–83.

¹¹ Hypsipyle's use of *memini* at *Her.* 6.64 also serves to underline the opposition between the two letters – where Medea recalls her own action, Hypsipyle recalls one of Jason's.

¹² In the *Heroides*, the only other heroines who use *vacare* are Phaedra and Ariadne. Cf. *Her.* 4.18 and 10.59. For instances of the verb that resemble Medea's use of it in *Heroides* 12, see Suet. *Aug.* 8.2 and *Ves.* 21.1. Likewise, Tacitus' account of Nero's objections to Thræsea Paetus at *Ann.* 16.22.1.

κούρη.¹³ In Ovid, however, Medea chooses a label for herself that establishes her superior status over Jason – a dynamic unfamiliar to the reader of the *Argonautica*. Here in *Heroides* 12, Medea sketches the hero as the recipient of extraordinary condescension, the proximity of *tibi* and *Colchorum* implying Medea's generosity in attending to the needs of the one man before those of the many.¹⁴ The heroine's *ars* is emphatically placed at the start of the second line, while Jason is reduced to a position of supplication – *peteres* – which both erases his heroic status and reinforces Medea's role as the character of greatest importance. The prominent images in these first couplets are all of Medea's life (*fusus...meos*), Medea's imagined death (*potui...mori bene*), Medea's experience of misfortune (*poena fuit*).¹⁵ In contrast to the majority of the other *Heroides*, the hero does not appear as a figure of substance in the early part of Medea's letter. In my view, this is an Ovidian intimation that *Heroides* 12 is less a poem about the hero-heroine relationship than it is about Medea's conception of herself as the protagonist of her own story.¹⁶

Hypsipyle's introduction stands in opposition to that of *Heroides* 12. Whereas Jason appears to be a secondary consideration for the self-focused Medea, Hypsipyle is almost obsessively concerned with her hero:

¹³ See, for example, *Arg.* 3.142; 3.477; 3.528. At no point in Apollonius is Medea described using an equivalent of *regina*. By contrast, Bessone (1997), pp. 62-3, notes that Ovid's *regina* offers an echo of Euripides, as when the nurse implies that Medea's behaviour resembles that of a τύραννος [*Med.* 119-21].

¹⁴ Phyllis' *Heroides* 2 acts as a counterpoint here, in that Phyllis' position in Thrace is the same as Medea's in Colchis. Phyllis calls herself *hospita* [*Her.* 2.1], a term suggesting a reciprocal relationship with responsibility on both sides – hers as the host, Demophoön's as the guest. Medea's *regina* is much more remote, serving to depict Medea as elevated above Jason's level in a way that Phyllis' letter does not. For further discussion of the dissimilarities between Phyllis and Medea, see the comparative study at the end of this chapter.

¹⁵ Davis (2012), p. 34, argues for the similarity between this passage of *Heroides* 12 and Medea's early exclamations in Euripides, where she longs to die [*Med.* 96-7; 144-7]. Unlike Davis, I suggest that the wish in *Heroides* 12 works as a rhetorical ploy, enabling Medea to emphasise to the hero her perception of her own self-sacrifice on his behalf; I do not agree that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 must genuinely be thinking of death. In Euripides, a number of characters describe to the audience Medea's distressed and unpredictable emotional state, including the nurse, Creon and Jason. Therefore, Medea's wish to die makes sense in the tragic context, because we have corroboration for the heroine's avowal. By contrast, I propose that Ovid does not characterise Medea at any point in *Heroides* 12 as the sort of heroine who might be so overcome by emotion that she would contemplate death. For this reason, I take the wish at *Her.* 12.3-4 to be indicative of the elegiac Medea's focus on Jason's culpability, and not reflective of the heroine's emotional state within the letter.

¹⁶ Knox (1986b) offers a useful comparison here. Although he disputes the Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 12 – a problem to which I return in Chapter Four – Knox is one of the few scholars who observes that the elegiac Medea does not appear to be primarily concerned with the hero, or indeed to want him back.

Litora Thessaliae reduci tetigisse carina
 diceris auratae vellere dives ovis.
 gratulor incolumi quantum sinis; hoc tamen ipso
 debueram scripto certior esse tuo.

You are said to have reached the shores of Thessaly, your ship safely returned, rich with the fleece of a golden ram. I congratulate you, safe as you are, as much as you permit; however, I ought to have been made certain of this very event by your own words.

[*Her.* 6.1-4]

In contrast to the clear ‘I’ of Medea’s *memini*, Hypsipyle elects to give Jason pride of place – *diceris*. The hero’s exploits occupy the whole first couplet of *Heroides* 6, painting a vivid picture which seems incongruous to Ovid’s reader, given Jason’s physical remoteness from Hypsipyle. The implied separation between Hypsipyle and Jason is symbolised in the passive verb of speaking, as is the dissimilarity between Hypsipyle and her rival Medea: where Medea’s *memini* is active, Hypsipyle’s *diceris* condemns her to a passive recitation of someone else’s account, the closest that Hypsipyle can approach to the hero’s real actions.¹⁷ In narrative terms, Hypsipyle fades into the background, our image of the writing queen supplanted by the ships and shores of her mind’s eye.

In line 3, Hypsipyle ‘congratulates’ Jason, but the sentiment is subordinated to the more important material, which is the sketch of the hero’s homecoming. *Quantum sinis* is perhaps the crucial phrase: in only the third line of her poem, Hypsipyle admits that she moderates both her feelings and her actions according to the hero’s own, even when he is absent from her. Notice that Hypsipyle attempts to change tack, reproaching Jason for not apprising her of his success *scripto...tuo*. To Ovid’s reader, however, Hypsipyle’s criticism of her beloved is ineffectual, because the heroine has already established that – in her mind – it is for the hero to choose how he behaves, and for Hypsipyle to accept it. Thus, the opening couplets of *Heroides* 6 offer a clear contrast to Medea’s *Heroides* 12, revealing that the writing Hypsipyle is not the most important character in her own poem: she awards that place to the absent Jason.¹⁸

¹⁷ Readers will observe that I diverge here from Knox (1995), p. 171, Hypsipyle’s most recent commentator: he describes Hypsipyle’s *diceris* as ‘scathing’. However, Knox resembles Palmer (1898, rp 2005) and Jacobson (1974) in tending to assume that the heroines are being viciously sarcastic, where I consider a less negative reading to be equally supportable.

¹⁸ Leigh (1997) offers some interesting comments on Hypsipyle’s opening lines, noting the verbal similarity between *Her.* 6.1-2 and the laments of Ariadne in Catullus 64.171-2 and of Dido in *Aeneid* 4.657-8. He argues that Hypsipyle’s congratulatory tone contrasts with the tones of the other two women. Leigh’s observation complements my argument: Hypsipyle is presented as

Other Narrators

The secondary narrators of *Heroides* 6 and 12 develop the themes of the opening couplets. In Hypsipyle's case, the *hospes* acts as a barrier between the heroine and Jason, reminding the external reader that Hypsipyle is not permitted to tell Jason's story first-hand, but only to repeat the words of others. In *Heroides* 12, there are two secondary speakers – the hero Jason and Medea's young son – each serving to underline Medea's role as the most important character in the letter. Jason's speech [*Her.* 12.73-88] depicts Medea as primarily concerned with protecting her own interests, while the child's brief narration [*Her.* 12.151-2] positions Medea as the hero's victim by focusing on the only event over which she has no control: Jason's new marriage.

Early in *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle tells us that news of Jason's Colchian exploits came to her first from *fama* [*Her.* 6.9] and then from an unexpected *hospes* [*Her.* 6.23-40]. Both sources highlight how divided Hypsipyle is from her hero: *fama*, in particular, emphasises the heroine's dependence on unpredictable and potentially inaccurate reports.¹⁹ Hypsipyle's lack of direct access to information about Jason increases the reader's perception of the heroine's isolation, as does the content of Hypsipyle's own reporting.

Cur mihi fama prior quam littera nuntia venit:
 isse sacros Martis sub iuga panda boves,
 seminibus iactis segetes adolesse virorum
 inque necem dextra non eguisse tua,
 pervigilem spolium pecudis servasse draconem,
 rapta tamen forti vellera fulva manu?

Why did a rumour about you come to me before your letter? A rumour saying that the bulls sacred to Mars had gone beneath the curving yokes; that crops of men had grown up from seed scattered about, and that for their deaths they had no need of your right hand; that the sleepless serpent safeguarded the prize of the ram, the golden fleece nonetheless snatched away by your brave hand?

[*Her.* 6.9-14]

divided from the hero, just as Leigh suggests that she is also divided from her fellow women of Roman literature.

¹⁹ The appearance of *fama* early in the letter contrasts with Hypsipyle's use of the same word in a different context later on, when she refers to the Lemnian massacre as an exercise in protecting the women's reputations: *milite tam forti fama tuenda fuit* [*Her.* 6.54]. The commonality between the two occurrences, I suggest, is the way in which they both depict Hypsipyle as being concerned with how matters appear from the outside – what people on the street are saying about Jason, and how the women of Lemnos will be perceived following their actions against their husbands. Cf. Jacobson (1974), pp. 97-100, regarding Hypsipyle's concern for her own reputation. Concerning the Hypsipyle of Apollonius, George (1972) offers a useful discussion of the Lemnian episode, arguing that the Hypsipyle of the *Argonautica* is also motivated by concern for her self-image.

The accusative and infinitive structure places Hypsipyle in story-telling mode, but she is deprived of the luxury of a good tale by her scrupulous honesty, which admits that *fama* ‘tells’ how the bulls were yoked, the field ploughed and so on. In contrast to Medea’s eye-witness account of the same events [*Her.* 12.39-50], the reported speech of *Heroides* 6 renders Hypsipyle’s physical separation from Jason brutally obvious, strengthening the reader’s focus on the heroine’s concomitant emotional isolation.²⁰ The most noticeable feature of these early lines is that Ovid does not permit Hypsipyle to say ‘I tell you how...’, even within the context of her own letter.²¹ The heroine is entirely at the mercy of other characters’ narrations, conveyed by the infinitive verbs which pile on top of each other to emphasise that the central action is happening where Hypsipyle is not. This type of reported speech recurs throughout the first half of *Heroides* 6, suggesting that Hypsipyle is trying to carve for herself a role in the hero’s life, by foregrounding the figure of the hero at the expense of her own narrative.

Hypsipyle’s *hospes* compounds the reader’s initial impressions of the heroine. The vocabulary of the two figures – guest and heroine – form a striking opposition, suggesting the activity and power of the one, and the reactivity and helplessness of the other.

“vivit? an,” exclamo, “me quoque fata vocant?”
 “vivit,” ait timidus; timidum iurare coegi.
 vix mihi teste deo credita vita tua est.
 Utque animus rediit, tua facta requirere coepi:
 narrat aeripedes Martis arasse boves,
 vipereos dentes in humum pro semine iactos
 et subito natos arma tulisse viros,
 terrigenas populos civili Marte peremptos
 inplesse aetatis fata diurna suae.
 devictus serpens. iterum, si vivat Iason,
 quaerimus; alternant spesque timorque fidem.

²⁰ Medea’s letter incorporates two eye-witness accounts of Jason’s labours [*Her.* 12.39-50; 12.93-102], which mirrors Hypsipyle’s double treatment of the same events [*Her.* 6.9-14; 6.32-8]. In both cases, the reader is aware that Medea relates an event that she personally experienced, whereas Hypsipyle’s anecdotes are mediated, the first by *fama*, the second by the unnamed *hospes*. I suggest that the structural similarity between this aspect of *Heroides* 6 and 12 works to highlight the dissimilarity of the writing heroines – one in the midst of the action, one set apart from it. The repetition of *ante oculos* at *Her.* 12.59-60 emphasises for the reader Medea’s proximity to Jason and to the labours; Hypsipyle’s poem never achieves this sort of immediacy.

²¹ Readers should note that in most of the other *Heroides*, the women’s accounts of the heroes’ actions are based on their own memories or experiences. See, for example, Phyllis [*Her.* 2.93-8]; Oenone [*Her.* 5.15-30]; Ariadne [*Her.* 10.71-4] and Canace [*Her.* 11.55-62]. This tendency accounts in part for the scholarly criticism that the heroines are unaware of or uninterested in the epic or tragic concerns of their heroes, because they insist on presenting the material from their narrow, ‘domestic’ point of view. On this point, see Anderson (1973). In narrative terms, however, the heroines are at least permitted to voice *their own* points of view. Ovid denies Hypsipyle even this measure of autonomy, since the most prominent account of the hero’s past actions is ventriloquised through the *hospes*.

“Does he live? Or are the fates calling me also?” “He lives”, replied the guest fearfully; I compelled the fearful one to swear it. [Even] with a god as witness, scarcely was I able to trust in your being alive. When my senses returned to me, I began to ask about your deeds. The guest related how the bronze-footed cattle of Mars ploughed; how the serpent’s teeth were sown into the ground instead of seed; how the men that appeared so suddenly carried arms; how the earth-born people were cut down by civil war, having fulfilled the fates of their lives in a single day. The serpent was conquered. Again, I ask if Jason lives; hope and fear alternate with conviction.

[*Her.* 6.28-38]

Ovid sets up a clear disjunction between the reporting Hypsipyle and her speaking guest. In line 28, Hypsipyle’s *exclamo* creates an illusion of affirmative action, but the substance of the outburst demonstrates only the heroine’s ignorance – ‘does he live?’ We perceive that even Hypsipyle’s first-person verbs underline the heroine’s tendency to react to the threat of loss rather than to manage her fears proactively. By contrast, the *hospes* occupies an unambiguously active role. Ovid gives him no name, no personal history and no physical features, yet the verbs *ait* and *narrat* afford him a position of narrative superiority.²² The *hospes* answers where Hypsipyle can only question; he communicates the story that Hypsipyle can only beg to hear.

Ironically, in line 29, Hypsipyle describes the *hospes* as *timidus*. For the Ovidian reader, the label serves to highlight the heroine’s disempowered position: the *hospes* might be fearful of Hypsipyle’s response to his news, but it is Hypsipyle who in her ignorance has reason to fear. In line 31, Hypsipyle says that she ‘compelled’ the *hospes* to swear to Jason’s safety, a statement that fails to acknowledge the power imbalance. The *hospes*, possessing all the information, can choose whether or not to indulge Hypsipyle; the heroine, meanwhile, is completely dependent on the guest to allay her anxiety.²³ I argue that the Hypsipyle-*hospes* interaction is representative of the dynamic of *Heroides* 6 more generally: the non-Hypsipyle character – whether the *hospes* or Jason – is dominant where Hypsipyle is subordinate. Observe that Hypsipyle is forced to *enquire* from the *hospes* (*quaerimus, requirere coepi*), and to *believe* his tale (*credita*), both actions suggesting a

²² Readers of Apollonius will observe that the Ovidian situation mirrors that of the *Argonautica*, where Hypsipyle’s relationship with Jason is mediated in its initial stages by the Argonauts’ herald [*Arg.* 1.640-52]. In Ovid, too, Hypsipyle is condemned to experience important events at second-hand. Cf. Drinkwater (2007), pp. 380-1.

²³ I suggest that the *hospes*’ position in Lemnos echoes the situation familiar to the reader of the *Odyssey*, where Alcinous asks Ulysses to identify himself and to tell his story [*Od.* 8.550-86]. Although Ulysses is indebted to Alcinous for hosting him, as the hero himself notes at *Od.* 9.17-18, within the story-telling context Ulysses retains the power of the narrator, and his mastery over his audience is evident in Homer’s description of the Phaeacians’ reactions to the tale at *Od.* 13.1-2.

lack of leverage over the interlocutor. As in the earlier passage, the reported speech telegraphs to the reader that this is not Hypsipyle's account; our focus remains on Jason, even at second- or third-hand, and the figure of Hypsipyle is effectively obscured by the internal narrators of her own story.

Hypsipyle's *hospes* shares some similarities with the secondary narrators of Penelope's *Heroides* 1 – the anonymous soldier who brings news of the Trojan War, and Penelope's son Telemachus who brings news from Ulysses' comrade Nestor.²⁴ In both poems, the secondary speakers act as a barrier between the writing women and the actions being described: the embedded male accounts of male action locate the female reporters in an entirely dissimilar context, domestic and non-heroic, cut off from the events in which they long to be involved. More significant, however, is the differing effect of the two narrations. In Penelope's *Heroides* 1, Telemachus' report of Ulysses' daring functions as a precursor to the hero's return to Ithaca, a return achieved by the very same *dolus* that Ulysses is described as using to infiltrate the Thracian camp [*Her.* 1.41-3]. Readers of Homer will perceive in the Ovidian narrative a foreshadowing of the story-telling in *Odyssey* 23, through which Ulysses and Penelope are reunited.²⁵ In my view, the reader's pity for Penelope's suffering as she listens to the soldier and to Telemachus is tempered by our knowledge that it is soon to be alleviated.²⁶ Thus, the secondary speakers of *Heroides* 1 can be read as emphasising the strength of the bond between hero and heroine as much as they do the cost of Ulysses' prolonged absence. Hypsipyle's situation is much less hopeful: the reader knows that Jason will not return to Lemnos, and so the *hospes*' account, rather

²⁴ Cf. *Her.* 1.31-44. Jacobson (1974), pp. 100-101, argues for the similarities between Hypsipyle and Penelope more generally. Jacobson is of the view that both poems present an essentially scornful account of the hero's deeds; conversely, I propose that the connection between *Heroides* 1 and 6 is structural rather than tonal.

²⁵ Moreover, I suggest that the dynamic between Penelope and the secondary speakers of *Heroides* 1 creates an echo of the situation in *Odyssey* 19, where Penelope pours out her troubles to the beggar-hero [*Od.* 19.124-63]. In *Heroides* 1, Penelope listens to other characters conveying their superior knowledge of the Trojan War, whether gained from first-hand experience, as with the soldier, or from other combatants, as with Telemachus' account of Nestor's information. In *Odyssey* 19, the positions are reversed, as Penelope explains to the beggar-hero her superior knowledge of the situation on Ithaca, to a listener who has a vested interest in the outcome of the situation. In *Heroides* 1, Penelope is the character who needs information but who is not permitted to communicate it; in *Odyssey* 19 that role belongs to the beggar-Ulysses, while Penelope occupies the marginally more powerful role of the communicator. I suggest that Ovid has remodelled the Homeric scene of the protagonist and the anonymous interlocutor so as to reflect the elegiac Penelope's frustration at her situation, without the need for a beggar-hero figure. Cf. Kennedy (1984) for a reading of the complex interconnections between Ovid's narrative and Homer's.

²⁶ Both Kennedy (1984) and Barchiesi (2001), pp. 29-30, are emphatic that *Heroides* 1 is highly dependent on the reader's awareness of the Odyssean chronology for its poetic impact.

than heralding the resumption of a relationship as in *Heroides* 1, instead reminds us that Hypsipyle will only become more irrelevant to her hero as time progresses.

The secondary speakers of *Heroides* 12 achieve quite a different effect to Hypsipyle's *hospes*, drawing attention to Medea's centrality in the narrative in contrast to Hypsipyle's disempowerment. Halfway through the letter, Medea's young son conveys the news of Jason's wedding to Creusa [*Her.* 12.151-2], enabling Ovid to define the position of *Heroides* 12 within the pre-existing mythological chronology. In my view, it is significant that Ovid chooses to place this information in the mouth of Medea's child. The secondary narrator enforces a level of distance between Medea and the event being described; moreover, I suggest that Jason's wedding is the only event in *Heroides* 12 of which Medea does not wish to take ownership, because it does not suit her.

cum minor e pueris (iussus studioque videndi
constitit ad geminae limina prima foris):
"hinc" mihi "mater adi! pompam pater" inquit "Iason
ducit et adiunctos aureus urget equos!"

... when the younger of the boys spoke. (He stood at the outer threshold of the twin doors, having been instructed to do so and being eager to see the sight.) He said to me "Mama, come here! My father Jason is leading a procession and – all in gold! – he is driving a team of horses!"

[*Her.* 12.149-52]²⁷

Most unusually for *Heroides* 12, Medea gives us a precise physical context for the child's exclamation.²⁸ By placing him at the threshold of the house – where he can see the procession, but not participate in it – the child occupies a liminal space, quite literally *in between* his two parents. Medea's subsequent outburst [*Her.* 12.153-4] reveals that the boy's announcement is the first irrefutable communication of the event which is to trigger

²⁷ *Her.* 12.149 is the subject of some dispute. Readers will observe that I use Bessone's (1997) text, which has *iussus studioque videndi*, in contrast to the texts of Palmer (1898, rp 2005), Showerman (1914), Dörrie (1971), Goold (1977) and Heinze (1997). Reeson (1999), pp. 53-5, raises valid concerns about Bessone's textual choices in general. Nonetheless, I defer to Bessone in this instance for three reasons: first, her version dominates the manuscript tradition; second, it makes reasonable sense, compared to the tortured attempts of Palmer and the two Loeb's; third, none of the commentators provides in my view an adequate rationale for their particular suggestion. For a brief but useful account of the textual issues with *Heroides* 12, see Heinze (1997), pp. 43-9. Cf. also Bessone (1997), pp. 207-11.

²⁸ In Chapter Two, I discuss in more depth Ovid's use of physical space in *Heroides* 12. Medea, I suggest, is quite an unusual heroine for this collection, because we struggle to visualise her clearly in any particular location, which contributes to our sense that she is not really engaged with the characters and situation around her.

so much carnage.²⁹ The child's youthful excitement at Jason's golden robes is thus implicitly juxtaposed with the terrible news he unwittingly imparts to his mother.

The episode takes on a different and more sinister cast, I propose, when we observe that this is the Ovidian reader's sole encounter with either of Medea's children. The boy's one purpose in the letter is to be the messenger of doom, since the reader knows that he will soon pay for these events with his own life. The boy's status as an innocent dependant located between two warring parents reminds the reader that Jason's abandonment has been enacted upon the child without his understanding or consent. In my reading, placing the declaration of Jason's final betrayal in the mouth of the hero's child enables Medea to give the impression that the entire situation, not only the child's articulation of it, has been forced upon *her* in the same way that we feel it has upon the child. The reader's sympathy for the child temporarily obscures our view of Medea as the controlling force of the narrative, and the heroine is able to elide her own experience with that of her son. I argue that these couplets form a clear contrast with the *memini* of Medea's opening lines: this is a situation, I suggest, of which Medea does *not want* to take ownership, and the child as secondary narrator facilitates this, serving to depict Medea as Jason's victim. The focus of the narrative, however, remains the figure of Medea and the pain that the child unwittingly gives her [*Her.* 12.153-8], and so Medea's role as the most important character in the poem is maintained.

Jason's speech in *Heroides* 12 works rather differently to that of the child. I suggest that the hero articulates a view of Medea which appears to offer story-world corroboration for Medea's self-perception as the most influential character in the poem. Jason's speech comprises 16 lines, of which Medea says *et quota pars haec sunt?* [*Her.* 12.89], implying that *Heroides* 12 includes merely a selection of the hero's oratory.³⁰ Jason accounts for almost the entirety of the direct speech in *Heroides* 12 – roughly a tenth of Medea's letter –

²⁹ Verducci (1985), p. 78, calls this scene the 'temporal fulcrum of the poem', marking the point at which *Heroides* 12 turns from being directed by Medea's 'memory' (that is, her past) towards the *poena* that is shortly to be enacted upon Euripides' stage. In my reading, the scene may represent a turning point in terms of the *events* of the myth, but in terms of our understanding of the Ovidian Medea's character, the fulcrum of the poem is undoubtedly Jason's speech at *Her.* 12.73-89.

³⁰ Davis (2012), p. 38, argues that Medea's expostulation serves an important purpose as a secondary 'Alexandrian footnote' after the opening *memini*, connecting Ovid's poem with earlier versions of the myth that inform our reading. In Davis' view, Medea is playing up her credibility by association, yet Davis' argument depends on the presence of similarities between Medea's *Heroides* 12 and the narrative of Apollonius, a position with which I disagree. In my reading, we could equally take Medea's statement *et quota pars haec sunt?* as an Ovidian invitation to consider just how dissimilar are the approaches taken by the heroes of *Heroides* 12 and the *Argonautica*.

which contrasts with the other letters of the *Heroides*, where only half of the heroes ‘speak’ at all in the single epistles. Those who do voice either a formulaic farewell or a protestation of enduring love, which the heroine recalls within her letter as evidence of the hero’s faithlessness.³¹ Hypsipyle, for example, cites Jason’s parting words at *Her.* 6.59-62, where the hero comments that he would like to stay, and gives instructions in the event of Hypsipyle’s having a son.³² Jason’s speech in *Heroides* 12 is therefore unusual in both its length and its content.³³ I propose that the purpose of Jason’s words becomes clear when we examine the way in which he seeks to persuade his lover:

“ius tibi et arbitrium nostrae fortuna salutis
tradidit inque tua est vitaeque morsque manu.
perdere posse sat est, siquem iuvet ipsa potestas;
sed tibi servatus gloria maior ero”.

“Fortune has handed over to you both authority and judgement upon my safety, and in your hands are both life and death. It is enough to be able to destroy someone, if power itself should delight anyone; but I will be a greater glory to you once I have been saved.”

[*Her.* 12.73-6]

In my reading, these lines form the crux of Jason’s speech. The most important feature of the entreaty is that Jason does *not* address Medea as though she were the *puella simplex* that she claims to be at lines 89-90. Instead, the hero approaches Medea as though she were the *regina* whom we met in line 1, declaring that she possesses *ius...et arbitrium*, terms deriving from the male-dominated Roman legal world. In a departure from the narrative of Apollonius, where Jason focuses on Medea’s ability to help him on an

³¹ Jason is by far Ovid’s most talkative Heroidean hero: in total, there are 30 lines of hero ‘speech’ in the single epistles, of which Jason alone accounts for two thirds. Amongst the 13 heroes of the 14 single epistles, there is an even split between those who ‘speak’ at some point in the heroine’s letter, and those who do not. Jason is, however, the only hero whose words span more than a line or two. Consider the following examples. The ‘speaking’ heroes are: Demophoön [*Her.* 2.98]; Paris [*Her.* 5.29-30]; Jason [*Her.* 6.59-62]; Aeneas [*Her.* 7.139]; Theseus [*Her.* 10.73-4]; Macareus [*Her.* 11.59-62]; and Jason again [*Her.* 12.73-88]. I am counting Jason as two heroes for the purposes of this discussion. The heroes who do not speak are: Ulysses, Achilles, Hippolytus, Orestes, Hercules, Protesilaus and Lynceus.

³² Jason’s departing words in *Heroides* 6 are substantially the same as his words at *Argonautica* 1.900-9. In the *Argonautica*, however, it is Hypsipyle who asks what she should do in the event of having a son, and so Jason’s intensely practical reply lacks the dismissive tone which it has in *Heroides* 6, owing to the lack of contextual material.

³³ In terms of direct speech more generally, Medea’s *Heroides* 12 includes a much greater proportion than almost any other of the single epistles. Hypermnestra’s poem, *Heroides* 14, is the only letter which boasts a greater quantity of direct speech, at 12.8% to Medea’s 9.9%. The similarities between the two letters are, I suggest, reflected in this unusual distribution of direct speech. Through the missives, we see both heroines contemplating an extraordinary course of action, and their inclusion of direct speech helps to unravel for the reader their deliberative processes, by drawing on ‘evidence’ from other characters. I discuss the relationship between these two letters in Chapter Two. For a compelling analysis of *Heroides* 14, see Fulkerson (2003).

individual level, the Ovidian hero chooses vocabulary that depicts Medea as having control over others in a very broad sense, since both terms refer to the general exercise of authority.³⁴ This seems an ambitious step up from the *Argonautica*'s far simpler declaration that without Medea's assistance the hero cannot succeed.³⁵ Perhaps most surprisingly, the Ovidian Jason designates Medea the master of 'life and death' [*Her.* 12.74], a statement which may be literally true in the hero's case, but which in its grandiosity implies a far greater and more widespread influence. The images in the Ovidian Jason's speech are centred on dominance, on personal power and status – these are not the ideals one would think of as appealing to the girl whom the hero identifies in Apollonius as being fearful, gentle and shy.³⁶

I propose that it is equally important to observe what the elegiac Jason does *not* say. He does not appeal to Medea's pity, by invoking the likelihood of his own gruesome demise; he does not appeal to her sense of justice, by explaining the righteousness of his quest to reclaim his throne.³⁷ Instead, he focuses on the caprice inherent in possessing power over others, from which the reader may infer that this is the approach the hero considers most likely to affect this uniquely Ovidian heroine. Line 75 is unmistakeable from this point of view: Jason argues that Medea does not need to *actually* destroy him; she ought to be content with knowing that she *could*.³⁸ The hero casts himself as a mere instrument of Medea's influence, suggesting that his survival is desirable for Medea because of the control that she can secure over him, provided that he does not die. The dissimilarity to Apollonius becomes truly striking – it hardly seems likely that the elegiac Jason's persuasions would succeed with the hesitant and inexperienced heroine of the epic.³⁹ In the

³⁴ Consider the intensely personal tone of the hero's first speech to Medea at *Arg.* 3.975-1010.

³⁵ Cf. *Arg.* 3.988-9.

³⁶ See, for example, *Arg.* 3.975; 3.1006-7; 3.978.

³⁷ The Ovidian Jason does refer briefly to his sufferings at *Her.* 12.77, where he says: *per mala nostra precor*. However, this is the only reference he makes to his misfortunes, suggesting that he does not regard this as a primary weapon in his attempt to secure Medea's favour.

³⁸ Jason's approach to the Heroidean Medea bears some similarity to the epic hero's approach to Aeëtes in the *Argonautica*. At *Arg.* 3.386-95, Jason characterises the tyrannical king as 'godlike' [3.392] in his attempt to deflect Aeëtes' anger. Jason also offers assistance with military conquest, intimating that Aeëtes, like his daughter in the Ovidian text, is swayed primarily by the prospect of controlling others. In the *Argonautica*, Jason's approach is unremarkable, because Aeëtes has already demonstrated his violent temper; the hero is thus reacting to the situation as presented to him. The peculiarity of the scene in *Heroides* 12 is that Jason leads with the characterisation of Medea as a heroine who shares her father's unsympathetic traits. In contrast to the Jason-Aeëtes meeting in Apollonius, the elegiac Jason does not appear to arrive at his strategy after a softer opening fails him.

³⁹ For a contrasting view of the Jason-Medea dynamic in *Argonautica* 3, see Ojennus (2006), who analyses the use of gestures in Apollonius. Ojennus argues that Medea's gestures towards Jason in

Argonautica, Jason seems in part to win Medea over by showing her how she can act both for her own and the hero's good, with Jason's survival and Medea's future in Greece treated as matters of equal weight and significance.⁴⁰ By contrast, Jason's portrait in *Heroides* 12 suggests that we are dealing in Ovid with a very different Medea, one who acts principally for her own benefit and who enjoys the exercise of controlling others. The ambiguous term *arbitrium* feeds this portrait of Medea as a power-hungry character: although referring most commonly to the arbitration of a legal question, we can also interpret it as representing an inclination, a whim or an irresponsible action.⁴¹ This seems entirely consistent with Jason's depiction of himself as a 'glory' to Medea [*Her.* 12.76] – a hero whose cause cannot hope to compete with Medea's own concerns.

I argue that Jason's speech characterises the Ovidian Medea as self-focused and driven by the desire for power, rather than by any interest in the hero himself. Perhaps most crucial, however, is the role of Jason's speech in establishing that Medea's self-interested nature must have been present *before* the arrival of the Argo in Colchis. I suggest that we can infer this from the fact that Ovid's Medea did go on to aid the hero in his labours. The speech thus served its intended purpose, and the images of dominance and glory must have appealed to the heroine who later records Jason's words with such apparent relish. In the *Argonautica*, we observe Medea's development from a young girl, tormented by divided loyalties, to a murderess in exile. In Ovid, the development is considerably less clear: the portrait of Medea espoused in Jason's speech suggests that the heroine was all of a piece from the very first. This generates a very different impression of Medea to that created by the heroine of Apollonius, because we cannot trace the elegiac Medea's decisions as we do in the *Argonautica*, observing how slippery is the slope between the first betrayal and those that inevitably follow.⁴² Through the voice of Jason, Ovid's poem provokes the unsettling

the temple scene depict her as the more 'aggressive' of the two parties, p. 261, in contrast to the more common view that the hero is in control of the interaction with the heroine.

⁴⁰ Consider, for example, that the largest part of Jason's three speeches to Medea before his labours aim to assure Medea of the hero's concern with protecting her well-being. The power dynamic in Apollonius is therefore quite different to that indicated by Jason's speech in *Heroides* 12. Cf. *Arg.* 3.975-1010; 3.1079-1101; 3.1120-30.

⁴¹ Cf. *OLD* 7b.

⁴² Here we encounter one of the problems with the *Heroides* as a collection: they present snapshots of the heroines' lives, and thus lack much of the natural momentum of other narrative forms. See Barchiesi (2001), who offers an incisive discussion of how the *Heroides* derive much of their tension and impact from the unarticulated back-story of the literary tradition, of which the external reader is already aware. Because the heroines present an essentially static view through their letters, it is much more difficult for the poet to depict his characters as dynamic epistolary personalities, because he is capturing them at only one moment in their narrative lives. I argue that

question of whether Medea was *always* as she appears to us ‘now’, in the narrative present encompassed by the letter – so consumed by her own interests that she does not feel for the other characters of her story.

Genette (1990) observes that extended dialogue quoted ‘verbatim’ by a first-person narrator is the hallmark of the fictionality of an account – a significant point when assessing Jason’s speech in *Heroides* 12.⁴³ If we deduce from Medea’s reproduction of the speech that the heroine believes it to reflect well on herself, attesting to her influence over the hero, then we understand that Medea’s aim seems to be to protect her position as the most important character in the story. In turn, this explains why Medea alleges that she can recall with accuracy Jason’s words, because their inclusion in the poem enhances her self-image.⁴⁴ In contrast to Genette’s assertion, I propose that it does not matter very much within *Heroides* 12 whether or not we entertain Medea’s account of Jason’s words as ‘true’ and accurate reporting. Ovid has rendered the point moot for the purposes of examining Medea’s character: either Jason considers his speech to give a good likeness of Medea, or Medea *herself* thinks so. For the external reader, the result is the same, and Medea’s self-focus is illustrated either in the hero’s voice or in her own. The speaking Jason thus contributes to the continuing opposition between Medea’s poem and Hypsipyle’s: where Hypsipyle’s *hospes* illustrates the heroine’s impregnable isolation, Jason’s role in *Heroides* 12 is the reverse, pushing the figure of Medea to ever greater prominence within the narrative.

Jason’s speech is thus a brilliant device on Ovid’s part: it allows him an unusual ‘window’ into Medea’s narrative past, influencing our reading of her in her writing present through the view of another character, a view which is now itself in the past.

⁴³ Genette (1990), p. 761.

⁴⁴ We should remember, here, that Medea is purporting to be able to recall Jason’s entreaties word-for-word after a lapse of some several years. This must be a problematic assertion for the external reader to accept.

1.2 The Presentation of the Hero

This section examines the figure of Jason in *Heroides* 6 and 12, arguing that the heroines' presentation of their hero strengthens the view of the women's personalities that we developed in the previous section. In my reading, the Jason of *Heroides* 6 is an idealised character whose prominence in the narrative demonstrates how central is Jason's approval to Hypsipyle's sense of self. Medea's Jason, meanwhile, is the *alter ego* of Hypsipyle's – a hopeless adventurer in constant need of Medea's help. These 'two' Jasons contribute to divergent portraits of the writing heroines: Hypsipyle's personality appears to be subsumed by the figure of the hero with whom she is preoccupied; Medea remains self-regarding, interested in Jason chiefly as an object of unfavourable comparison with herself.⁴⁵

Hypsipyle's Obsession

I suggest that Ovid shapes his Hypsipyle as a character whose sense of identity is predicated on the hero's positive opinion of her. In the early sections of *Heroides* 6, we observe that Hypsipyle's letter compensates for a lack of information about Jason's exploits by including miniature 'fantasy narratives', in which the hero acts exactly as Hypsipyle wishes him to.

hoc ego si possem timide credentibus "ista
ipse mihi scripsit" dicere, quanta forem!
Quid queror officium lenti cessasse mariti?
obsequium, maneo si tua, grande tuli.

Oh, if I myself were able to say to those people believing but fearfully "He himself wrote me of it", how great I should be! Why should I complain that my sluggish husband has given up his duty? I have received a great indulgence if I remain yours!

[*Her.* 6.15-18]

The conditional structure signals at once to Ovid's reader that this event derives from Hypsipyle's imagination;⁴⁶ more important, however, is what the heroine's approach

⁴⁵ Readers will observe that my reading of the elegiac Jason stands in opposition to that of Bloch (2000), who argues that there are parallels in *Heroides* 6 and 12 between the heroines' depictions of the hero. In Bloch's view, the abandonment of Medea is prefigured in Jason's treatment of Hypsipyle, and so the abandonment of Creusa is foreshadowed in the hero's behaviour towards Medea.

⁴⁶ We know, too, from the literary tradition that Hypsipyle is unlikely ever to receive such a missive from the errant Jason. Readers of Euripides' fragmentary *Hypsipyle* can be left in no doubt that Hypsipyle's fate and Jason's lie along wildly dissimilar paths. See Collard, Crop and Gilbert (2004) for a helpful discussion of the available fragments.

conveys about her sense of self. Notice, for example, that Hypsipyle describes the hero's wished-for letter not as a source of peace of mind, but as an indication of her own importance to Jason. As with many aspects of *Heroides* 6 and 12, perhaps of greatest significance is what the heroine does *not* say: Hypsipyle does not say how happy she would be if sure of Jason's safety and free from her dependence on *fama*; she does not say how comforting would be a declaration of love in the hero's own words; she does not even say that she desires the notoriety of being the first to impart news of Jason's labours. Instead, she says how *great* she would be, *quanta* testifying to the social capital that such a letter could confer on its addressee.⁴⁷

Hypsipyle's sentiment is highly unusual amongst the *Heroides*, not least because Hypsipyle appears unconcerned as to Jason's success in his endeavours.⁴⁸ In general, the heroines express concern for the heroes' safety, which depicts the women as selfless in some measure: they want the heroes to live because they love.⁴⁹ By contrast, Hypsipyle shows a surprising lack of investment in Jason's fate. The implication of these lines is that Hypsipyle would derive more-or-less the same status from Jason's missive regardless of its contents.⁵⁰ This sits in opposition to heroines such as Laodamia and Penelope, for whom a report from the hero would assure them of his safety and of the endurance of their

⁴⁷ Knox (1995), p. 175, offers 'how grand I should be' for *quanta*. This suggested translation captures perfectly the social focus that I perceive dominates Hypsipyle's thinking in this part of *Heroides* 6. Palmer, too, (1898, rp 2005), p. 327, emphasises the point: 'great in the opinion of my hearers as well as proud myself'.

⁴⁸ In my interpretation, the majority of the other heroines fall into two types when contemplating what the absent heroes might be doing. These types are exemplified by Laodamia's *Heroides* 13, where the heroine is tormented by not knowing whether her hero lives or dies; and by Penelope's *Heroides* 1, where the heroine longs for the hero's return, that he might rescue her from an intolerable situation. Other examples of the first type would be Phyllis' *Heroides* 2 and Canace's *Heroides* 11; of the second Briseis' *Heroides* 3 and Ariadne's *Heroides* 10. Heroines who fall into neither category would include Oenone's *Heroides* 5, Medea's *Heroides* 12 and Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14. I discuss Oenone and Hypermnestra at greater length in Chapter Two.

⁴⁹ Some scholars would dispute this point in the case of certain letters. For example, Jacobson (1974), pp. 243-76, takes an entirely contrary approach to Penelope's *Heroides* 1, as does Lindheim (2003), pp. 37-50. Reeson (2001) is similarly critical of Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14. All three critics argue that the women are self-serving and largely uninterested in the outcome for the hero.

⁵⁰ I suggest that this appears to be Hypsipyle's view of the situation, which is not necessarily the same as that of her social circle. Clearly, the lover of a conquering hero is more impressive than the lover of a vanquished one. That Hypsipyle seems not to regard this point is, I think, evidence of the heroine's narrow focus – her concern is with the status of the relationship between herself and Jason, and she inadvertently assumes that the rest of the world accepts and even reflects her prejudices.

marriages.⁵¹ Hypsipyle seems to prefer the letter *itself* to the news it might contain; such unusual priorities intimate that Hypsipyle is less interested in Jason's welfare than she is in occupying the role of the hero's favoured correspondent.⁵² The difficulty, however, is that Hypsipyle waits upon the hero, and so the role that she desires for herself serves largely to highlight the extent to which Hypsipyle subordinates her own identity to the actions of the hero.

In my view, these lines also reveal the extent to which Hypsipyle's Jason is idealised, and likewise her relationship. In line 17, we observe that Hypsipyle does not complain about Jason's silence (*quid queror*); instead, she re-frames her sentiment as a self-criticism. This is the crux of the matter: if Jason fails the standard that Hypsipyle sets for him, she responds by adjusting the standard. Therefore, Jason cannot be said to 'fail', because Hypsipyle manipulates her expectations to mirror what Jason is prepared to give. Line 18 emphasises the point: Hypsipyle describes being Jason's lover – *tua*, we notice, although the hero is never *meus* – as a *grande obsequium*. The reader's impression is that Hypsipyle has no fixed concept of her relationship, or of her hero as a character; both are flexible entities determined by what Jason elects to give.

Hypsipyle's depiction of her situation takes us straight back to the imaginary letter, as we begin to understand that the heroine's concern with the letter as an object can be taken as representative of the hero-heroine relationship as a whole. Hypsipyle appears to desire the illusion of a continuing relationship – symbolised in the letter – more than she desires the hero himself. I propose that this aspect of the writing heroine contributes to the reader's sense that *Heroides* 6 presents but a facsimile of both hero and romantic relationship, because Hypsipyle seems chiefly concerned with being able to demonstrate her Jason-oriented position to the outside world. We notice that the content of Hypsipyle's fantasy letter – the substance of the hero's communication – is not discussed within the story world

⁵¹ Penelope opens her letter with this very point, entreating Ulysses to bypass the act of writing back in favour of returning in person: *nil mihi rescribas attinet: ipse veni!* [*Her.* 1.2]. As Kennedy (1984) has argued, the irony of this entreaty is striking to Ovid's reader, since we suspect Ulysses to already be lurking in the palace.

⁵² The arguments of scholars such as Rosenmeyer (1997) and Spentzou (2003) would suggest that Hypsipyle's tendency exemplifies a wider trend in the *Heroides*, whereby the heroines' narrow viewpoints reduce them to worrying more about their letters – as their only means of self-expression – than about the heroes for whom those letters are supposedly intended. In Spentzou's reading (2003), pp. 123-59, this aspect of the poems is key to understanding the failure of the heroines' writing as a communicative endeavour.

of *Heroides* 6; in my view this is because the Ovidian Jason is inaccessible to the writing heroine.

The account of Jason's labours in *Heroides* 6 makes a final compelling comment about Hypsipyle's Jason-centrism. In the first section, I argued that the reported speech in the labour narrative serves to distance Hypsipyle from the act of story-telling. However, it also dispenses with the need to mention Medea or her involvement in Jason's success. By stating simply that the bulls *were* yoked, the field *was* ploughed, Hypsipyle is able to skate over the precise details of how this was achieved. For example, in line 37, Hypsipyle reports *devictus serpens*, the passive verb both concise and suitably vague about the method of conquest. As Hypsipyle records the tale of poisonous teeth and earth-born men *civili Marte peremptos* [*Her.* 6.35], the vivid imagery works to gloss over the space in the narrative that is Medea's unacknowledged agency. Observe that Hypsipyle refers only to Jason's role, enquiring after *tua facta* [*Her.* 6.31] and *si vivat Iason* [*Her.* 6.37]; these bookend the *hospes*' account of the event and edit Medea out altogether. At lines 19 and 20, Hypsipyle reveals her hero-bias still more strongly, referring to Jason's new relationship so as to give the impression that the two events are unconnected.

barbara narratur venisse venefica tecum
in mihi promissi parte recepta tori.

A barbarian poisoner is said to have come with you, having been granted a share in the marriage bed that was promised to me.

[*Her.* 6.19-20]

By labelling Medea as a 'barbarian poisoner' rather than as a sorceress and the daughter of Aeëtes, from whom Jason steals the Golden Fleece, Hypsipyle avoids any appearance of a connection between Jason's quest and his new lover. I suggest that a reader unacquainted with the Apollonian tradition would not necessarily infer from these lines that Medea played any part in the events which Hypsipyle records so faithfully. As critics accustomed always to reading through the literary tradition, it is all too easy to overlook the fact that Hypsipyle's account of Jason's heroism represents a skewed reality in which Jason is the absolute master. Such a reality mirrors our earlier observation that Hypsipyle crafts her portrait of Jason around the prejudice that he is the best and most important character in the scene, with the writing heroine herself noticeably absent.

Medea's Objectification

The Jason of *Heroides* 12 could hardly offer a more emphatic contrast to the hero of Hypsipyle's conception. Where Hypsipyle affords Jason ever greater prominence in her narrative, Medea stresses that Jason could not have achieved anything without her assistance. I propose that Jason acts for the Ovidian Medea as a kind of prism, refracting through his actions her own greatness. In the first half of *Heroides* 12, Medea narrates the tale of Jason's labours three times, on each occasion placing her own influence centre-stage. The first iteration is an Ovidian reimagining of the nurse's opening speech in Euripides, a series of unfulfilled conditions which explore the ramifications of Medea's elegiac wish that the Argonauts had never come to Colchis.⁵³

aut, semel in nostras quoniam nova puppis harenas
venerat audacis attuleratque viros,
isset anhelatos non praemedicatus in ignes
inmemor Aesonides oraue adusta boum!
semina iecisset totidem sevisset et hostes,
ut caderet cultu cultor ab ipse suo!

Otherwise, when once the strange ship had reached our shores and had brought her bold men, the heedless son of Aeson would have gone unprotected into the fires exhaled from the flaming noses of the bulls. He would have sown the seeds, and the same number of enemies as those seeds, so that the sower might fall at the hand of his very own crop!

[*Her.* 12.13-18]

Here Medea entertains an unrealised outcome, a familiar aspect of the *Heroides*, and yet Medea's account is unusual in that it reveals a contrast with the heroine of the earlier Greek tradition. Unlike the Medeas of Apollonius and Euripides, who openly acknowledge their roles in the theft of the Golden Fleece, Ovid's heroine inserts herself into the narrative surreptitiously. Observe that the succession of unfulfilled conditions *appears* to focus on Jason – Jason's arrival [*Her.* 12.13-14], Jason's confrontation with the bulls [*Her.*

⁵³ Cf. Eur. *Med.* 1-10. The correlation between Medea's account and the nurse's is clear: both accounts commence by questioning why the Argo should ever have come to Colchis. In Euripides, however, the nurse's speech is couched as a wish, while the Ovidian Medea approaches the same material as open-ended questions: *cur umquam* [*Her.* 12.7; 12.9] and *cur mihi* [*Her.* 12.11]. Although the similarities between the two scenes must be intended to draw the reader's attention to Medea's imminent translation from elegy to tragedy, the section has a very different effect in *Heroides* 12. In Euripides, the nurse invokes the Argo's Colchian journey in a general sense, as the cause of all the suffering that has succeeded it. In other words, she is wishing a bad situation unmade for everyone's sake. Medea, on the other hand, does not actually say that the Argo should not have come. Instead of wishing away a complex and painful situation, Medea explicitly entertains the hero's death that would necessarily have followed from her refusal to help him. Ovid thus transforms the general lament of the Euripidean nurse into an indication of the elegiac Medea's capacity for self-service at the expense of others.

12.15-16], Jason's battle with the autochthonous army [*Her.* 12.17-18]. On the other hand, the grammatical structure of the lines creates an opportunity for Medea to subtly emphasise her own control over the hero: by dissecting so minutely what she *wishes* had happened – that Jason had not secured her aid – Ovid's heroine contrives to draw the reader's attention to what *actually* happened – to the assistance which enabled Jason to avoid death.⁵⁴

Praemedicatus, in particular, highlights the extraordinary nature of Jason's protection, its qualifying *non* signalling Medea's role as director of the hero's fate. This largely implicit portrayal of Medea's influence stands in opposition to equivalent scenes in the *Argonautica* and in Euripides, where the heroine is only too happy to frame the narrative of Jason's trials in terms of what she herself did.⁵⁵ In this important opening section of *Heroides* 12, I suggest that Ovid is illustrating for his reader Medea's penchant for manipulation and misdirection: she organises her narrative so as to emphasise her own contribution, without having to declare her purpose by stating directly 'I achieved this, not you'.

The second narration is the emotional 'centrepiece' of the three. Medea dwells on the sensational aspects of Jason's trials; her focus provides a narrative anchor for the earlier and later iterations, where Medea features as Jason's protectress.

Dicitur interea tibi lex, ut dura ferorum
 insolito premeres vomere colla boum.
 Martis erant tauri plus quam per cornua saevi,
 quorum terribilis spiritus ignis erat,
 aere pedes solidi praetentaque naribus aera,
 nigra per adflatus haec quoque facta suos.
 semina praeterea populos genitura iuberis
 spargere devota lata per arva manu,
 qui peterent natis secum tua corpora telis:

⁵⁴ Had Medea simply reminded Jason of his debt to her – 'had we not met, you would not have succeeded' – I suggest that the emotional impact of the Ovidian scene would be negligible. At *Arg.* 4.355-8, Medea reproaches the hero in exactly these terms, asking him whether his success has made him forgetful of her help. In Apollonius, however, the tone of the scene is altered by Medea going on to enumerate to Jason the things he promised her in his speech at *Arg.* 3.975-1010. The less confrontational opening to Medea's Apollonian speech is consistent with her epic characterisation; Ovid's heroine, on the other hand, depicts her influence in much stronger terms.

⁵⁵ For example, contrast the Euripidean Medea's first speech to the hero at *Med.* 465-519. At line 473, Medea launches into her accusations of Jason with ἐγώ, effectively framing the monologue with an image of herself. Moreover, the tragic Medea refers to 'my' father and 'my' homeland (ἐμοῦς), juxtaposing these with the escape to Jason's native Iolchus (σὺν σοί). Likewise, in the Apollonian scene cited at n.54 above, images of Medea's own actions dominate the speech she delivers against Jason. I suggest that Ovid's interpretation of the heroine intimates that the Heroidean Medea possesses greater emotional distance than her counterparts in Apollonius and Euripides – her epistolary style is more oblique than confrontational. For this reason, I do not accept Bessone's contention (1997), p. 22, that these lines in *Heroides* 12 are a straightforward translation of the Euripidean material into the elegiac context.

illa est agricolae messis iniqua suo.
lumina custodis succumbere nescia somno
ultimus est aliqua decipere arte labor.

Meanwhile, an instruction is conveyed to you that you should press the hard necks of the fierce bulls beneath the unfamiliar yoke. The bulls belonged to Mars, and were cruel with more than just their horns, bulls whose breath was terrible fire; their feet were of solid bronze; bronze was stretched across their noses and was blackened by their own exhaled breath. Moreover, you are ordered to scatter with doomed hand across the broad fields the seeds that will bring forth a people who will attack your body with weaponry that was born along with them; an evil crop is this one for its own farmer. The final task is to deceive by some contrivance the eyes of the guardian which know not how to give in to sleep.

[*Her.* 12.39-50]

The imagery in this section aims for maximum impact. The bulls themselves are *saevi*; their breath is not merely fire, it is *terribilis*. The effect is to place the hero in a context of unnatural action which he cannot control, and Ovid's choice of verbs supports this: notice that Jason is acted upon rather than acting in this scene. An instruction is given *to* him by Aeëtes (*dicitur...tibi*); the passive *iuberis* frames the hero against the statement of another's power; the serpent is couched as the *ultimus labor*, an impersonal construction removing Jason altogether from the reader's field of vision. Perhaps most interesting is line 48. Medea describes Jason's harvest of warriors as *iniqua*, denoting its grim or ill-starred quality. If, however, we embrace the ambiguity of *iniqua*, we have also the characterisation of Jason as 'unequal' to his harvest, physically unable to defeat the *spartoi* and metaphorically unable to contain the consequences of his own actions in sowing the serpent's teeth. In contrast to Hypsipyle's hero who is beloved, the Jason of *Heroides* 12 is instead completely taken over by his trials.

The final narration completes the portrait of Jason's helplessness [*Her.* 12.93-102]. Medea positions herself as a spectator to the scene, emphasising by contrast Jason's embattled position. Medea is shown sitting *pallida* [*Her.* 12.97] literally in the middle of the account – after the ploughing of the field and before the clash with the *spartoi*. The balanced construction creates an impression of Medea sitting still (and safe!) in the midst of Jason's action, making explicit the division that we have noted in the other accounts, where Medea is in a position of advantage corresponding to Jason's disadvantage.⁵⁶ All three versions purport to be about Jason's extraordinary victory, yet the first and last give Medea greater prominence at the hero's expense. The middle account, meanwhile, sketches Jason as a

⁵⁶ Cf. Davis (2012), p. 39-40, who observes the distinction between Medea's 'colourless' narration of Jason's own deeds compared with the emotive value of her own.

helpless victim, the scene bookended by intimations of Medea's superior control. I suggest that the overall effect of Jason's labour narratives is to convey to Ovid's reader that the story of *Heroides* 12 is not really *about* Jason, but rather focused *through* him or framed *by* him: the character of real consequence is Medea herself, in striking contrast to Hypsipyle.

Comparative Analysis: Penelope's *Heroides* 1

I turn now to examine Penelope's *Heroides* 1, which offers a counterpoint to my reading of Medea's *Heroides* 12. I argue that – although Penelope and Medea appear in certain respects to be alike – a consideration of the two characters helps us to perceive how atypical is Medea's epistolary personality. Both heroines make clear statements of identity which do not look to the hero-addressee for his approval; second, both women occupy overtly influential roles in the events of their narratives, in comparison with several of the other heroines in the collection. These similarities notwithstanding, I suggest that the characters of Medea and Penelope produce opposite effects on Ovid's reader, depicting Penelope as duty- and family-centred, while Medea remains preoccupied with her own interests.

In contrast to virtually all of the other *Heroides*, Penelope depicts her marriage in terms that reflect her sense of herself as an integral and influential member of her family unit. Whereas most of the other heroines appear to write their letters out of a sense of helplessness, Penelope's poem focuses on the actions that she has taken in Ulysses' absence.⁵⁷ In the early lines, Penelope refers to her famous web, the stratagem by which she outwits the suitors: *nec mihi quaerenti spatiosam fallere noctem / lassaret viduas pendula tela manus* [*Her.* 1.9-10].⁵⁸ In the same way, she tells Ulysses that she has been making enquiries of all visitors to Ithaca, sending out letters in the hope of reaching him [*Her.* 1.59-62]; meanwhile, Telemachus has travelled to Pylos and Sparta in search of news, Penelope's own role in the expedition suggested by the first-person *misimus* [*Her.* 1.63-5]. The reader's impression is of a heroine who is accustomed to acting independently of the hero, as is Medea.

On the other hand, Penelope's position is much more embattled than Medea's – as the heroine herself attests in describing the suitors, who are called a *turba luxuriosa* [*Her.* 1.88], *hostes* [*Her.* 1.106] and *inimici* [*Her.* 1.109]. I propose that Ovid constructs Penelope quite differently to Medea, using the depiction of the heroine's challenging

⁵⁷ See here Holzberg (1998, rp 2002), pp. 72-6, and Barchiesi (2001), pp. 34-7. Both focus on Penelope's programmatic status within the collection.

⁵⁸ Readers will note, however, that Penelope does not refer explicitly to the web as a stratagem – she alleges that she uses her weaving to beguile the night rather than the suitors (*fallere noctem*). Penelope thus offers an excellent illustration of Farrell's argument (1998) that the *Heroides* dramatise the danger of writing for female characters, whose missives might be intercepted and the contents used against them.

situation to highlight Penelope's commitment to her role as Ulysses' wife, rather than to focus on the heroine as a lone actor, as appears to be the case with Medea's *Heroides* 12.

Me pater Icarius viduo discedere lecto
 cogit et immensas increpat usque moras.
 increpet usque licet—tua sum, tua dicar oportet;
 Penelope coniunx semper Ulixis ero.

My father Icarius compels me to abandon my widowed bed, and he reproaches my long delays. Let him reproach as much as he likes – I am yours; it is right that I should be called yours. I shall be ever Penelope, the wife of Ulysses.

[*Her.* 1.81-4]

These lines depict for the reader the loneliness of Penelope's position. With the heroine's own father demanding that she give up her vigil for Ulysses, the situation is grave indeed.⁵⁹ The second couplet, however, intimates that Penelope is not so easily persuaded – *tua sum* makes a clear statement in favour of Ulysses' influence over Icarius'. Penelope crystallises this thought in line 84, calling herself *coniunx Ulixis*. Whereas, in another letter, such an appellation might diminish the heroine to the status of a possession, Penelope's poem is much more complex. The composition of the line highlights Penelope's active appropriation of her title: she commences with her own name and finishes emphatically with the future tense *ero*, asserting that this is the heroine's choice and the heroine's action.⁶⁰ The self-description *coniunx* thus becomes in Penelope's voice an affirmation which connotes Penelope's personal investment in the marriage; it is not merely a legal title. Ovid's line also reflects the harmony between his lovers, since it encompasses both Penelope's name and Ulysses'.⁶¹ Each spouse occupies one half of the line, connected by *semper*; the balanced construction suggests complementarity between the parties, two separate but interlinked roles which depict Penelope as a heroine the equal of her husband.

⁵⁹ In the *Odyssey*, Athena tells Telemachus that Penelope's father wants her to marry [*Od.* 15.16-7], but Penelope herself does not mention Icarius when speaking to the beggar-hero at *Od.* 19.157-61. Instead, Penelope says only that she feels she cannot escape marriage much longer, and that Telemachus is annoyed at the gradual ruination of his inheritance by the suitors. In *Heroides* 1, the invocation of Icarius by name is consistent, I suggest, with the more personal tone of the epistle. See Knox (1995), pp. 104-5, for an alternative view; likewise Jacobson (1974), pp. 260-2, who interprets the figure of Icarius as a foil to the suitors, enabling Penelope to stir up Ulysses' jealousy, as is the convention of the elegiac genre. Jacobson treats Penelope chiefly as a hostile and unsympathetic heroine. Frécaut (1972), pp. 195-206, also regards the Ovidian Penelope as an unfavourable caricature of her Homeric incarnation.

⁶⁰ Consider here Farrell's argument (1998), pp. 323-4, that Penelope characterises herself as the writer in *Heroides* 1, and Ulysses as the character responding to what she has written. I would take this one step further, and observe that Penelope's letter indicates that she is acting *as well as* writing.

⁶¹ We might argue here for a correlation between Penelope's presentation of her marriage in *Heroides* 1 and the qualities of *homophrosyne* that Ulysses describes to Nausicaa at *Od.* 6.180-5.

Thus we observe that Penelope's approach seems very different to Medea's. Whereas Penelope is *tua Penelope* in the opening line of her poem, Medea is *regina*. One heroine chooses a label that symbolises her interconnectedness with her spouse, the other a term that elevates her above the hero of the historical recollection. I suggest that the dissimilarity between the two heroines' self-identifications is emblematic of the divergence between the two women more generally: Penelope represents herself most often in the context of other members of her household, whereas Medea appears largely in isolation. This in turn communicates the heroines' differing world-views – Penelope is outward-looking and family-focused while Medea is inward-looking and self-regarding. A similar passage from each poem illustrates the point, as Penelope and Medea each pose a rhetorical question signalled by *referam*.

quid tibi Pisandrum Polybumque Medontaque dirum
 Eurymachique avidas Antinoique manus
 atque alios referam, quos omnis turpiter absens
 ipse tuo partis sanguine rebus alis?

What can I say to you about Pisandrus and Polybus and harsh Medon, [what] of the greedy hands of Eurymachus and Antinous, and the others whom you yourself – disgracefully absent – feed with goods all purchased by your blood?

[*Her.* 1.91-4]

In my view, these couplets reflect Penelope's weariness with her struggle against remarriage. In the lines immediately preceding, the heroine summarises the scale of the battle with the suitors – *Dulichii Samiique et quos tulit alta Zacynthos* [*Her.* 1.87]. *Referam* follows on from Penelope's account of her trials to suggest a situation the magnitude of which cannot be captured in epistolary prose. The lone first-person verb appears insubstantial beside the catalogue of the heroine's enemies, and we notice that *referam* is barricaded into the middle of the line, as though poetically oppressed by the task of enumerating the hostile suitors and their misdeeds.⁶² Seen in the context of Penelope's earlier account of the actions she has taken to protect Ithaca, the effect of this section is to position Penelope as a heroine whose resources are almost exhausted. I propose that Ovid chooses *referam* by way of implying that Penelope may have the strength to hold off the

⁶² These and other similar aspects of *Heroides* 1 inform Baca's assertion (1969) that the Ovidian Penelope is much less self-assured than her Homeric counterpart. Baca treats *Heroides* 1 as a 'psycho-drama', p. 5, arguing that Ovid's Penelope is driven by fear and resentment, in contrast to the queen of the *Odyssey*. In my view, Baca derives his conclusions from the fact that Penelope is unusual amongst the women of the *Heroides* – able to articulate clearly a range of problems, not merely her own emotional turmoil. I suggest that the assumption that Penelope must be 'judging' Ulysses proceeds from the critic's expectations of the conventions of elegy, where the poem's focus is on one lover's dissatisfaction with the other.

suitors, but that she now finds herself unable to put those events into words.⁶³ Although we know from Homer that the heroine's wait is nearly over, we also know how difficult Penelope has found the waiting, as the Homeric heroine admits to the beggar-Ulysses in Book 19.⁶⁴ I suggest that the elegiac Penelope's *referam* performs an important function in humanising this independent heroine for the Ovidian reader, suggesting that Penelope's control of her narrative slips momentarily, just as her holding off of the suitors cannot go on forever.

The effect of the same verb is quite different in *Heroides* 12. In Medea's narrative, *referam* appears as a rough analogue of the expression 'What do you want me to say?', serving to distance the writing heroine from an event that she considers unworthy of detailed reporting, and in which she wants to communicate no personal investment.⁶⁵

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

What should I say about the daughters of Pelias, made harmful by their piety; or about the limbs of their father, slain by a virgin hand? Although others will blame me, you must praise me, you on whose behalf I have been so often compelled to be harmful.

[*Her.* 12.129-32]

Here Medea attempts to reproach Jason with some of the acts she has committed, supposedly on his behalf. In my interpretation, these lines reduce the gruesome murder of Jason's uncle Pelias to a mere indirection – Medea's *referam* implying that there is nothing really worth saying about the event.⁶⁶ The tone of the couplets suggests a breath-taking indifference to a cruel deed of Medea's own devising, which deliberately involved Pelias' daughters in his destruction. Perhaps most arresting, however, is the disparity between Medea's casual reporting and the content of the episode. The bloody imagery of the

⁶³ For an alternative viewpoint here, see Drinkwater's analysis (2007), in which she argues for reading Ovid's Penelope as a heroine who has an established history as an active sender of messages. Cf. *Od.* 2.91-2, where we find out that Penelope has been distracting the suitors with messages, whilst she is plotting her weaving stratagem.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Od.* 19.124-63.

⁶⁵ There are two other instances in the single epistles where the heroine uses *refero* in a similar way, to question her own narration or to pass over an event and on to another. See *Her.* 9.143, where Deianira uses *refero*; and *Her.* 14.109, where Hypermnestra says *referam*. Neither instance offers the striking contrast, however, that we perceive between Penelope and Medea.

⁶⁶ Consider, for example, how the Ovidian Medea's approach to the murder differs from that of Euripides' heroine. In the tragedy, Medea admits not only that she personally killed Pelias, but that she did it in an unusually cruel fashion: Περίαν τ' ἀπέκτειν', ὥσπερ ἄλγιστον θανεῖν, / παίδων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, πάντα τ' ἐξεῖλον δόμον [*Med.* 486-7]. Cf. Bessone (1997), pp. 191-3.

butchered limbs is juxtaposed with the 'virgin hand' which makes such an unlikely assailant, and both limbs and hand undermine Medea's assertion that the event barely merits retelling. Moreover, we notice that Medea devotes the same amount of space – two lines – to the acknowledgement of Pelias' murder as she does to the subsequent declaration that Jason should praise her for her actions. Pelias' suffering is forced to share space with Medea's concern for her own 'reward'.

Medea alleges that she has been *coacta nocens*, the repetition of *noceo* from line 129 drawing an implicit comparison between the heroine and the grieving daughters. However, the comparison serves chiefly to differentiate Medea from the Pelidae, because the daughters were harmful through their piety, as well as through ignorance of Medea's real intentions. In defence of her *own* actions, Medea offers only that she was 'compelled', a contention scarcely substantiated by the rest of the poem in which the reader perceives the heroine to be the character in control. Outside of the literary tradition, I suggest that we would hardly divine that Medea is responsible for this murder, based on such a brief aside in *Heroides* 12; thus the rhetorical *referam* contributes to a portrait of the Ovidian Medea as uninterested in the suffering she has caused.

Finally, I suggest that our competing impressions of Medea and Penelope are reinforced by our knowledge of their 'futures' in other texts. In Penelope's case, we know that she is rescued by Ulysses and the suitors expelled. Moreover, we know that Penelope's delaying tactics play a vital role in Ulysses' *nostos*; thus Penelope's Ovidian self-presentation as protector of her family is vindicated by Homer's plot. By contrast, *Heroides* 12 looks forward to the bloodshed of Euripides. I argue that the Ovidian heroine's apparent indifference to the death of Pelias foreshadows the carnage of the tragic stage, thereby enabling Ovid to position Medea's self-focus as the trait most visible to his reader. Penelope and Medea thus appear to be fundamentally dissimilar – one viewing herself as interconnected with her family and household, one apparently devoid of connection with other characters, even those such as the Pelidae upon whom she has had such a devastating impact.

1.3 Interpersonal Relationships

I turn now to examine Hypsipyle's and Medea's attitudes to interpersonal relationships more broadly, arguing that the same dynamics we have observed in the hero-heroine relationships are visible in the women's interactions with other characters. In my reading, the Ovidian Medea is characterised by a pragmatic and self-focused approach to interpersonal contact. This takes two forms: first, the heroine is concerned with securing practical benefit for herself, if necessary at the expense of other characters. Secondly, Medea shapes her epistolary account so as to obscure the reader's perception of her own complicity in events such as the betrayal of her family – using her connection with other characters to divest herself of responsibility. Both aspects of *Heroides* 12 sketch Medea as a heroine unburdened by concern for others. Hypsipyle is again the reverse, appearing to view relationships in terms of the self-validation and social capital that they confer; the heroine's attitude depicts her as socially-grounded in contrast to Medea's self-involvement.

Medea's culture of transaction

I argue that Medea's *Heroides* 12 demonstrates the heroine's mercantile attitude to interpersonal interaction. This is evident, I suggest, in Medea's presentation of her relationship with Jason, and also in her speculations about Jason's new relationship with Creusa. Medea is unusual amongst the women of the *Heroides* in that her epistolary vocabulary is centred on bargaining and repayment rather than on emotion. While many of the other heroines dwell at length upon their feelings,⁶⁷ Medea appears to be preoccupied with the practical benefits – or lack thereof – resulting from her liaison with the hero. The heroine's concerns become apparent as she summarises her deeds on the hero's behalf:

proditus est genitor, regnum patriamque reliqui,
munus in exilio quod licet esse tuli,
virginitas facta est peregrini praeda latronis,
optima cum cara matre relictā soror.

⁶⁷ Historically, this has been the most common criticism of the *Heroides*. See, for example, Haley (1924) and Wilkinson (1955), although the trend continues right through to Lindheim (2003). Even Jacobson's extremely thorough (1974) analysis is hindered by his obvious irritation with the women's emotions. The scholarly determination to focus on the heroines' epistolary 'feelings' has resulted in insufficient attention being given to heroines such as Medea, who do not appear to be especially emotional, and whose poems benefit from being read according to a different set of parameters.

My father was betrayed; I abandoned my kingdom and my homeland. I have received my reward, which is that I am allowed to live in exile! My virginity was made the prize of a foreign vagabond; my dear sister left behind, along with the best of mothers.

[*Her.* 12.109-12]

This section illustrates the heroine's treatment of relationships as a bargaining process.⁶⁸ Each line forms a contrast with the one following, the pattern setting up a clear economic model: loss / profit / loss / profit. The hexameter lines represent the outlay or 'loss' – Medea's actions on behalf of Jason – and the pentameter lines her 'profit'. At line 110, the heroine draws attention to these concepts by referring explicitly to her *munus*, the anti-reward of living in exile.⁶⁹ The repetition of the structure over two couplets creates an impression of dispassionate calculation on Medea's part, the dualistic construction evoking the dry precision of an accountant's ledger.⁷⁰ I suggest that the book-keeper's columns of figures are here transcribed into corresponding lines of poetry – A / B / A / B – intimating that Medea is tallying up the debits and credits of her alliance with Jason as though they were business partners.

A second point of interest is the voice in which Ovid's heroine presents her accusations. The couplets contain three passive verbs, an unusual occurrence in *Heroides* 12, where Medea generally prefers to claim actions for herself.⁷¹ I propose that Medea's use of the passive voice serves to distance the writing heroine from the events with which she seeks to reproach Jason, suggesting first that Medea is unconcerned by the suffering that her liaison with the hero has precipitated, and second that she is to blame for none of it. In line 109, for example, Medea says *proditus est genitor*, referring to Aeëtes, defrauded of the Golden Fleece by his daughter's artifice. However, Medea does not say that *she* betrayed

⁶⁸ Although Medea refers to Chalciope as *cara*, I suggest that the adjective functions as a convenient label with which the heroine can reproach Jason, and that it does not reflect Medea's genuine attachment to her sister. First, the inclusion of *cara* forms a contrast with Medea's unemotional presentation of the other elements of the situation; second, Medea does not refer to her sister in similar terms at any other point in *Heroides* 12. The heroine's point, perhaps, is that Chalciope is a more deserving individual than Jason himself – furthering Medea's negative characterisation of the hero. In the context of a comparison with Jason, we could equally read *cara* in the sense of 'costly', as though Medea is suggesting that Chalciope is too high a price to pay for marriage to Jason, that the hero is not 'worth' the sacrifice of a sister.

⁶⁹ See here Rosati (1989), who argues that Medea presents herself in this section as Jason's spoil of war.

⁷⁰ Cf. Bessone (1997), pp. 169-72.

⁷¹ Statistically speaking, this section represents the densest concentration of passive verbs in *Heroides* 12, whether referring to Medea or to any other character.

her father, nor does she mention his name.⁷² I suggest that the label *genitor* is significant, enabling Medea to diminish the reader's sense of Aeëtes' personal identity by describing him only in terms of his relationship to herself. The Aeëtes of *Heroides* 12 functions as a social role rather than a character, which allows the writing heroine to avoid having to engage with the personal cost of her familial betrayal.⁷³

More important, perhaps, is the sole first-person verb in this section – *reliqui* – which contributes to the illusion of Medea's blamelessness. The message is clearly that the heroine abandoned her homeland *for Jason*, and thus a clever strategy emerges: the one action for which Medea takes responsibility is subsequently laid at the hero's door, thereby disguising Medea's agency and acquitting her of deliberate cruelty towards her family. Furthermore, by cobbling together the betrayal of Aeëtes in the passive voice with her own departure in the active, Medea contrives to elide the two actions, implying that her departure was the sole constituent of her betrayal, and avoiding any reference to her other unsavoury actions.⁷⁴ Medea's epistolary technique serves to indict the hero on two fronts, since the heroine argues that Jason is to blame for both the risks that she has taken and the reward that she has (not) received.

We observe a similar rationale in the second couplet: Medea states that her virginity was 'made' Jason's prize, her characterisation of the hero as a *latro* presenting the event as something that was done to her without her consent. This portrayal of the affair omits all mention of Medea's own passion, shaping the heroine's 'risk' on the hero's behalf into

⁷² This section contrasts with the heroine's equivalent admission in Euripides [*Med.* 483-5], where Medea says that *she* betrayed her father – an active construction. In both texts, Medea refrains from using Aeëtes' name, and we could therefore treat the occurrence of *genitor* in *Heroides* 12 as a direct echo of the scene commencing at *Med.* 483. The Ovidian Medea uses the term *pater* in the scene at *Met.* 7.51, offering a more precise reflection of Euripides than does *Heroides* 12. Lindheim (2003), p. 126, argues that it is significant that the Heroidean Medea refers to Aeëtes only as 'father' and never as 'king'. Cf. also Heinze (1997), p. 161-3; Bessone (1997), pp. 169-72.

⁷³ We could equally treat Medea's decision to call her father *genitor* rather than Aeëtes as a representation of the elegiac egocentricity of the heroines in this collection. As many scholars have observed, the women are focused on themselves and their lovers to the exclusion of everyone else, which can result in caricatured portraits of other characters. See, for example, Anderson (1973) and Barchiesi (2001), p. 32, who notes that Ovid's heroines are engaged in 'reducing' their external realities to focus completely on the persona of the lover. Medea, however, resists this interpretation precisely because she appears *less* concerned with the figure of Jason as her lover than are most of the writing women of the collection.

⁷⁴ For a completely opposite reading of this passage, see Davis (2012), pp. 35-6, who argues that Medea's awareness of her own guilt comes across more strongly here in *Heroides* 12 than it does in Euripides. Davis approaches the elegiac Medea as an inherently moral heroine, which accounts in large part for our divergent readings.

something coercive, which focuses the reader's attention on Jason's wrongdoing rather than the heroine's.⁷⁵ In the same way, Medea's mother and sister are 'left behind' in the passive voice, converting the heroine's own desire for a future in Greece into a cruel separation foisted on her by Jason. Thus we observe that the elegiac Medea appears to be measuring each of her sacrifices on Jason's behalf against the yardstick of its reward, a surprisingly passionless approach to the end of a love affair.

Medea's repeated references to her dowry further strengthen the reader's perception of the heroine's mercantile attitude.⁷⁶ In the other single epistles, six heroines refer to a dowry at some point, yet none includes it as a specific reproach against the hero.⁷⁷

dos mea tu sospes, dos est mea Graia iuventus.
i nunc, Sisyphias, inprobe, confer opes.

Your own life saved, you are my dowry. My dowry is the Greek youth! Go now,
wicked one, gather in your Corinthian wealth.

[Her. 12.203-4]

Here Medea characterises Jason's successful capture of the fleece as the direct result of her assistance. Line 203 is particularly interesting in that it reprises the loss / profit pattern of our earlier passage. Each half of the line contains an opposition, as Medea sets up a contrast between her assistance and the benefits that have accrued to Jason as a result: *dos mea / tu sospes / dos mea / Graia iuventus*. The tone of the couplet is depersonalised; just as Medea diminishes Aeëtes by labelling him *genitor* [Her. 12.109], here she allows Jason neither name nor personal attributes, referring to him in the general context of the *Graia iuventus*. The hero's role in this scene is to testify to his failure to repay Medea's favours, a view supported by the striking A / B / A / B construction.⁷⁸ As with the earlier passage, we perceive the Ovidian Medea's apparent lack of feeling: she seems less grieved at the loss

⁷⁵ Although we might argue that the Apollonian Medea was coerced by the strange passion with which she is divinely fired, there is no evidence in *Heroides* 12 that Ovid subscribes to this version of the myth. In such a context, I consider it justifiable to infer that any accusations of coercion from the Heroidean Medea must be directed at Jason himself.

⁷⁶ Medea uses the term *dos* six times, each in tandem with a reminder to the hero of the aid she has rendered. Cf. Her. 12.53; 12.103; 12.199; 12.202; 12.203.

⁷⁷ For the occurrences of *dos* in the other single *Heroides*, see Briseis [Her. 3.55]; Phaedra [Her. 4.163]; Oenone [Her. 5.92]; Hypsipyle [Her. 6.117-18; 6.138]; Dido [Her. 7.149] and Canace [Her. 11.100]. Phyllis [Her. 2] and Ariadne [Her. 10] are interesting comparisons here, in that both resemble Medea in providing assistance to heroes in extremis. However, neither Phyllis nor Ariadne uses dotal imagery, nor do they focus specifically on the heroes' abuse of their aid. Both women are chiefly concerned with their feelings of personal loss, and – in Phyllis' case – of the loss of self-respect. I discuss Phyllis' *Heroides* 2 in more detail at the end of this chapter.

⁷⁸ For an alternative view, see Bessone (1997), pp. 266-7, who treats this scene as Medea's elegiac 'response' to Jason's second speech in Euripides, in which the hero justifies his decision to abandon Medea and marry Creusa. Cf. *Med.* 522-75.

of the hero than she is annoyed by the insufficient return she has received on her investment in him.

I suggest that Medea displays an identical attitude towards interpersonal relationships when she argues for her own superiority over Jason's new bride Creusa. Although several of the heroines allege that they are 'better' than the hero's new lover, Medea takes an unusual tack in arguing her case in purely economic terms:

hoc illic Medea fui, nova nupta quod hic est;
 quam pater est illi, tam mihi dives erat.
 hic Ephyren bimarem, Scythia tenus ille nivosa
 omne tenet, Ponti qua plaga laeva iacet.

There was I, Medea, what your new bride is here. As rich as her father is, so rich was mine. Her father rules Ephyrus of the two seas, mine everything which lies on the left bank of the Pontus, as far as snowy Scythia.

[*Her.* 12.25-8]

As with several aspects of *Heroides* 12, it is crucial to observe what the writing heroine does *not* say. She does *not* say that she loves Jason more than does Creusa; nor that she is a heroine of finer moral stature than her rival; nor that she, Medea, chose Jason for herself where Creusa is having the hero chosen for her. These arguments resemble those we are familiar with from other heroines in the collection, as when Oenone declares that she is morally superior to Helen because Helen has abandoned Menelaus for the sake of Paris [*Her.* 5.79-88; 5.105-6]; or when Hypsipyle laments that she is loyal to Jason whereas Medea is dangerous to those around her [*Her.* 6.125-32].⁷⁹ Conversely, the Medea of *Heroides* 12 ignores such emotional appeals, making no reference to Creusa's personal qualities. As in several of the other poems, the couplets make an explicit comparison between Medea and Creusa, but the writing heroine's focus is limited to each woman's role as conduit of her father's wealth. Observe the repeated binary composition, with Creusa occupying one half of a line and Medea the other: *quam pater est illi, / tam mihi dives erat* [*Her.* 12.26].

⁷⁹ Penelope's *Heroides* 1 offers an interesting contrast to the letters of Oenone and Hypsipyle, in that Penelope imagines Ulysses criticising her to his new lover: *fortisan et narres, quam tibi sit rustica coniunx / quae tantum lanas non sinat esse rudes* [*Her.* 1.77-8]. Although Penelope appears in many ways to be a stronger figure than is, for example, Hypsipyle, here in *Heroides* 1 Penelope's confidence in her self-worth seems to fail, and she does not argue explicitly for her own superiority as do Oenone and Hypsipyle. Cf. Knox (1995), p. 194, who comments that *rustica* is 'Ovid's favourite epithet for describing...lack of sophistication'.

The view of herself that Medea espouses in these couplets is not consistent with the portrait that she has developed elsewhere – that of a strong and independent heroine. I propose that the implication of these lines is that Medea considers her father's wealth to be her most important asset when looking at the situation from the hero's point of view. Medea returns to this theme throughout *Heroides* 12, twice pointing out that Creusa could not have helped Jason obtain the Golden Fleece [*Her.* 12.53-4; 12.103-4]. Taken together with the couplets above, the elegiac Medea contrives to present herself as a better 'bargain' for the hero than is Creusa.⁸⁰ Whereas the other heroines attempt to win their heroes back with feeling, Medea does so with hard-boiled negotiation. This conveys to the reader that the Ovidian Medea assumes Jason to have the same loss / profit approach to relationships as does Medea herself – an unambiguous indication of the heroine's self-focused epistolary personality, which cannot entertain the notion that other characters think and feel differently from herself.⁸¹ I suggest that the combined effect of these two passages – Medea's approach to Jason, and Medea's speculation about Jason's approach to Creusa – is to depict Medea as a heroine whose guiding principle is the pursuit of personal gain.

Readers will observe that Medea's preoccupation with repayment recalls some of the hallmarks of Roman *amicitia*, which held that the provision of services for mutual benefit was an integral part of a good friendship.⁸² However, critics both ancient and modern concur that *amicitia* could not be based *solely* on the expectation of reciprocal aid, that a degree of goodwill was necessary for a relationship to meet the criteria of true *amicitia*.⁸³ Cicero, who writes at length on Roman friendship, is particularly emphatic on this point,

⁸⁰ As critics, we observe that Medea omits the fact that Creusa has provided Jason with a social position in Corinth, which Medea cannot do. From the external reader's point of view, Creusa is arguably at least as good a 'bargain' as is Medea, given the hero's present circumstances. That Ovid has Medea ignore this aspect of the situation is, I suggest, further evidence of the heroine's self-absorption: she proceeds from the assumption that she is always the most important character in the scene.

⁸¹ Critics have noted this as a feature of the *Heroides* more generally – that the women write as though all of the characters operate according to their own elegiac principles, which leads to criticism of the heroes whose priorities are different. For example, Jacobson (1974), pp. 254-8, is particularly critical of Penelope in this respect, arguing that Penelope ridicules Ulysses by being scathing about the stratagems that he uses against the Trojans [*Her.* 1.41-4]. For an analysis of the elegiac self-absorption of the collection as a whole, Rosenmeyer (1997) offers a useful study.

⁸² See, for example, Cic. *De Am.* 6.22.

⁸³ Cf. Williams (2012), pp. 22-3, for a useful 'definition' of *amicitia*, despite the difficulties of arriving at a precise characterisation of Roman friendship, owing to the inevitable disconnect between the philosophical ideal and the everyday reality. Saller (1982), pp. 15-22, includes a useful list of Latin terms used to describe *amicitia*, which acts as a counterpoint to Williams' analysis. Konstan (1997) offers a complementary discussion which focuses mainly on an examination of *amicitia* as it relates to modern conceptions of healthy relationships.

which suggests that the Ovidian Medea represents a very poor exponent of *amicitia*, even as she appeals implicitly to its standards in her reproaches of the hero.⁸⁴ Nowhere in the passages we have examined is there evidence of affection or goodwill towards the hero, or of concern for his welfare that matches concern for Medea's own.

The first passage, in which Medea states that she betrayed her father [*Her.* 12.109-12], is particularly significant from this point of view. While Medea asserts that she has obtained no reward for the deeds she has undertaken on Jason's behalf, neither does she accept responsibility for her actions, couching events as the hero's fault.⁸⁵ Such an approach implies that Medea fails according to a second of *amicitia*'s core principles – that of reciprocity. Although Medea constructs the hero as having responsibilities to *her*, she declines to acknowledge her own responsibilities to other characters, such as Aeëtes.⁸⁶ The Ovidian Medea appears to view relationships as a one-way street, where she derives benefit and other characters must protect their own interests. Cicero remarks on just such a personality-type in *De Officiis*, noting that people of influence regard themselves as having conferred a favour by condescending to accept one from someone else.⁸⁷ The self-focused world-view to which Cicero refers closely resembles that of the Ovidian Medea, as we observe that the heroine's chief concern in *Heroides* 12 is with the gratitude that is owed to her rather than the gratitude which she herself may owe. Viewed in the context of *amicitia*, I suggest that Medea's poem reveals the heroine's determination not only to secure

⁸⁴ Cf. Cic. *De Inv.* 2.167. I do not consider it incongruous to consider the concept of *amicitia* when evaluating Medea and Jason's relationship. First, there appears to be a general consensus that the vocabulary of *amicitia* was very flexible, and could be applied to a surprising variety of relationships and situations. Konstan (1997) is particularly interesting on this point. Secondly, I consider *amicitia* not incongruous with Medea's self-appointed role as elegiac letter-writer, since the descriptive vocabulary of *amicitia* could be used to characterise the relationship between poet and *puella*. See, for example, Gibson (1995). Finally, Ovid constructs his Medea as much more concerned with status and self-worth than many of his other heroines. I argue that it is therefore consistent for a character such as Medea to call on the vocabulary of *amicitia*, which allows her to present herself as Jason's equal – if not his superior.

⁸⁵ Regarding the question of *amicitia*, we should also note that Medea's loss / profit evaluation of her relationship with Jason suggests that she would not have undertaken deeds on the hero's behalf had she known that she would derive little benefit from the interaction. As we have noted above, Cicero takes an unfavourable view of this attitude in *De Inventione* [2.167].

⁸⁶ Mueller (2001) provides a complementary study of the way in which the language of reciprocity shapes the depiction of Euripides' characters and their behaviour. Mueller's discussion follows on from that of Gill (1996), who argues that the revenge at the centre of the tragedy is the culmination of a relationship built on exchange between hero and heroine.

⁸⁷ Cf. *De Off.* 2.20.69. Immediately after this pronouncement, Cicero counsels against performing services for the wealthy and influential in the hope of deriving benefits from them in the future, observing that powerful people are rarely as grateful for assistance as those with fewer resources. Cf. *De Off.* 2.20.70-71.

advancement for herself, but to disregard the interests of other characters where they collide with her own.

Family and Motherhood

I suggest that the dissimilarity between Medea's attitude to interpersonal relationships and that of Hypsipyle affects the heroines' epistolary presentations of their families, and in particular of their children. Medea's preoccupation is with material gain, whereas Hypsipyle appears to derive satisfaction and self-confidence from her role as a member of her family. This reaffirms the division we have identified between the two heroines – Hypsipyle is a social being who depicts herself predominantly in the context of other characters; Medea operates in isolation.

Hypsipyle's depiction of her father Thoas offers a useful characterisation of the writing heroine. In examining Hypsipyle's account of her rescue of Thoas from the Lemnian massacre, we perceive that the well-being of her family is one of Hypsipyle's chief considerations. In the first half of the chapter, we observed that Hypsipyle appears very dependent on Jason's wishes and actions; by contrast, she is less overawed by her fellow women of Lemnos. In line 53, recalling the Argo's arrival, Hypsipyle says: *Lemniadesque viros – nimium quoque! – vincere norunt* [*Her.* 6.53].⁸⁸ I propose that this reference to the massacre is significant, in that Hypsipyle implies a criticism of the women's actions. Whereas we might expect Hypsipyle to describe the Lemniades in the first person, she uses a third-person verb – *norunt*. The effect is to position Hypsipyle outside the group, an impression compounded by the obliquely judgemental phrase *nimum quoque*. Unlike Medea, who devotes very little consideration to the other characters of her myth, Hypsipyle characterises herself *in relation to* a social group, even when she is setting herself apart from the Lemnian women. For Ovid's reader, Hypsipyle appears as a heroine

⁸⁸ Hypsipyle also says that her reception of the Argonauts was conditioned in some measure by 'fate': *sed me mala fata trahebant* [*Her.* 6.51]. In Apollonius, however, we have no sense that the Lemnians' reaction to the men stems from anything other than an acknowledgment that they could be useful to each other. See, for example, Polyxo's speech to the queen at *Arg.* 1.675-96. This is a very small point, but it seems to me that the Ovidian Hypsipyle may be trying to distance herself from the Lemnian women, in preparation for her explicit condemnation of the murders at *Her.* 6.139. Put simply, I suggest that the writing Hypsipyle is looking to justify to the reader and to herself why she went along with the women on this particular occasion, when she is also arguing that she refused to comply with them in the earlier perpetration of the massacre. My reading here contrasts with Verducci's (1985), pp. 56-66: Verducci argues that Hypsipyle lacks self-awareness.

who places greater value on her interpersonal relationships than does Medea. In this case, the sense of separation between Hypsipyle and the Lemnian women sets the scene for the entrance of Hypsipyle's father, who is clearly more important to her than the women of her community.

prodidit illa patrem—rapui de caede Thoanta.
deseruit Colchos—me mea Lemnos habet.
Quid refert, scelerata piam si vincit? et ipso
crimine dotata est emeruitque virum.
Lemniadum facinus culpo, non miror, Iason!
quamlibet ignavis ipse dat arma dolor.

That woman betrayed her father; I snatched Thoas away from death. She abandoned the Colchians; my Lemnos has me still. What does it matter, if a wicked woman conquers a pious one, and if she is richly endowed and has purchased her husband by that very crime? I condemn the Lemnian women's crime, Jason, I do not revere it. Grief gives arms to a person, however cowardly.

[*Her.* 6.135-40]

Here Hypsipyle argues for her own superiority over Medea. Readers will observe that this passage offers a complete contrast to Medea's evaluation of Creusa: whereas Medea is concerned with each woman's economic value to the hero, Hypsipyle critiques each heroine's role as a daughter. Line 135 and 136 recall Medea's comparison of herself with Creusa [*Her.* 12.25-6], except that Medea draws attention to her material assets, while Hypsipyle's view is that each heroine's treatment of her father and community is of greatest significance. A second resemblance between this part of *Heroides* 6 and Medea's poem is Hypsipyle's inclusion of *quid refert?* [*Her.* 6.137]. As we discussed in the section on Penelope, Medea uses *quid referam* to enable her to brush over a consideration of other characters' interests in favour of a focus on her own [*Her.* 12.129-30]. Hypsipyle, on the other hand, uses the same rhetorical structure to draw the hero's attention to a general moral principle, intimating that Jason cannot be helped if he is determined to value Medea's wickedness above Hypsipyle's own *pietas*. In line 139, Hypsipyle specifically condemns the massacre of the Lemnian men, enhancing the portrait of her as a heroine who judges herself against the norms of social behaviour. Notice that Hypsipyle sets up her own view of the murders in opposition to the *Lemniadum facinus*, the two first-person verbs grouped together away from the Lemnians, poetically separated by the 'crime'. In contrast to Medea, Hypsipyle argues that her worth as a heroine is demonstrated not by superior wealth or skill, but by her behaviour towards those deserving of her loyalty.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Hypsipyle's inclusion of *dotata* [*Her.* 6.138] is also interesting, in view of Medea's repeated use of the term. Whereas Medea uses *dos* to refer to herself four times out of six [*Her.* 12.199-203], Hypsipyle uses it twice of herself [*Her.* 6.117-18], and once of Medea [*Her.* 6.138]. Both heroines

Likewise, *Heroides* 6 conveys Hypsipyle's pride in her role as a daughter, compared to Medea's complete lack of engagement with her birth family:

si te nobilitas generosaque nomina tangunt:
 en ego Minoos nata Thoante feror.
 Bacchus avus: Bacchi coniunx redimita corona
 praeradiat stellis signa minora suis.
 dos tibi Lemnos erit, terra ingeniosa colenti;
 me quoque dotalis inter habere potes.

If my noble birth and distinguished name touch you – consider, I am called the daughter of Minoan Thoas. Bacchus was my grandfather; the wife of Bacchus, her head encircled by her crown, outshines the smaller constellations with her stars. Lemnos will be for you my dowry, a land generous to its cultivator. You can possess me also, amongst my dotal gifts.

[*Her.* 6.113-8]

Several of the heroines in the collection draw the hero's attention to their illustrious histories, but this section serves a double purpose in implicitly juxtaposing the figure of Hypsipyle with that of Medea.⁹⁰ We observe that, in contrast to Medea's self-appointed title *regina* [*Her.* 12.1], Hypsipyle does not insert herself forcibly into the text: the *generosa nomina* and the *nobilitas* to which she refers apply equally to all members of her family. Calling herself the daughter of Minoan Thoas demonstrates respect, but also intimates that Hypsipyle does not need to be centre-stage, being content to present herself as part of a larger familial entity. The heroine shows the same outward-looking attitude towards her self-avowed dowry: *terra ingeniosa colenti* connotes benefits which are shared amongst many and support the daily life of an entire community. Hypsipyle's dowry is quite unlike Medea's, which comprised a binary interaction between the heroine's individual gift and the hero's individual benefit.⁹¹

are contrasted with a general lack of dotal imagery in the single epistles. The recurrence of the term here in *Heroides* 6 offers additional justification, I suggest, for treating this episode as offering a critique of Medea's approach to similar topics in *Heroides* 12. An interesting counterpoint here is Davis' (2006) chapter on the *Heroides*, in which he argues that Ovid characterises his heroines as being committed to an explicitly Augustan model of marital fidelity and social responsibility.

Hypsipyle appears to be a good example of Davis' thesis.

⁹⁰ See, for example: Oenone's pastoral ancestry at *Her.* 5.10. Likewise Hermione, who reminisces at some length about her familial connections [*Her.* 8.27-50]; and Ariadne, who laments that her lonely fate is not commensurate with her lofty position [*Her.* 10.89-92]. Finally, Hypermnestra's digression about Io [*Her.* 14.85-108] is an inverted approach to family history – Hypermnestra uses Io's story to draw a connection between the two women's sufferings.

⁹¹ Whilst one could argue that the capture of the Golden Fleece ultimately benefited all the people of Iolchus, by allowing Jason to depose his uncle and restore rightful rule to his homeland, I do not consider this point relevant for an analysis of *Heroides* 12. Medea gives no indication that she cares at all for this outcome, or is even aware of it.

Hypsipyle's family-oriented approach bears little resemblance to Medea's treatment of her relatives in *Heroides* 12. Consider, for example, the absence of the figure of Chalciope. Given the Ovidian Medea's apparent determination to avoid taking responsibility for unpalatable events or outcomes, it is surprising that the heroine fails to argue that her betrayal of Aeëtes stemmed from concern for her sister and for her sister's imperilled children. In Apollonius, Chalciope's fear for her sons is clearly a matter of some weight to the epic Medea, although she has already been afflicted with passion for the hero.⁹² Despite the fact that Chalciope's wishes and Medea's coincide in the *Argonautica*, we have no reason to imagine that Medea's distress on Chalciope's behalf is not genuine, which makes the omission of Chalciope's character in Ovid all the more striking.

In *Heroides* 12, Chalciope is mentioned only twice: once, as we have seen, in Medea's loss / profit scene; once when Medea describes how she wept through the night for Jason's imminent demise, and Chalciope finds her still weeping in the morning.⁹³ In the first instance, Chalciope furnishes for Medea a source of reproach against the hero; in the second, she acts as a descriptive addition to Medea's narrative, offering objective 'proof' of the depth of Medea's suffering on the hero's behalf. The Ovidian Medea's lack of engagement with Chalciope indicates to me the heroine's overall lack of concern with the feelings or interests of her family. Even in a situation where the inclusion of Chalciope might have strengthened Medea's epistolary position, corroborating Medea's version of events in which she is blameless, the heroine ignores her sister, suggesting that Medea does not consider Chalciope of sufficient importance to be depicted as a fully-fledged character in her own right.

Aeëtes suffers similar treatment, in that he features in *Heroides* 12 only to motivate the necessary action, having no emotive value himself. The second iteration of Jason's labours is a citation by Medea of her father's words, but we realise this only after the narration has ended – *dixerat Aeëtes* [*Her.* 12.51]. Even when Medea has the opportunity to include Aeëtes in her poem, and even when to do so would likely increase the reader's fear for Jason and dislike of the tyrannical king, Medea prefers to keep her father in the background of the missive.⁹⁴ The only other references to Aeëtes occur in the context of a

⁹² See, for example, Chalciope's first speech to her sister at *Arg.* 3.695-704.

⁹³ Cf. *Her.* 12.112; *Her.* 12.62-4.

⁹⁴ A complementary study here is Williams (1996), who discusses the character of Aeëtes in Apollonius, arguing that scholars have traditionally overlooked Aeëtes, despite his significant role in motivating the action of the epic. Within the story world of *Heroides* 12, Ovid's Medea shows a

direct reproach to the hero: *proditus est genitor* [*Her.* 12.109] and *laese pater, gaude!* [*Her.* 12.159]. The latter is unusual in that it takes the form of a rhetorical apostrophe, and so is concerned with Medea's own situation, having nothing to do with Aeëtes at all. Neither reference, nor Medea's persistent comparison of Aeëtes' riches to Creon's, suggests the kind of personal connection conveyed by Hypsipyle's emphasis on her relationship with Thoas. In my reading, Medea's limited epistolary engagement with her family offers a poetic illustration of the heroine's self-focus. The presence of Chalciope and Aeëtes as mere 'stock figures' in Medea's arsenal against Jason strengthens our impression that Medea's world-view is a culture of transaction, in distinct contrast to that of Hypsipyle, which is predicated on social engagement.

The heroines' attitudes to motherhood function as a final indication of the dissimilarity between Medea's interpersonal relationships and Hypsipyle's. Hypsipyle appears to have a strong sense of herself as a mother, and the future that she imagines for herself with Jason and her children – although impossible – underlines Ovid's depiction of her as a heroine invested in the well-being of others. Medea, however, makes only glancing references to her children, which suggests that they are of little significance to her and that she feels little for them. The Ovidian Medea's lack of interest in her sons forms a strong contrast with the heroine of Euripides, who ruminates on her fears for her children's situation in Corinth.⁹⁵ Near the middle of *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle reflects on the future that she desires with Jason and her children.

Nunc etiam peperi. gratare ambobus, Iason—
 dulce mihi gravidæ fecerat auctor onus.
 felix in numero quoque sum prolemque gemellam
 pignora Lucina bina favente dedi.
 si quaeris, cui sint similes, cognosceris illis:
 fallere non norunt, cetera patris habent;

Now I have even given birth: rejoice for us both, Jason. The cause made my burden sweet during my pregnancy. I am blessed, too, as to the number – I have given you twin offspring, a two-fold pledge with Lucina favouring me. If you should enquire as to who they resemble, you will recognise yourself in them. They do not know how to deceive, but they have the rest of their father's qualities.

[*Her.* 6.119-24]

I suggest that this is one of the few passages in *Heroides* 6 in which Hypsipyle gives the impression of being happy. The aggrieved tone which permeates much of the poem is

similar lack of interest in her father as a character; perhaps scholars of Apollonius and the Ovidian Medea share the view that Aeëtes is not germane to their interpretation of the events of the narrative?

⁹⁵ See, for example, Eur. *Med.* 780-3.

briefly diminished as the heroine focuses on her children, the verb *peperi* drawing attention to the physical connection between mother and child. *Ambobus* in line 119 is interesting: Hypsipyle articulates to the hero her belief that parental joy ought to be shared, revealing that she views both herself *and* Jason as being of central importance to their family.⁹⁶ Lines 123 and 124 expand on this theme. Hypsipyle's description of the children's features creates a complete family portrait by including the absent hero in the narration of his family's story. However, Jason does not appear as the focus of this scene, which is unusual in Hypsipyle's poem; his centrality has been temporarily supplanted by his children, the descriptions of whom are universally positive – they are *dulce*, while Hypsipyle herself is *felix*.

Hypsipyle's self-presentation as a mother forms a crucial aspect of her Ovidian characterisation, since the poet diverges here from the Apollonian tradition to which he otherwise adheres.⁹⁷ In the *Argonautica*, Hypsipyle has no children at all; in *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle has not only two sons, but twins.⁹⁸ The value of this Ovidian invention is that it slightly elevates Hypsipyle above her rival Medea, at least as far as motherhood is concerned. Ovid's reader knows from the Euripidean tradition that Medea has two sons and therefore two separate claims on the hero. Within the context of *Heroides* 6, however, Ovid contrives to bestow upon Hypsipyle a still more auspicious situation by giving her twins. I suggest that Ovid's alteration of the mythological tradition is entirely consistent with the view of motherhood espoused by each heroine – Hypsipyle seems engaged with her children where Medea does not; thus her superiority as the mother 'more blessed' seems not only justified, but an important reflection of the heroine's characterisation.

By contrast with Hypsipyle's idealised family portrait, Medea's children are largely absent in *Heroides* 12. As we discussed earlier, the elder of Medea's sons does not appear in the

⁹⁶ Hypsipyle's words here echo Jason's own sentiments, as reported by Hypsipyle on the occasion of the hero's departure from Lemnos at *Her.* 6.59-62. Jason allegedly wishes that they may each (*uterque*) be a parent to Hypsipyle's unborn child, and so the heroine's anecdote feeds into an earlier narrative of the lovers' history. It does not, however, bear any relation to the tradition as established by Apollonius, in which neither Jason nor Hypsipyle foresees a joint-parenting situation.

⁹⁷ Ovid adheres to the Apollonian tradition only in the case of *Heroides* 6. Readers will observe that my interpretation of Medea's *Heroides* 12 highlights the numerous ways in which Ovid does not follow the tradition of the *Argonautica*, yet this deviation appears to be confined to *Heroides* 12. For a contrasting view of the Apollonius-*Heroides* 12 relationship, see Kenney (2001).

⁹⁸ The notion of the twins seems to be an Ovidian invention. Apollodorus [*Bib.* 1.9.17] refers to two sons, Euneus and Nebrophonus, while Statius reports that the second son was called Thoas [*Theb.* 5.465], however neither refers to the boys as twins. Cf. Knox (1995), p. 196.

poem at all, while his brother enters the narrative only briefly to relay news of Jason's marriage to Creusa. Such a striking contrast with the reader's knowledge of the heroine in Euripides intimates that Ovid is conceiving of his heroine very differently, that the elegiac Medea does not consider her sons to be an integral part of her life and relationship with the hero, as Hypsipyle so clearly does. Apart from the account of Jason's wedding, Medea mentions her children only once, when recalling how she gave up her home: *iussa domo cessi natis comitata duobus* [*Her.* 12.135]. The line is interesting in part because it echoes Hypsipyle's use of *comito* in imagining Jason's homecoming to Lemnos – *obviaque exissem fetu comitante gemello* [*Her.* 6.143]. I argue that the voice of the two verbs draws an important, if subtle, distinction between our heroines: Hypsipyle's *comitante* is active and inclusive, suggesting that each member of the family participates equally in the imagined reception of the hero. Medea's verb is passive – *comitata* presenting the event from Medea's point of view, focusing on her own experience rather than on the act of departure to which her sons were likewise condemned.⁹⁹

I argue that Medea's omission of an account of her sons' feelings on being forced to leave their home – or of Medea's own feelings *on their behalf* – testifies to the heroine's lack of emotional investment in her children. They exist in the scene only to provide a context within which to judge the hero's actions, indicting Jason still further by avowing that he drove out not only his wife but his small sons also. In my interpretation, the children of *Heroides* 12 serve a similar purpose to the figure of Medea's sister: both Chalciope and the boys allow Medea a greater measure of indignation against Jason, effectively legitimising her allegations of Jason's wrongdoing by assembling an entire cast upon whom the hero can be said to have inflicted suffering.¹⁰⁰ Such a reading of Medea's epistolary tactics encourages the reader to perceive a clear contrast between Hypsipyle's parental focus and Medea's dispassionate allusion to the murders she is about to commit:

quos equidem actutum—sed quid praedicere poenam
attinet? ingentis parturit ira minas.
quo feret ira sequar. facti fortasse pigebit;
et piget infido consuluisse viro.
viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat.
nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit.

⁹⁹ Cf. Huskey's observation (2004), pp. 274-5, that Medea and Hypsipyle employ names and relationships very differently in *Heroides* 6 and 12. Hypsipyle is happy to include other characters in the narrative and bring them to life, as with the portrait of her children; Medea prefers to keep her references oblique, relegating other characters to the background. My own thinking on *Heroides* 12 owes a particular debt to Huskey's evocative title: 'strategies of omission'.

¹⁰⁰ On Chalciope, see *Her.* 12.109-12; for Medea's reference to her sons see *Her.* 12.133-6.

Those who indeed... but what good is it to foretell your punishment? My anger brings forth great threats. Whither my anger leads, I shall follow. Perhaps I shall repent of my deeds; I repent, too, of caring for an untrustworthy husband. The god [Cupid], who now sways my heart, will have [fore]seen those things. Assuredly, my mind struggles towards some greater deed.

[*Her.* 12.207-12]

Although Medea does not refer directly to her children's impending deaths, the reader can be in little doubt about the future that our heroine is entertaining. *Parturit* in line 206 seems an especially loaded choice of verb, given Medea's cursory engagement with her role as a mother. Ovid's birthing vocabulary appears to underline the very reading of Medea towards which we have been moving: our observations thus far suggest that she is more capable of 'mothering' her anger than she is her own sons. Lines 207 and 208 are perhaps the most chilling of the epistle, as Medea approaches the revelation of her devastating intentions, before reverting to oblique threats. The rhetorical *quid attinet* offers an unsettling echo of the heroine's casual dismissal of Pelias' murder at line 129; more importantly, it implies the inevitability of the Euripidean 'solution', by failing to equivocate as to the *necessity* for punishment. In Medea's mind, there has to be *poena* – the only uncertainty lies in its form.

In my view, the elegiac Medea's self-absorption is all the more noticeable in these closing lines because the reader has in mind the tragedy of Euripides, where the children's fate so dominates the thoughts and actions of the characters. Our impression is that even when we might most expect the Ovidian Medea to acknowledge her children, still she declines to do so.¹⁰¹ I suggest that the reader's disquiet stems from the realisation that Medea does not appear to feel any maternal responsibility, even as she approaches the destruction of her children by her own hand. In contrast to Hypsipyle's concern for the members of her family, Medea shows herself unwilling to entertain any solution except her longed-for vengeance, and her focus remains on herself to the very end – referring only to *mea pectora* and *mens mea* [*Her.* 12.211-12]. This contrast is emblematic of the two heroines overall: Hypsipyle is outward-looking and invested in relationships; Medea is chiefly concerned with her own ends.

¹⁰¹ This aspect of the Ovidian Medea offers perhaps the strongest contrast with the heroine of Euripides, whose concern with her children pervades the tragedy. Cf. Luschnig (2006), pp. 85-117, and Emmett (2010) for two excellent studies of the construction of the Euripidean heroine as a mother. Emmett performs a comparative analysis with the protagonist of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in my view highlighting the lesser-studied aspects of the Euripidean Medea's identification of herself with her children.

1.4 Action and Reaction

In this section, I argue that the dissimilar characterisations of Hypsipyle and Medea enable Ovid's reader to identify an important incongruity in Medea's *Heroides* 12. As we discussed earlier, at certain points in the poem Medea attempts to present herself as Jason's victim – a common occurrence in the *Heroides*, where all the women have had their faith in the heroes abused in some measure. However, Medea's approach jars with the reader's impression elsewhere in the letter that Medea is a character in control of her own future. I suggest that we can interpret Medea's self-depiction as a heroine acted upon by others as a self-exculpatory strategy; this view is supported by comparison of *Heroides* 12 with a poem such as Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6, where the heroine appears to be genuinely and consistently reactive. In my view, a reading of Hypsipyle's letter encourages the critic to perceive that the Ovidian Medea adopts a pose of victimhood only when it suits her; in turn, this highlights Medea's attempt to revise the historical events of her myth for her own benefit.

Rhetorical Questions

The use of rhetorical questions in *Heroides* 12 offers an indication of how different is Medea's epistolary strategy from Hypsipyle's. We noted earlier that Medea's reference to the murder of Pelias is couched as a rhetorical question [*Her.* 12.129-30], which works to obscure the reader's perception of Medea's own role in the event. Now I propose that the poem's other rhetorical enquiries perform the same function.

Ei mihi! cur umquam iuvenalibus acta lacertis
Phrixeam petiit Pelias arbor ovem?
cur umquam Colchi Magnetida vidimus Argon
turbaque Phasiacam Graia bibistis aquam?
cur mihi plus aequo flavi placuere capilli
et decor et linguae gratia ficta tuae?

Woe is me! Why did the wood of Mount Pelion ever seek Phrixus' ram, driven onward by youthful arms? Why did we Colchians ever see the Magnesian Argo, and why did your Greek crowd drink the waters of the Phasis? Why was your golden hair more pleasing to me than was right; likewise your grace, and the false charm of your tongue?

[*Her.* 12.7-12]

These lines follow Medea's opening characterisation of herself as *regina*, in contrast to Jason, who is positioned as a suppliant; the reader recalls the power imbalance that is conveyed through the differing verbs assigned to hero and heroine – *peto* versus *vaco* [*Her.*

12.1-2]. The passage above represents a sudden change of tone, as Medea uses a rhetorical structure to suggest that she was helpless in the situation. Once more, we observe that Medea differs from her fellow heroines: several of the women wish that their fates had been different, but Medea expresses similar sentiments not as a wish but as a series of would-be questions.¹⁰² Notice, too, that Medea's questions are depersonalised, distancing the writing heroine from the material under discussion in a way that could not have been achieved if the heroine were forced to say 'how I wish...'

Instead of saying 'how I wish that they had not come', or even 'why did I fall in love with him?' Medea asks 'why *did* they come?'¹⁰³ The implication is that Jason and his men were to blame simply by arriving. All three of the above couplets conform to this pattern. Medea constructs the latter two couplets as the unavoidable consequence of the lines preceding: Why did the Argonauts come? Why did we, the Colchians, thus see and receive them? Why was Jason thereafter so irresistible? The approach is subtle, in that it trains the reader's eye on the *first* event – Jason's daring to come to Colchis – which allows the heroine to position each subsequent occurrence as inevitable. We are encouraged to focus only on the event of Jason's arrival, for which Medea cannot be expected to take any responsibility.

Despite its obliqueness, Medea's strategy fails on two fronts. First, the reader of Apollonius is alive to the fact that the Ovidian Medea chooses to focus her narrative around Jason's actions only. We know that the elegiac heroine is excluding from her poem the hesitation and self-analysis which plague the heroine of the *Argonautica*, and which affect the Apollonian heroine's decision to assist Jason with the labours. In suggesting that events proceeded inevitably from the arrival of the Argonauts, the elegiac Medea inadvertently highlights her determination to avoid acknowledging that she herself could have behaved differently.¹⁰⁴ We are thus aware that the Ovidian Medea has edited out of

¹⁰² See, for example, Dido's *Heroides* 7: '*sed iubet ire deus.*' *vellem, vetuisset adire / Punica nec Teucris pressa fuisset humus* [*Her.* 7.139-40]. Notice the inclusion of *volo*. Dido's approach is more emblematic of the collection generally.

¹⁰³ Ennius' *Medea* offers an interesting contrast here, in that it takes the line of 'how I wish that they had not come'. The fragment of the tragedy that appears to correspond to the nurse's opening speech in Euripides [*Med.* 1-8] commences with *utinam ne*, an approach which highlights the dissimilarity of the elegiac Medea's approach, which reframes the sentiment as 'why did they come at all?' I suggest that Ovid's deviation from both Greek and Latin models must have some significance. Cf. Enn. *Med.* 208-16 Jocelyn.

¹⁰⁴ Huskey (2004) offers a useful discussion here, highlighting the various aspects of the Apollonian narrative that Medea chooses to leave out.

Heroides 12 her own role in electing to help Jason, which mitigates the reader's view of Jason's alleged culpability. Secondly, even within the Ovidian story world Medea's account betrays an incongruity, since Ovid's reader cannot help but ponder the characterisation of a heroine who depicts herself as *regina* one moment, and the blameless victim of circumstance the next.

By contrast, Hypsipyle appears less calculating:

Quid mihi cum Minyis? quid cum Tritonide pinu?
 quid tibi cum patria, navita Tiphy, mea?
 non erat hic aries villo spectabilis aureo,
 nec senis Aeetae regia Lemnos erat.

What had I to do with the Minyae? What with the Tritonian pine? What had you to do with my fatherland, helmsman Tiphys? The ram, resplendent with his fleece of gold was not here, nor was Lemnos the kingdom of the old man Aeëtes.

[*Her.* 6.47-50]

In comparison with their counterparts in *Heroides* 12, Hypsipyle's questions suggest the heroine's bewilderment at the situation in which she finds herself. Where Medea aims to distance herself from the integral role she played in Jason's quest, Hypsipyle's words emphasise a genuine lack of significance to the hero's endeavours. In saying 'what had I to do with the Minyae?' [*Her.* 6.47], Hypsipyle reminds her reader that Jason came to Lemnos only in search of Colchis – a point made explicit in the second couplet.¹⁰⁵ Observe that Hypsipyle frames her musings in the negative: the repetition of *non erat* / *nec erat* in lines 49 and 50 draws the reader's attention to what Hypsipyle's kingdom *lacks*, to the heroine's *inability* to help Jason whether or not she wished to. This is an unhappy epistolary strategy, for it implicitly confirms to the reader the necessity of Jason's departure from Lemnos, and thus of his abandonment of Hypsipyle.

In contrast to Medea's *Heroides* 12, the effect of Hypsipyle's rhetorical questions is to depict the heroine as someone who was in the wrong place at the wrong time – injured by the hero in the course of his search for a more rewarding encounter. Perhaps most significantly for a reading of the heroines' epistolary personalities, Hypsipyle's enquiries suggest that the heroine fails to recognise her own contribution towards her present

¹⁰⁵ The structural similarity between lines 47 and 48 is likewise interesting for the purposes of highlighting the dissimilarity between Hypsipyle and Medea. Hypsipyle says *quid mihi* and then *quid tibi*, suggesting that Hypsipyle views both herself and Jason as being in some way jointly responsible for events on Lemnos. Medea's *Heroides* 12 shows no such reciprocity; she prefers to position Jason alone as the transgressive party, as we saw in the passage quoted above at *Her.* 12.7-12.

predicament. Unlike Phyllis, who reproaches herself for being seduced by Demophoön, Hypsipyle asks only ‘why did this happen to me?’¹⁰⁶ The vague, non-specific nature of the heroine’s questions strengthens the reader’s impression of Hypsipyle as a character who experiences events as being done *to* her, who reacts to the behaviour of other characters rather than directing her own.

Expressions of Agency

The portraits we have identified of Medea as history’s revisionist and Hypsipyle as its bystander expose a further incongruity in Medea’s *Heroides* 12. The reader loses sight of the image of the writing Medea only when the heroine has need of another character to absorb blame that more accurately belongs to Medea herself. This reinforces the trend that we observed in Medea’s attitude to interpersonal relationships, where the heroine relates to other characters in terms of their usefulness to her. Ovid introduces this theme in the opening couplets of *Heroides* 12, which provide an important snapshot of Medea’s epistolary characterisation.

Immediately after her designation of herself as the narrator of her own myth – *memini* [*Her.* 12.1] – the heroine declares that the *sorores* ought to have ‘wound off’ the thread of her life before she could assist Jason [*Her.* 12.3-4]. The sentiment is unusual in the collection, in that it does not express an explicit wish for death, as do several of the other heroines.¹⁰⁷ Rather, Medea suggests that an external force, to which she refers at no other point in *Heroides* 12, should have *caused her* to die. The implication is that the heroine cannot be wholly to blame for the events that followed, since the Fates neglected to divert Medea’s actions by effecting her demise. This image of a heroine victimised by divine forces reveals a tension in the poem, between the figure of the writing heroine and the view of her own agency that Medea appears to be projecting.

An identical juxtaposition appears later in *Heroides* 12, as Medea attempts to style herself the victim of her own passions.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Her.* 2.27; 2.57-8.

¹⁰⁷ A number of the heroines entertain the idea of their own deaths, and not only those whom we know from the mythological tradition will die. See, for example, Phyllis [*Her.* 2.133-6]; Briseis [*Her.* 3.63-6]; Dido [*Her.* 7.181-2]; Deianira [*Her.* 9.146]; Ariadne [*Her.* 10.77-8] and Canace [*Her.* 11.21-2].

et vidi et perii! nec notis ignibus arsi,
 ardet ut ad magnos pinea taeda deos.
 et formosus eras et me mea fata trahebant:
 abstulerant oculi lumina nostra tui.
 perfide, sensisti! quis enim bene celat amorem?
 eminet indicio prodita flamma suo.

I saw you and I was lost! Nor did I burn with familiar flames, but as a pine torch
 blazes before the mighty gods. You were handsome and my fates were dragging
 me onward; your eyes captivated mine. You knew it, treacherous one, for who can
 properly conceal love? The flames shine forth, betrayed by their own evidence.
 [Her. 12.33-8]

In contrast to the heroine who occupies positions of physical advantage in the narratives of Jason's labours, Medea here characterises her love for Jason as a kind of supernatural force, obscuring her own role in electing to assist the hero. We notice the writing heroine's penchant for ambiguous vocabulary: Medea describes the flames of her passion as 'unfamiliar', a designation which suggests an emotion of otherworldly origin.¹⁰⁸ As if to strengthen this supernatural implication, Medea compares herself to the *pinea taeda* used in divine rituals, which in turn fashions a link with the *Argonautica*, where Eros inflames Medea's feelings at Aphrodite's instruction.¹⁰⁹ The torches of *Heroides* 12 are unusual, however, in that the other heroines in the collection refer almost exclusively to the torches of marriage, focusing on the legitimacy of their relationships with the heroes instead of their personal passions.¹¹⁰ In contrast to her fellow heroines, whose torch imagery looks forward to a longed-for future with the heroes, Medea seems more concerned with arguing for the role of her passions in precipitating the events of the past.

Medea's depiction of Jason likewise recalls the tradition of the *Argonautica*. Line 37's *perfide, sensisti!* accuses the hero of taking advantage of Medea's feelings, as in Apollonius, where Jason is aware of the heroine's passion before he petitions her.¹¹¹ The reader's impression is that Medea is keen to avoid taking responsibility for her relationship with Jason, presenting the hero as more dominant than herself for the first and only time in

¹⁰⁸ Most commentators prefer to interpret this passage in a typical elegiac context. See, for example, Bessone (1997), p. 105, who calls the *ignis* 'topos dell'inesperienza erotica'. However, Bessone also observes that Medea's flames prefigure the fire by which Creusa will die, which Medea mentions at *Her.* 12.180. In my view, the connection between the flames of Medea's love and the supernatural flames of the poison would seem to support the reading that Medea is attempting to 'blame' someone else for her passion.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Aphrodite's speech at *Arg.* 3.129-44 and Eros' action at *Arg.* 3.275-98.

¹¹⁰ Several heroines refer to marriage torches: for example, Phyllis [*Her.* 2.39-42], Hypsipyle [*Her.* 6.41-6], Canace [*Her.* 11.101-4], Laodamia [*Her.* 13.160] and Hypermnestra [*Her.* 14.9-10]. Dido, like Medea, refers to burning like a torch: *Her.* 7.23-4.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Arg.* 3.973-4.

this poem. The heroine's invocation of her sister at lines 65 and 66 operates in much the same way. Medea says of Chalciope: *orat opem Minyis, alter petit, impetrat alter* [*Her.* 12.65]. In the *Argonautica*, Chalciope's entreaties to Medea are depicted sympathetically; in Ovid, Medea's aside is so brief as to imply that Chalciope is like Jason in capitalising on Medea's vulnerability for her own ends.¹¹² The *alter...alter* structure is pertinent here, for it erases Medea from the reader's view, positioning Chalciope and Jason as the prevailing forces in contrast to Medea herself. On the other hand, I propose that Medea's epistolary strategy crumbles when we notice that Ovid offers no suggestion that he adheres to the Apollonian version of events in which Medea is the victim of Aphrodite's interference.¹¹³ In my reading, the elegiac Medea's depiction of her passion for Jason functions as a narrative device, deflecting the reader's attention away from the wider questions of blame and responsibility in the myth. By focusing on the small-scale detail of how *the affair itself* came about, Ovid's heroine contrives to avoid addressing blame for any of the events that followed. Medea's attempt to position herself as the victim of the Fates, of Jason or of Chalciope can be read as part of a wider trend in which the heroine is the controlling figure, drawing on the influence of other characters only when it suits her.

Finally, I argue that Medea's deflection of agency away from herself makes an interesting comment on her invocation of the *deus* at the end of the letter [*Her.* 12.211]. Having observed the way in which Medea highlights the influence of other characters so as to dilute the reader's perception of her own responsibility, I contend that it becomes possible to interpret the 'god' not as a figurative description of how Medea experiences her rage, but as a counterpart to the earlier *sorores* – an image in the heroine's arsenal of self-exculpation.

viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat.
nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit.

The god [Cupid], who now sways my heart, will have [fore]seen those things.
Assuredly, my mind struggles towards some greater deed.

[*Her.* 12.211-12]

¹¹² Contrast the sisters' speeches at *Arg.* 3.667-743.

¹¹³ Jacobson (1974), pp. 109-12, was the first of the contemporary *Heroides* scholars to question the extent to which we should understand Ovid to be depending on Apollonius when he composed *Heroides* 12. Otis (1938), p. 214, n. 89, advocated breaking the poem into 'Apollonian' and 'Euripidean' halves, and this tendency persists to some extent in *Heroides* criticism, despite Jacobson's persuasive rebuttal. I propose that Otis' observation has given rise to scholarship that is more interested in tracing the parallels between *Heroides* 12 and Apollonius and Euripides than it is in observing Ovid's divergences from either predecessor.

Medea intimates that the bloodshed to come will proceed from a divine force which is changing her heart – consider the transformative connotation of *versat*. The notion that the heroine is being physically altered by this ‘god’ works to pre-emptively diminish the reader’s view of Medea’s own responsibility, by transferring agency to the divine force. Nonetheless, Ovid’s reader perceives a clear disjunction between the heroine who alleges that she is being controlled by outside influences, and the heroine whom we have most often observed to be exercising the control, whether by narrating her sorcerer’s skills or reproaching Jason for his failures. We observe that Medea takes up a wholly reactive stance only at the very end of her missive. In the final line, the heroine states that her mind struggles towards a ‘greater deed’, recalling Jason’s description of himself as a *gloria maior* [*Her.* 12.76] and reminding the reader of the powerful heroine whom the hero approached in abject supplication. Here at the letter’s close, the heroine has changed the dynamic: the deed itself is placed in the position of emphasis at the start of the line – *nescio quid* – while Medea’s own intellectual force – *mens mea* – is uncharacteristically buried in the middle.

More significantly, this reactive Medea is inconsistent with the heroine of Jason’s speech [*Her.* 12.73-88]. As we noted earlier in the chapter, Jason characterises the Ovidian Medea as a controlling personality, the possessor of influence over the hero’s very life and death [*Her.* 12.73-4]. This unequivocal view, indicting the writing heroine either by her lover’s assessment or by her own arrogance in approving it, undermines the notion that Medea’s vengeful feelings are being directed by any force other than herself. In light of Jason’s account, I suggest that the *deus* at the end of the poem [*Her.* 12.211] indicates to the reader the Ovidian Medea’s capacity for obfuscation. Just as Medea’s attempts to blame Jason and Chalciope serve chiefly to highlight the self-focus of the writing heroine, so the *deus* conflicts with the strong and wilful Medea whom we have observed in other parts of *Heroides* 12. I argue that the heroine may attempt to attribute agency away from herself, but that Ovid encourages his reader to interpret this in itself as an indication that the heroine is rewriting the past to justify her view of her own innocence.

Comparative analysis: Phyllis' *Heroides* 2

In this final section, I compare Medea's *Heroides* 12 with Phyllis' *Heroides* 2. At first glance, the women are alike: both are the daughters of ruling kings; both offer assistance to their heroes before entering into a relationship. Apparent similarities notwithstanding, I argue that Ovid characterises Phyllis very differently from Medea. Whereas Medea strives to present events as the hero's fault, Phyllis acknowledges the role of her own actions in shaping her current predicament. Secondly, Phyllis is able to compartmentalise aspects of her history with Demophoön. Medea regrets the outcome of her relationship with Jason, and appears as a consequence to regret her very connection to the hero, as when she asks why the Argo came to Colchis [*Her.* 12.9-10]. Phyllis is the opposite: she is unambiguously regretful that she allowed herself to be seduced by Demophoön, but she remains proud of the hospitality that she offered the shipwrecked hero. Likewise, the heroines are diametrically opposed in their attitudes to punishment and vengeance. Medea's poem dwells on the punishment of other characters, from the murders of Absyrtus and Pelias to the revenge upon Jason which is soon to be acted out on Euripides' stage. Phyllis, on the other hand, is contemplating suicide – a punishment of herself rather than a revenge against the hero. In my view, *Heroides* 2 and 12 offer portraits of heroines whose circumstances may be similar, but whose responses to their situations suggest that the women are fundamentally dissimilar.

The opening couplet of Phyllis' *Heroides* 2 reveals a very different frame of reference to Medea's *Heroides* 12. Where Medea styles herself as *regina* [*Her.* 12.1], Phyllis calls herself Demophoön's host:

Hospita, Demophoön, tua te Rhodopeia Phyllis
ultra promissum tempus abesse queror.

I, your host, Demophoön, Rhodopeian Phyllis complain to you that more than the
promised time has passed, and you are [still] absent.

[*Her.* 2.1-2]

The designation of Phyllis as *hospita* is programmatically placed – the very first word of the epistle. The structure of the line, with Phyllis and *hospita* balanced at either end, depicts Phyllis as a heroine in control of her narrative, just as is Medea. On the other hand, Phyllis' noun lacks the hierarchical connotations of Medea's *regina*, since *hospita* is more focused on the reciprocal responsibilities of the host-guest relationship. Crucially, Phyllis' prominent placement of her self-appointed role suggests that the heroine views the provision of service as an integral aspect of her role within the relationship. Like Oenone,

writer of *Heroides* 5, Phyllis orientates her letter using *queror*, establishing an instant division between hero and heroine as Phyllis claims the position of the injured party.¹¹⁴ Phyllis' complaint, however, appears less aggressive than Medea's opening attack on her hero. Medea accuses Jason of seeking her skills only for his own advancement [*Her.* 12.2], which casts the hero as self-serving and abusive. Phyllis, meanwhile, reproaches Demophoön that the 'promised hour' is past, reminding him of a commitment of his own making, one which represents a negotiation between his own interests and the heroine's. In contrast to Medea, Phyllis does not condemn the hero according to a unilateral standard, instead referring him to his own self-appointed obligation.

This sense of negotiation between two parties' interests is a major theme of *Heroides* 2. Phyllis is dissimilar to Medea – and indeed to many of the heroines – in that she does not present herself as the blameless victim of the hero's cruelty. Phyllis critiques her own behaviour throughout the epistle, engaging Ovid's reader by encouraging us to participate in the heroine's gradual realisation that things might have turned out differently, had she only acted differently herself.¹¹⁵

Dic mihi, quid feci, nisi non sapienter amavi?
 crimine te potui demeruisse meo.
 unum in me scelus est, quod te, scelerate, recepi;
 sed scelus hoc meriti pondus et instar habet.

Tell me, what did I do, except that I did not love wisely? By my very crime did I deserve you. The one crime that could be held against me is that I welcomed you, o wicked one. But this crime has the gravity and likeness of a good deed.

[*Her.* 2.27-30]

These lines summarise Phyllis' fundamental dilemma. In line 27 she asks herself whether all that she 'did' was to love unwisely. From a certain point of view, Phyllis' words can be taken as a catch-phrase for the *Heroides* collectively, where the heroines largely consider themselves the victims of love. Conversely, Phyllis is scrupulous in interrogating her own behaviour: she acknowledges that she took Demophoön in, and so precipitated the events of the rest of the myth. The same is true of Medea, we remember, who has to *decide* to assist Jason with his labours, yet we have already observed that Medea prefers to depict

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Her.* 5.4: *queror de te*.

¹¹⁵ I do not suggest that Ovid depicts Phyllis as believing that she could have affected Demophoön's failure to return. Rather, I mean that Phyllis appears to be aware that she could have spared herself some of the social humiliations that she suffers as a result of the affair with Demophoön, to which she refers at *Her.* 2.81-5. Presumably, if she had not been seduced by the hero, she would have had only her heartache to contend with if Demophoön never returned; she would not also have had to endure the censure of her own people.

her situation as the inevitable result of Jason's arrival in Colchis [*Her.* 12.7-12]. Phyllis is alive to the cruel irony of her lot, as she laments that the morally defensible deed should be the same deed that brought her so much grief. However, where another heroine might argue that the necessity of Demophoön's rescue absolves her of any responsibility for the events succeeding it, Phyllis confronts both her own actions and the inherent unfairness of the situation: the active verbs *feci*, *potui* and *recepi* are juxtaposed against the *crimen* and the repetition of *scelus* to centre the reader's attention on Phyllis' role in the scene.

Whereas Medea prefers to skate over her own questionable behaviour, Phyllis makes no attempt to mitigate the reader's view of her own agency. I propose that Phyllis' brutal honesty further emphasises for the reader the dissimilarity between *Heroides* 2 and 12, all the more since we know that the only person to suffer by Phyllis' 'crime' has been the heroine herself.

The incidence of moral vocabulary in *Heroides* 2 likewise illustrates the disjunction between the two heroines. Phyllis uses terms such as *crimen* to denote situations where the heroine herself is prepared to take ownership of both contributory action and consequent suffering. Medea, on the other hand, uses such terminology solely of the hero, although the reader is aware that terms such as *scelus* [*Her.* 12.141] apply equally well to Medea, given her history of murder and betrayal. I suggest that this observation is consistent with the women's opposing self-presentations. Phyllis uses the verb *credo* seven times in *Heroides* 2, in contrast to Medea who uses it only once, to draw a pejorative comparison between Jason's deceitfulness and her own faith in the hero.¹¹⁶ *Heroides* 2 is unusual in that Phyllis admits that she is chiefly concerned with her subjective experience: the incidence of *credo* shows the heroine framing her account so as to acknowledge the partisan nature of her viewpoint. In a marked departure from Medea's strategy, Phyllis does not attempt to persuade the hero that *Heroides* 2 offers an incontrovertible version of events. The effect of such vocabulary is to portray Phyllis as a less manipulative heroine than her counterpart: Medea is categorical in her denunciation of Jason, and acknowledges no possibility of error in her judgements.

Phyllis continues to demonstrate a different model of action to Medea by refusing to repent of assisting Demophoön.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Her.* 2.9-10; 2.49-52 and 2.63. Medea refers to her *credulitas* at *Her.* 12.120. I am discounting Medea's reflexive use of *credo* at *Her.* 12.118, since it represents a different usage of the verb – in the sense of 'to entrust oneself' rather than 'to believe'.

Nec moveor, quod te iuvi portuque locoque—
 debuit haec meriti summa fuisse mei!
 turpiter hospitium lecto cumulassem iugali
 paenitet, et lateri conseruisse latus.
 quae fuit ante illam, mallem suprema fuisset
 nox mihi, dum potui Phyllis honesta mori.
 speravi melius, quia me meruisse putavi;
 quaecumque ex merito spes venit, aequa venit.
 Fallere credentem non est operosa puellam
 gloria. simplicitas digna favore fuit.

I am not distressed because I helped you with a harbour and place of safety: these things ought to have been the extent of my kindness! I am ashamed that I disgracefully added to hospitality with the marriage bed, and that I pressed my side to your own. How I wish that the night before the wedding night might have been the last for me, when I could have died as Phyllis with her good name intact. I hoped for better because I thought that I deserved better; whatever hope comes from one's deserving nature comes justly. It is not much of a triumph to deceive a trusting girl. My very lack of guile was worthy of your approbation.

[*Her.* 2.55-64]

The first two couplets establish a clear polarity between Phyllis' hospitality on the one hand and her own role in allowing herself to be seduced by the hero on the other. The construction is significant because it shows Phyllis placing each event in a self-contained 'box', able to be assessed independently. It appears that, from Phyllis' point of view, the situation with Demophoön did not begin to deteriorate until the heroine moved from the role of host into that of lover; the message is that Phyllis should have been content with the former position and resisted the latter. *Summa* in line 56 passes an implicit moral judgement on Phyllis' affair, designating her action in helping Demophoön as justifiable, while her private relationship can only be labelled *turpis*. We perceive here a dissimilarity between Phyllis and Medea, in that Phyllis is prepared to accept moral responsibility for her liaison in a way that Medea does not. Moreover, Phyllis' differing assessments of her two actions suggest that the heroine did *not* rescue Demophoön in the hope of a relationship: it is clear from these lines that the affair followed quite a separate path. In turn, this reveals that Phyllis does not judge a situation according to what benefit she thinks she can derive from it, as we have observed Medea to do. Ovid constructs Phyllis as being capable of judging her merciful actions positively, whilst holding them in tension with the condemnation of her inadvisable relationship. In my view, Phyllis' moral framework makes her more sympathetic for the reader than is Medea, because Phyllis

explicitly rejects the absolutist view that one failed affair can negate any and all good deeds that preceded it.¹¹⁷

The themes of punishment and revenge offer perhaps the most significant disjunction between the heroines of *Heroides* 2 and 12. We have observed that a key aspect of Medea's Ovidian narrative is the heroine's determination to see Jason punished for his betrayal. Phyllis, on the other hand, is resistant to the notion of revenge.

saepe venenorum sitis est mihi; saepe cruenta
traiectam gladio morte perire iuvat.
colla quoque, infidis quia se nectenda lacertis
praebuerunt, laqueis inplicuisse iuvat.
stat nece matura tenerum pensare pudorem.
in necis electu parva futura mora est.

Often my thirst is for poison; often I resolve to perish by a bloody death, pierced by the sword. It pleases me to encircle my neck with the noose, because it offered itself to be embraced by your treacherous arms. I am resolved to repay my frail honour with a timely death. There will be only a small delay in my choosing how to die.

[*Her.* 2.139-44]

Here at the very end of *Heroides* 2, Phyllis discusses punishing not the hero but *herself*. Although Ovidian scholars have argued persuasively that Phyllis' suicide seems precipitate, since she cannot be certain that Demophoön is not intending to return, for our purposes it is enough to observe that Phyllis does not contemplate vengeance against the hero.¹¹⁸ At lines 135 to 138, Phyllis wonders how Demophoön would react if her corpse were to wash up on his home shore, but in her imaginings the event causes the hero no particular grief, and I propose that we can infer that Phyllis does not entertain suicide primarily as a means of making the hero suffer.¹¹⁹ The contrast between Medea and Phyllis

¹¹⁷ In this respect, Phyllis resembles Hypermnestra in *Heroides* 14, who declares that a person cannot be truly pious if they regret the trouble that pious actions may bring upon them [*Her.* 14.14]. Like Phyllis, Hypermnestra is able to separate the different parts of her history into actions that needed to be taken whatever the consequences, and those that ought to have been avoided. Both women stand in contrast to Medea's one-sided account of her history with Jason. For further analysis of the Hypermnestra story, see Chapter Two; also Fulkerson (2003).

¹¹⁸ The Ovidian Phyllis' lack of concern with revenge contrasts with aspects of the literary tradition, in which the heroine curses Demophoön [Apollod. *Epit.* 6.16-7]. Cf. Knox (1995), pp. 111-13. Regarding Phyllis' death, see Fulkerson (2002b), who argues that *Heroides* 2 depicts a case of hysterical suicide, where the heroine is determined to view herself as abandoned because she knows of other women – even within the *Heroides* – who have been left behind. Fulkerson suggests that Phyllis has no reason to imagine that her hero is not coming back, that Phyllis is 'carried away' by the idea of herself as a tragic heroine. For my reading, however, we need only establish that Phyllis operates according to a very different set of principles to Medea.

¹¹⁹ In this respect, Phyllis is quite different to the Dido of *Heroides* 7, on whose story Phyllis' response appears to be partly modeled. As Anderson observes (1973), p. 54, the Dido of *Heroides*

is underlined by the images of sword and flame, which offer a direct echo of Medea's myth.¹²⁰ In *Heroides* 2, Phyllis envisages using the weapons on herself, which shapes the reader's interpretation of the *cruenta mors* of lines 139 and 140: Phyllis entertains her own suffering, whereas Medea prefers to entertain that of other characters, as we have observed. In Medea's case, the significance of the weapons is twofold, because we know that the heroine has already used her deadly skills against Absyrtus and Pelias, and that she soon will against Creusa and the children. In *Heroides* 12, the images of sword and poison draw together the bloody actions of Medea's past with those that are shortly to follow in the Euripidean future; our impression is of a heroine whose life is threaded together by acts of violence. Phyllis, on the other hand, is contemplating the sword as a solution to her situation, depicting the heroine's violent action as a singular and unrepeatable event, rather than a defining characteristic of Phyllis' epistolary nature. Whereas, in Medea's poem, images of death remind the reader of the heroine's proven capacity for cruelty, in Phyllis' narrative the same images highlight the extent to which the heroine is *not* vengeful, and therefore not like Medea.

Phyllis' contemplation of suicide contributes to the characterisation of a heroine who critiques her own actions. In my reading, the second of the above couplets [*Her.* 2.141-2] is particularly important, in that Phyllis draws an explicit link between her desire for death and her seduction by Demophoön. In contrasting her submission to the noose with her former delight at the hero's embrace, Ovid's Phyllis demonstrates that she does not interpret her life purely in the context of things *done to* her. Instead, the heroine constructs the situation as a blend of things done by herself and by the hero, but most importantly as the result of the interplay between those two sets of actions. Notice the impersonal vocabulary here: Phyllis uses *iuvat* twice and *stat* once in only six lines. Both refer to

7 uses the threat of suicide to try to manipulate Aeneas into staying, setting her apart from her Virgilian predecessor. Lindheim (2003), p. 97, argues that Phyllis' suicide proceeds from a desire to bind herself to her lover forever, made evident through the epitaph at *Her.* 2.147-8. If Lindheim's assertion is correct, then the suicide is not about Phyllis at all, but about the hero, and I do not find this consistent with the heroine's self-presentation elsewhere in *Heroides* 2.

¹²⁰ There are, of course, other echoes from within the *Heroides*: Dido [*Her.* 7] and Canace [*Her.* 11] both die by the sword, and the blade features in both women's letters. The poison reminds us of Deianira's *Heroides* 9, in which the heroine contemplates suicide after accidentally killing Hercules by poisoning his cloak. Deianira also refers to her own mother's suicide by the sword [*Her.* 9.157]. Medea's myth, however, offers perhaps the strongest connection with *Heroides* 2, given that both blade and poison appear together in the tragedy which *Heroides* 12 so clearly foreshadows. On the imagery of death in *Heroides* 12, see Davis (2012), pp. 45-6. Also Lindheim (2003), pp. 127-9, on the tension between the poem's foreshadowing of Euripides' tragedy and the elegiac Medea's self-portrait as a *puella simplex*.

Phyllis' own behaviour, but the tone is – like the verbs – impersonal and unemotional. Crucially, the section is almost entirely devoid of 'blame' terminology. At line 140, Phyllis refers to Demophoön's 'treacherous arms'; yet two lines later she balances this against an acknowledgment of her own 'frail honour'. Gone are the earlier references to *crimen* and *scelus*: the effect is to present Phyllis as a heroine who has moved beyond unequivocal condemnations, whether of herself or the hero, into a more nuanced understanding of her position.

The contrast between *Heroides* 2 and 12 could hardly be greater, when we observe that Medea dwells on both her own *ira* and Jason's *poena* right up to the end of the letter [*Her.* 12.207-8]. Moreover, the declaration that 'no enemy of Medea's shall go unpunished' [*Her.* 12.182] reveals that the heroine of *Heroides* 12 attains none of Phyllis' critical distance on her own situation; Medea seems as much concerned with revenge at the end of the epistle as she is at the start. The difference, then, between Medea and Phyllis lies not in their circumstances but in their modes of dealing with them: Medea is focused on self-justification and revenge, where Phyllis is preoccupied with self-criticism and the expiation of her guilt. I propose that the dissimilarity between the two heroines serves once more to underline for the Ovidian reader the extent to which the elegiac Medea is unusual in her self-focus.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have observed that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 appears to be a very different epistolary personality to the Hypsipyle of *Heroides* 6. I have argued that Ovid characterises Medea and Hypsipyle according to opposing principles, depicting Medea as an active and independent heroine in control of her narrative, whereas Hypsipyle is reactive, subordinating her own concerns to those of other characters. This disjunction is reflected in the heroines' differing epistolary accounts. If we set out to identify the most important character in each poem, we realise that Jason is of greater importance in *Heroides* 6 than is Hypsipyle herself, consistent with the characterisation of Hypsipyle as reactive. Medea, on the other hand, is the central concern of her own missive, as befits her role as narrator of her own story.

Secondly, the women's presentations of Jason strengthen the reader's perception of a dichotomy between the two letters. In *Heroides* 6, Jason is an idealised figure on whom Hypsipyle dwells in the absence of the hero himself to direct her actions and feelings. Medea's *Heroides* 12, however, depicts Jason as a weak and ineffectual hero, serving to emphasise Medea's own skills by pejorative comparison. Moreover, we observe the same dynamics at work in the heroines' broader attitudes to interpersonal relationships. Ovid constructs Hypsipyle as a socially-grounded figure, deriving satisfaction and self-worth from her role as a member of a family and community. By contrast, the Medea of *Heroides* 12 appears self-absorbed: she judges her relationships according to the practical benefit that she can expect to derive, thereby characterising her as a heroine consumed with personal gain. Lastly, I suggest that Medea attempts to deflect blame from herself by focusing on the actions taken by other characters. In so doing, I propose that Ovid exposes a tension in *Heroides* 12 between the active personality of the writing heroine and the Medea who is allegedly the victim of the hero. Examined in light of Hypsipyle's consistently reactive personality, Medea's invocation of other characters appears as an opportunistic strategy, enabling the heroine to espouse a view of herself as blameless.

The two comparative analyses, of Penelope's *Heroides* 1 and Phyllis' *Heroides* 2, demonstrate that the elegiac Medea is dissimilar to other heroines as well as to Hypsipyle. In the case of *Heroides* 1, Penelope constructs herself as a heroine committed to her role as Ulysses' wife. Penelope depicts herself most often in the context of her family and household, highlighting by contrast the way in which Medea chooses not to focus on the

feelings or interests of any character except herself. In the same way, Phyllis' *Heroides* 2 demonstrates a very different model of behaviour to Medea's *Heroides* 12. Although Phyllis has also rescued a hero, only to be seduced and then abandoned, she resists the temptation of revenge. Phyllis' refusal to repent of helping the hero combines with her critique of her own actions to depict her as a heroine with contrasting priorities to Medea, who expressly blames Jason for everything. We have established, then, that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 is an unusual heroine by comparison with some of her sister-writers. In Chapter Two, I explore Ovid's poetic construction of Medea's letter, arguing that the poet's framing of his narrative supports the reading of the heroine's characterisation that we have here developed.

CHAPTER TWO

non audet scribere dextra:

Writing the Medea of the *Heroides*

In this chapter, I continue my analysis of Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 and Medea's *Heroides* 12, altering the focus from Chapter One to examine the way in which Ovid's composition of his heroines' narratives strengthens the view of their characters that we developed in the preceding discussion. I am here less interested in what the heroines have to say about themselves, than I am in the poetic techniques by which Ovid contrives to present his characters in a particular light. As in Chapter One, I argue that the poet depicts Hypsipyle as hero-focused, whereas Medea is self-focused.

The chapter has four sections. First, I consider the question of epistolary purpose, arguing that Ovid depicts his Medea as a heroine very different to that of Euripides; a heroine for whom the letter is a medium chosen to enable her to put her version of events 'on the record' without challenge. Second, I develop a reading of narrative space in *Heroides* 6 and 12, suggesting that Ovid places each heroine in specific physical contexts which mirror the personality traits that we have already identified – Hypsipyle's position is circumscribed and disempowered, while Medea's physical space serves to highlight her control over other characters.

Third, I propose a radically different framework for evaluating Medea's narrative, examining Ovid's construction of her character through the lens of forensic psychiatry. I observe that the Heroidean Medea appears to possess a number of personality traits which could be labelled psychopathic; in turn, this allows us to establish that Ovid's characterisation of Medea is both plausible and coherent. Finally, I look briefly at epistolary 'self-revelation' – the notion that Ovid uses the reader's knowledge of the

literary tradition to manipulate our perceptions of the heroines' Ovidian incarnations. Ovid encourages us to view Hypsipyle as all the more helpless by alluding to her fate in Euripides, just as we are likely to consider Medea to be invincible for the same reason. Two further comparative analyses complete the chapter: Oenone's *Heroides* 5 and Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14. Each discussion strengthens the view that, while Medea's *Heroides* 12 remains an unusual poem, the women of the *Heroides* are in general much more individual than they are alike.

2.1 The Epistolary Medium

In this section, I argue that the epistolary form of *Heroides* 12 reinforces Ovid's characterisation of Medea as a strategic heroine, preoccupied with achieving her own ends. In contrast to the dynamic environment of Euripides' tragedy, where Medea's actions and emotions are presented as the result of interaction with other characters, I suggest that the epistolary form is uniquely suited to the depiction of Ovid's self-focused heroine. Two aspects are important here: first, the premeditated nature of epistolary composition, which implies a deliberate decision and a specific communicative purpose on the part of the writing character. Second, the univocal form of the epistle, which presents only one character's version of events to the exclusion of the other figures in the myth. In my reading, Ovid uses this premeditated, one-sided literary medium to bring his Medea into 'conflict' with the heroine of Euripides: the familiar image of the volatile tragic heroine clashes with the controlled elegiac letter-writer of Ovid's conception, prompting the realisation that we are dealing in *Heroides* 12 with a very different sort of Medea from that of Euripides – cool, where Euripides' is raging.¹ Moreover, I propose that Ovid's selection of the epistolary form obviates the need for the poet to *tell* his reader that his Medea differs from the tragic heroine, since the very nature of epistolary composition invites us to infer this.

Key to my analysis is the question of epistolary purpose: what does Ovid convey to his reader about *why* Medea chooses to write a letter? In the case of the *Heroides*, divining the women's reasons for writing is far from straightforward.² Where a letter usually enables correspondents to facilitate an ongoing relationship through the exchange of information, Ovid's heroines have all been left behind or abandoned; thus their poems cannot be read as part of a dynamic interaction with the hero.³ I suggest that heroines such as Medea present us with a particular problem: in contrast to Penelope and Laodamia, who write in

¹ Readers will observe that I differ in this respect from scholars such as Nikolaidis (1985), who is of the view that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 is heavily dependent on the characterisation of Euripides.

² Much of contemporary discussion derives in one form or another from the position typified by Barchiesi (1993, 2001), who interprets the epistolary medium as a device enabling Ovid to create an artistic space for himself in the pre-existing stories of the literary tradition. However, the views of Barchiesi and of critics like him are concerned only with why *Ovid* should have chosen the epistolary medium for the *Heroides*. Conversely, I suggest that we also need to interrogate what Ovid intimates that his *heroines'* reasons for writing might be. My approach is closer to that of Fulkerson (2005, 2009), who treats the writing heroines as a community of authors, for whom the letter functions as a form of commentary on their own and each others' stories.

³ I refer only to the single epistles, *Heroides* 1 to 15. Readers will note that the question of epistolary purpose takes a rather different form in the case of Ovid's double epistles, *Heroides* 16 to 21.

ignorance of their husbands' fates and therefore in the hope of the hero's return, Medea knows herself to have been abandoned, and it is unclear to Ovid's reader why Medea should choose to write a letter.⁴

A great deal of scholarship on the *Heroides* proceeds from the assumption that the heroines write in order to persuade their heroes to return.⁵ I, however, argue that this seems unlikely in the case of Medea. Altman (1982) offers a useful way of thinking about Medea's apparent epistolary purpose, and likewise about the dissimilarity between Hypsipyle's poem and Medea's: 'given the letter's function...as a bridge between sender and receiver, the epistolary author can choose to emphasize either the distance or the bridge'.⁶ In my reading, Hypsipyle and Medea adopt opposite approaches: Hypsipyle attempts to emphasise the letter as bridge, while Medea – despite being physically closer to Jason – focuses on the division between sender and addressee that the presence of an epistle implies.

In Chapter One, we observed that Hypsipyle's letter is hero-focused, to the extent that the heroine subordinates her own wishes to those of Jason. In examining the opening of *Heroides* 6, we noticed that Hypsipyle manipulates her expectations of the hero so as to mirror what Jason is prepared to give, concerned only with the *grande obsequium* that a connection to the hero confers upon the heroine [*Her.* 6.18]. If we examine these aspects of *Heroides* 6 in the context of epistolary purpose, we perceive that Hypsipyle is offering Jason a way back to her – proposing to disregard his behaviour if it will secure their common future in Lemnos. In Altman's terminology, this is the letter as bridge, although the reader knows that Jason has no intention of crossing it.

⁴ For this reason, some scholars argue that Medea and Hypsipyle are not so much writing to Jason as they are to each other. Fulkerson (2005) interprets this in light of her community of authors, and Spentzou (2003) sees the women as part of a dialogue with their earlier or canonical portraits in Greek literature. I am not persuaded that such a justification is necessary – both women are, I suggest, writing *to* Jason, but for very different purposes.

⁵ Critics offering a contrasting viewpoint include Rosenmeyer (1997), who argues that the poems document the heroines' despair rather than embodying any persuasive purpose. Likewise, Farrell (1998), who treats the epistolary form as inherently feminine, arguing for a dichotomy between men as speakers and women as writers that does not derive primarily from the argumentative potential of either medium. Liveley (2008) provides a useful counterpoint, suggesting that the epistolary medium enables the heroines to revise their mythological histories in isolation from the literary tradition, rather than being concerned with conveying a particular point to the heroes. Finally, Landolfi (2000) seems ambivalent as to whether the letters aim to inspire the heroes' return, appearing to take the heroines' commentaries on their mythological histories to be of greater significance.

⁶ Altman (1982), p. 13.

I suggest that Ovid depicts a very different epistolary purpose for Medea's *Heroides* 12. Whereas Hypsipyle is concerned with Jason's present, Medea focuses almost exclusively on the past. The temporal distribution of the heroines' narratives reflects the women's dissimilar focuses. Hypsipyle spends 72 out of 164 lines retelling her own past with Jason. Less than half of *Heroides* 6 pertains to Hypsipyle's own time with the hero, and the remainder focuses on Jason's liaison with Medea, which is the hero's mythological present. Medea, meanwhile, allows her own past to take up 160 of 212 lines – just over three quarters of the epistle. I propose that the weighting of the two narratives – Hypsipyle's towards the present, Medea's towards the past – feeds into the question of each heroine's epistolary purpose, intimating that Hypsipyle views *Heroides* 6 as part of an ongoing struggle to reclaim Jason, while Medea's *Heroides* 12 is a historical recitation, not part of a current relationship.

Medea's unique Ovidian characterisation becomes visible when we evaluate the implications of the moment of composition that Ovid has chosen for *Heroides* 12. As we discussed in Chapter One, two-thirds of the way through the letter, Medea refers to her son's delight at seeing Jason's wedding procession from the doorway of his home [*Her.* 12.149-52]. Therefore, we know that Ovid's heroine is living in Corinth, and that Jason has already married Creusa. Moreover, the mythological chronology of Euripides tells us that the murders of Creon, Creusa and the children are imminent. I suggest that the key difference between Ovid's version of the myth and Euripides' – and thus between the characterisations of the two heroines – is that Medea's location comes as a surprise to the Ovidian reader.

Consider the effect on the audience of the nurse's opening speech in Euripides. The nurse laments that Medea ever came to Corinth, focusing the audience's attention both on the geographical location of the action, and on the fact that both protagonists are there together.⁷ The nurse's account of Jason's behaviour and Medea's consequent anguish orientates the tragedy around the hero's actions and the heroine's responses, constructing the play's central tension as the result of a binary interaction between the two most

⁷ Cf. Eur. *Med.* 1-24. Mastronarde (2002), pp. 160-1, notes that Euripides' decision to have the opening soliloquy voiced by a minor character rather than by Medea enables the poet to inspire both sympathy and trepidation in his audience: the summary of Medea's plight is delivered alongside the nurse's account of her own concerns for the children.

important characters.⁸ Although Jason does not enter the tragic stage until line 446, the audience is constantly aware of the hero, because he is so clearly present in the minds of the speaking actors. *Heroides* 12 creates an almost opposite impression, since the epistolary format is much more directed by the preoccupations of the writing heroine than is Euripides' dramatic presentation of the narrative. *Heroides* 12 lacks the clear spatio-temporal boundaries of Euripides' play: the first half of the poem is focused exclusively on the events of the past, making no comment on the present location of the writing Medea. Crucially, the Ovidian reader has no reason to wonder when, where or *why* the heroine might be composing her missive, since the first half of the letter deals only with the period up to the death of Pelias. In contrast to Euripides, we do not need to know when or where Medea writes in order to understand the events of Ovid's poem.

At line 133, the Ovidian Medea makes the first explicit reference to a recent event, enabling the reader to position the heroine precisely within the mythological chronology.⁹

ausus es—o iusto desunt sua verba dolori!—
 ausus es "Aesonia" dicere "cede domo!"
 iussa domo cessi natis comitata duobus
 et, qui me sequitur semper, amore tui.
 ut subito nostras Hymen cantatus ad aures
 venit et accenso lampades igne micant
 tibiaque effundit socialia carmina vobis,
 at mihi funerea flebiliora tuba,
 pertimui, nec adhuc tantum scelus esse putabam,
 sed tamen in toto pectore frigus erat.

You dared – O, words fail me to express my righteous grief – to say: "Leave the home of the son of Aeson". I left the home as instructed, accompanied by my two sons and by my love for you, which follows me always. When suddenly a song of Hymen came to my ears, and the torches shone with kindled fire, and the pipes poured out for you a wedding tune, but for me it was more tearful than a funeral trumpet. I was afraid, nor did I yet believe that such great wickedness could be, but nonetheless my whole breast was chilled.

[*Her.* 12.133-42]

This passage marks a clear break in the letter, from the comparatively distant to the very recent past.¹⁰ Immediately preceding these lines is the oblique reference to the death of

⁸ Cf. Foley (1989).

⁹ Fulkerson (2009) offers a concise summary of the debate as to where *Heroides* 12 fits into the mythological chronology.

¹⁰ Otis (1938), p. 214, n. 89, argues that we should understand *Heroides* 12 as comprising two halves – the first Apollonian, the second Euripidean. On the transition between these so-called halves, see Palmer (1898, rp 2005), p. 396, Jacobson (1974), p. 110 and Bessone (1997) pp. 193-5. Palmer regards the abrupt change in Medea's tone as a failing in Ovid's narrative composition, arguing that '[the poet] *ad eventum festinat* too fast', p. 396; Bessone, however, notes the

Pelias which we discussed in Chapter One. From the reader's point of view, we are suddenly jolted from Iolchus to Corinth, and thereby into the narrative chronology of Euripides' play.¹¹ With no obvious explanation, the Ovidian Medea moves from an avowal that Jason ought to praise her for her actions, to a strident accusation that he made her give up her home. We notice once more Medea's tendency to compare the cost of one action with the value of its reward: Medea murders Pelias and Jason throws her from his home, reprising the A / B construction that we have identified in other parts of the letter. More importantly, for the first time in Ovid's conception of the myth the reader becomes aware of Medea's physical proximity to Jason, as emphasised by the heroine's recollection of the wedding songs that she could hear from her dwelling.

I suggest that the abrupt revelation of the time and place in which Medea is composing *Heroides* 12 enables the poet to draw attention to the heroine's location within the existing mythological chronology. In turn, the Ovidian Medea's proximity to the events of Euripides shows Ovid forcing a 'collision' between the stages of the tragic and elegiac narratives, encouraging the reader to observe the differences between the Ovidian and Euripidean Medeas, and also between Medea and her sister-writers of the *Heroides*. We notice that the other women of Ovid's collection compose their letters in situations either of geographical separation from the hero, or of physical imprisonment. Oenone, for example, resorts to a letter because Paris is no longer with her; Hypermnestra because she is in chains. Canace's situation is perhaps the closest to Medea's, in that the heroine and her brother are probably in the same house when Canace composes *Heroides* 11 as her suicide note.¹² Yet even here, Canace's imprisonment is crucial – she cannot speak to her beloved brother [*Her.* 11.5-6], and thus the medium of the letter is chosen for her in an important respect. Medea is singular in that she *chooses* to write, when the Euripidean tradition tells us that she does not have to.¹³ Ovid's reader is familiar with the climactic

importance of the passage: 'il racconto...assume le movenze del dramma', p. 194, consistent with her interest in Ovid's depiction of Medea as moving towards the tragic genre.

¹¹ Cf. Barchiesi (2001) and Kennedy (1984) for two compelling analyses of the significance for the external reader of the heroine's moment of composition. Barchiesi, in particular, suggests that the poetic success of the collection turns on the reader's awareness of the tension between the existing tradition and Ovid's incursion into it.

¹² The same is probably true of Phaedra's *Heroides* 4, although it, too, differs from *Heroides* 12, as I discuss briefly below. Cf. Knox (1995), pp. 257-77, for some useful comments on Canace's composition.

¹³ Despite the obvious physical barriers between many of the heroes and heroines, Farrell (1998) takes this as true of all of the heroines in some sense – that they write because they want to, and because it is an appropriate medium for their concerns. He argues for a 'clear polarity between men,

confrontation between hero and heroine at the end of the first half of Euripides' play, and this reminds us that we have no reason to imagine that it is *necessary* for the Ovidian Medea to write to Jason.

Ovid's narrative brings this very aspect of Medea's epistolary identity to the fore, as the heroine directly contradicts the Euripidean version of events. Whereas, according to the Ovidian heroine, Jason said '*cede domo*' [*Her.* 12.134], we know that in Euripides the hero does exactly the opposite, declaring that Medea could have kept her home had she not opposed his new marriage so violently [*Med.* 446-64]. From the reader's point of view, with the tragic setting so clearly in mind, the incongruity of Medea's epistolary approach becomes evident, since Ovid offers no suggestion that his Medea is imprisoned in her home, or that Jason is actively avoiding her. The tragic hero is prepared to face Medea's anger, so why does Ovid's heroine need the ruse of an elegiac letter?

In short, I argue that, in the case of the other *Heroides*, the epistolary form is a function of Ovid's plot – the women have few other means of attempting communication with their heroes.¹⁴ Medea's situation is less clear: she *can* speak to Jason, we imagine, and yet she does not. The epistolary form thus becomes in *Heroides* 12 a function not of the poet's plot but of his *characterisation*, and its effect is to depict Medea as a heroine for whom the composition of the letter is a deliberate strategy, rather than the only practical means of self-expression.¹⁵ Altman (1982) argues that the medium of the letter can dictate the writer's message, rather than being dictated by it.¹⁶ The same is true, I suggest, of the characterisation of the writing Medea: Ovid capitalises on the premeditated nature of the epistolary form in depicting a heroine whose approach to communication is coolly

speech and deception on the one hand, and women, writing and honesty on the other', p. 329. I, however, suggest that Medea's letter can be read very differently.

¹⁴ Rosenmeyer (1997) interprets this as a key correlation between the *Heroides* and Ovid's exile poetry. For Rosenmeyer, both are born out of isolation and disconnection.

¹⁵ Phaedra is the only other heroine for whom this is the case. Since the queen can hardly proposition Hippolytus directly, *Heroides* 4 allows Phaedra an avenue of expression with greater dramatic and persuasive possibilities than she could achieve by choosing face-to-face interaction. In contrast to Medea, however, Phaedra is open about her decision to commit her illicit feelings to paper. Consider *Her.* 4.14, where the heroine states that Amor prompted her to write: '*scribe! dabit victas ferreus ille manus*'. Medea and Phaedra are therefore as dissimilar as they are alike.

Although both heroines choose the epistolary medium in preference to a dynamic confrontation, Phaedra acknowledges her reasons for doing so, where Medea's lack of transparency marks her as a more manipulative character.

¹⁶ Altman (1982), p. 8.

strategic. In turn, the reader's interpretation of Medea's character cannot help but be influenced by her selection of the letter as a means of articulating her concerns.

If we accept that the Ovidian Medea appears to have chosen the epistolary form for a strategic purpose, then we observe that the necessarily indirect nature of the letter is beneficial to Ovid's depiction of a self-focused heroine, interested chiefly in her own point of view. In contrast to Euripides, where hero and heroine are forced to interact, the univocal form of *Heroides* 12 enables Medea to exclude Jason's viewpoint on the events of the past.¹⁷ Since the bias towards Medea's perspective derives in part from the first-person form of the letter, the heroine's determination to justify her actions at the hero's expense is less obvious than it is in Euripides, where the back-and-forth between Medea and Jason exposes so brutally the partisan nature of each character's assertions.¹⁸

In Euripides, the tragic form dictates that the poet create a set of characters whose behaviours and opinions are conditioned by their interactions with each other: this enables the tragedian to explore the extent to which events need not be predetermined, but rather informed by a particular set of stresses.¹⁹ In Ovid's *Heroides* 12, the situation is the opposite. In order to make best use of the epistolary form, Ovid needs to build a character who can craft a version of events without input from other characters; in a communicative sense, this makes for a successful letter. For our purposes, the significance of these differing literary forms lies in the observation of their dissimilar effects on the reader's perception of each heroine's characterisation.

In the tragedy, we understand that Medea is reacting to Jason's treatment of her, since the audience has experienced 'first-hand' the heroine's catalogue of Jason's abuse and the hero's own disavowal of Medea's perspective. As we hear the hero recasting Medea's assertions to represent himself in a better light, we begin to comprehend the rage that

¹⁷ Important discussions of epistolary principles generally would include Altman (1982) and Rosenmeyer (2001). Also Brownlee (1990), whose discussion is excellent, although focusing on first-person narratives more generally. Contrasting views include Kauffman (1986), for whom the heroines' writing is quite literally their 'life', putting off the moment of death through self-expression.

¹⁸ Farrell (1998) takes a completely opposing view of the role of epistolarity in the *Heroides*. He argues that the women of the *Heroides* should be read as being engaged in acts of genuine self-disclosure for the heroes' benefit. In contrast to my approach to Medea, Farrell reads Ovid's elegiac heroines as generally disingenuous in their epistolary disclosures.

¹⁹ The extent to which Euripides' play trades on this tension is evident from the vast scholarly literature devoted to establishing which stress or stresses are the most significant in informing Medea's actions. Knox (1977) offers a useful and succinct discussion of some key aspects.

motivates the tragic heroine's decisions. Conversely, in Ovid, the effect of the first-person narration is to portray Medea as a heroine concerned with recording her own version of events, without allowing the hero the privilege of dispute.²⁰ Having noted the Ovidian Medea's repeated denigration of Jason, it seems unlikely that the heroine wants him back, nor is the hero likely to be mollified by Medea's account of his personal qualities.²¹ I suggest that the disjunction between Medea's dismissal of Jason's views and the fact that she nonetheless troubles herself to write to him supports the position that the elegiac Medea is seeking to present her epistle as the true and definitive – because the only – version of events. In turn, this amplifies the reader's sense that we are dealing in Ovid with a heroine concerned with achieving her own ends, one who is not particularly interested in whether she can persuade the hero to agree with her.

Solitude and Premeditation

Secondly, I argue that the epistolary form of *Heroides* 12 is significant for a reading of Medea's Ovidian characterisation because the solitude of the letter-writer introduces the possibility of premeditation into the murders of Creusa and the children. In Euripides, the audience observes clearly the point at which Medea decides on her final course of action, and we understand that it proceeds from the altercations we have seen throughout the play:

²⁰ Scholars have observed something very similar about Dido's *Heroides* 7. Miller (2004), p. 58, describes Dido's narrative as a 'rhetorical *tour de force*' in reinterpreting the events of Virgil; however, I suggest that there are two key differences between Dido and Medea. Firstly, like Phaedra, Dido is explicit about her epistolary purpose. In the opening lines of the poem, Dido declares that *perdere verba leve est* [*Her.* 7.6], compared to the preceding losses of her lover, her reputation and her self-respect. She does not attempt to conceal the fact that her letter represents an attempt to stand as her own witness. By contrast, Medea does not declare such a purpose at any point in *Heroides* 12, leaving the reader to infer it; in turn, this suggests that the heroine does not wish to have her testamentary intentions under the reader's microscope. Secondly, Ovid's Dido tries to persuade Aeneas to stay in Carthage [cf. *Her.* 7.7-12]. Therefore, within the story world of *Heroides* 7, Dido appears to be setting herself up in competition with Virgil, attempting to change the established events of her myth. Given that Ovid's reader knows that Aeneas leaves Carthage and founds Rome, Dido's entreaties in *Heroides* 7 serve to depict the heroine as struggling fruitlessly against the might of the literary tradition. Medea's *Heroides* 12 is different in that the writing heroine does not attempt to revise the crucial events of the preceding mythological tradition; Ovid merely presents the same events through the lens of a different characterisation. By changing the emphasis, the motivation, the personality of the heroine, but *not* the events, Ovid's poem infiltrates and becomes part of the literary tradition in a way that is impossible for Dido's revisionist *Heroides* 7. Dido's attempted confrontation with Virgil renders her letter narratively impotent in a way that Medea's is not, because Medea's rests on looking at the Greek sources from a new angle rather than directly challenging them. For alternative readings of *Heroides* 7, see Desmond (1993) and Anderson (1973).

²¹ See Knox (1986b), one of the few scholars who agree with me that Medea does not appear to want Jason back.

we are able to watch the heroine move from the general accusation that Jason will ‘regret’ his marriage to Creusa, to the specific articulation of her decision to kill Creusa and the children.²² I suggest that the audience can comprehend the shift from comparatively reasonable heroine to raging monster, because we have witnessed the provocation Jason has offered, the insults and self-justification which rate Medea’s feelings so low. Moreover, we have heard Creon’s concerns that Medea will do something dangerous, enabling us to view Creon’s stated fears as perhaps the very seed of Medea’s plan.²³ In short, Euripides encourages his audience to observe the progression from accusations made in the heat of the moment to a terrible act committed in rage.²⁴

In Ovid, however, if we internalise the image of the heroine sitting, presumably alone, in the quiet of her own chamber, occupied in the time-consuming process of composing and physically inscribing a letter, we arrive at quite a different characterisation of Medea. In Chapter One, we noted that the foreshadowed violence at the end of *Heroides* 12 intimates that Medea is already thinking along the grim lines that will lead to her children’s deaths. The rhetorical phrasing of lines 207 and 208 – *sed quid praedicere poenam / attinet? –* recalls Medea’s casual dismissal of the murder of Pelias, which is signposted by *quid referam?*²⁵ The implication for the reader of such a striking verbal echo is that Ovid’s heroine feels a similar lack of concern about any future acts of violence as she does about those that she committed in the past. Line 209 is also relevant, where Medea declares *quo feret ira sequar. facti fortasse pigebit*. I propose that the most likely effect of this line is to remind the reader that we are yet to see any evidence of ‘regret’ in the Ovidian Medea. These aspects of Medea’s epistolary personality drastically alter our understanding of the heroine’s motivations as previously explored by Euripides. If, as Ovid suggests, the elegiac Medea is the sort of heroine who can calmly entertain the prospect of intrafamilial violence, as we have observed her to recall the violence towards Pelias, then Ovid is presenting us with a heroine whose nature is inherently violent.

²² Cf. Eur. *Med.* 650–818, especially *Med.* 804–18, where Medea articulates her decision to kill Creusa and the children.

²³ Cf. Creon’s admission that he is afraid of Medea [*Med.* 282–91].

²⁴ See here Papadopoulou (1997) for an excellent discussion of the significance of Medea’s fourth speech in Euripides, where she resolves to kill the children. Papadopoulou argues that the interior monologue structure is vital to enable Euripides to keep the audience on Medea’s ‘side’ while he unravels the various strands of her motivation for the filicide.

²⁵ Cf. *Her.* 12.129–30: *Quid referam Peliae natus pietate nocentes / caesaque virginea membra paterna manu?*

In Ovid's conception, Medea's violent acts do not appear to proceed, as they arguably do in Euripides, from pain experienced in the heat of the moment. Instead, the image of the solitary writer creates the impression that the Ovidian Medea's actions are coolly planned as the natural and defensible reaction to injury which is temporally divorced from the heroine's response. In Euripides, Medea's violence appears as the bursting of a dam: the heroine has experienced Jason's behaviour over a period of time, but the actual deeds derive from her overwhelming rage at the hero's most recent dismissal of her concerns – the proverbial 'final straw'. The alteration from Euripides to Ovid, from killing that is explosive and unforeseen to murder that is cold-bloodedly entertained as the final solution to a problem, presents us with an entirely different heroine.²⁶ The unique suitability of the epistolary medium lies in the fact that it is not necessary for Ovid to demonstrate to the reader that his Medea is a very different character to Euripides'. I argue that we can hardly avoid inferring this from the letter's very form, from its implication of distance and of dispassionate composition, which raises several important questions about Medea's motives left unprovoked by Euripides' decision to address the myth in a tragedy rather than a letter.

The final third of *Heroides* 12 offers perhaps the most explicit intimation that Medea is employing her missive as a device to exculpate herself for events both past and future. The heroine refers to the forthcoming violence only twice in her poem, at lines 175 to 184, where she exclaims 'let [Creusa] weep!'; and at lines 204 to 212, where she dwells on Jason's future 'punishment'. In between these two sections, Medea makes the letter's only direct reference to her sons, apart from the child's earlier appearance as the narrator of Jason's wedding:

si tibi sum vilis, communis respice natos:
 saeviet in partus dira noverca meos.
 et nimium similes tibi sunt, et imagine tangor
 et quotiens video, lumina nostra madent.

If I am worth little to you, think on our shared sons; a harsh step-mother will be cruel to my offspring. They are too like you, and I am touched by the resemblance, and as often as I see them my eyes shed tears.

[*Her.* 12.187-90]

²⁶ Barchiesi (1993), p. 345, asserts that *Heroides* 12 makes the point that 'in a different setting, [Medea] could be different'. I would take this one step further, to suggest that *Heroides* 12 reveals the extent to which Medea is different in the Ovidian setting, and to which our understanding of a character's difference or similarity is shaped by the literary context in which we are accustomed to observing them.

These lines allegedly reflect Medea's concern that Jason is not looking out for his sons' interests; however, the scene acquires an unpleasant hue from the couplets' location between two unambiguous indications of Medea's capacity for savagery.²⁷ Medea's accusation that Creusa may prove to be a *dura noverca* appears horrifying to the reader, who is aware that Medea herself will soon be more terrible than any fictional step-mother could be.²⁸ The heroine's instruction to Jason *communis respice natos* underlines Medea's own failure to 'consider' her children in *Heroides* 12 – as we have already observed, the reader is hardly aware of their existence until very late in the letter, and we can perceive no attachment between the heroine and her sons. Even Medea's declaration that the boys resemble Jason 'too much' has a double edge: given Medea's determination to dwell on Jason's deserved punishment, we cannot help but interpret the figures of the boys as Jason-substitutes caught up in their mother's desire for vengeance.²⁹ Line 190 is perhaps the most ambiguous. As often as she sees her sons, Medea weeps, and yet we cannot tell whether this is because she grieves for the boys' broken family or because she sees only their hateful connection to their absent father.³⁰ The threat of violence underlies Medea's every sentiment in this part of *Heroides* 12; these lines draw together in the reader's mind the images of cruelty and of the heroine's children, creating a powerful impression of foreshadowing.³¹ It is this foreshadowing which leads us inevitably to the conclusion that Ovid's narrative is constructing the killings as the result of premeditation on Medea's part.

²⁷ On this point, see Davis (2012), pp. 37-8, who reads Medea's tears as an explicit foreshadowing of the heroine's tears immediately before the murders in Euripides [*Med.* 90-5; 922-5; 1012-16].

²⁸ Readers may recall here the equivalent incident in Euripides, which I suggest mirrors Ovid's framing of Medea's state of mind in *Heroides* 12. In Ovid, Medea expresses fear about Creusa's motives and intentions, but in Euripides we are first encouraged to feel unease about the children's fates when the nurse reveals that she fears Medea's violent temper. [Cf. *Med.* 115-30.] In my view, the parallel between the Euripidean and Ovidian scenes makes it difficult for Ovid's reader to credit Medea's alleged anxiety about the children. Instead, I suggest that Ovid is drawing his reader's attention to the heroine's manipulative tendencies: Creusa is not a proven danger to other people, but Medea is.

²⁹ It may be worth comparing Medea's attitude here in *Heroides* 12 with her second outburst in Euripides [*Med.* 111-14]. In the tragedy, Medea explicitly wishes that her children would die *along with* their father, suggesting that she views the two parts of her family as inextricably linked. Cf. Burnett (1973), who discusses the role of the family more broadly in framing the Euripidean heroine's desire for revenge.

³⁰ Cf. Bloch (2000), pp. 201-2, who observes that the entirety of Jason's new life in Corinth stems from the freedom provided by Medea's magical service. He argues that Ovid casts Jason as unheroic throughout *Heroides* 12, just as some scholars have argued vis-à-vis the hero of Apollonius. On the model of heroism depicted in the *Argonautica*, see Beye (1982).

³¹ Cf. Bessone (1997), p. 252: 'la superficie patetica ha un sottofondo sinistro: cela precise prefigurazioni ironiche dell'infanticidio'.

I suggest that Ovid's selection of the epistolary medium highlights how dangerous the act of writing can be for certain types of heroine: in Medea's case, the unmediated nature of the letter allows her to 'test out' disastrous scenarios for the future, and to rationalise her own culpability.³² The foreshadowing of the children's deaths goes some way towards explaining what Ovid's heroine may be about in composing *Heroides* 12. She is justifying her chosen course of action by placing it in the context of her history with Jason, as seen from her own point of view. The imminent murders of Creusa, Creon and the children form little more than the next episode in a life for which Medea herself cannot be held responsible.³³ At lines 183 and 184, Medea laments that her words are not 'fitting' for her soul:

Quod si forte preces praecordia ferrea tangunt,
nunc animis audi verba minora meis.

But if, by chance, my entreaties touch an iron-clad heart, hear now words too humble for my true nature.

[*Her.* 12.183-4]

The heroine presents her words as a 'lesser' instrument, not suited to the true expression of her desires. Within the story world, this appears as an exclamation of frustration, an inability to find words that will accurately convey a particular emotional state. Outside the story world, however, viewed through the lens of Ovid's epistolary construction, the reader can interpret Medea's 'lesser' words as the poet's warning of the 'greater' actions soon to come in Euripides.³⁴ *Heroides* 12 becomes to the external reader merely the dress rehearsal for the real thing, offering a striking link between epistolary composition as the heroine's empty stage, and the heroine-playwright who will carry her terrible plan over into action. In my reading, Ovid's poem thus conspires to present Medea as a premeditated killer and as a relentlessly self-focused heroine.

³² Fulkerson (2005), pp. 23-40, calls this 'reading dangerously'. In light of Medea's repeatedly violent behaviour, this seems a frighteningly apt designation.

³³ See Huskey (2004) for a persuasive, albeit unfavourable, reading of *Heroides* 12 which focuses on Medea's ability to circle around the issue of blame.

³⁴ As Barchiesi notes (1993), p. 343, Medea is about to move from 'writing action' to 'scenic action'. In Medea referring to her words as 'lesser', I see a reflection of the status of the *Heroides* as a collection – always the lesser counterparts of the 'greater' poets and playwrights of the epic and tragic traditions. It is worth considering, I think, whether Ovid is here exercising his prodigious capacity for irony. The elegiac Medea is 'lesser' in a literary sense, but Ovid's manipulation of our understanding of Medea's motives makes his heroine at least as complex, if not more so – arguably 'greater' – than Euripides' tragic figure. Cf. also Davis (2012), who offers the most persuasive discussion of Medea as a character poised on the brink of entry into the tragic genre.

2.2 Imagery and Context

In this section, I argue that Ovid's depiction of physical space in *Heroides* 6 and 12 supports my reading of the women's dissimilar characterisations. I suggest that the spatial imagery of Hypsipyle's narrative reflects the sense of powerlessness that we have identified in other aspects of *Heroides* 6. By contrast, *Heroides* 12 is an unusually 'spaceless' poem: Ovid gives Medea an explicit spatial frame only infrequently, contributing to the reader's impression that the heroine is focused more on herself than on any character or place around her. This general absence of narrative framing in *Heroides* 12 contrasts with three instances where Ovid *does* place Medea in a specific physical context; in my view, these strengthen the characterisation of Medea as a heroine interested in the exercise of her own control.

Hypsipyle's tower

In the preceding chapter, I argued that the Hypsipyle of *Heroides* 6 is hero-focused, allowing the figure of Jason to dominate the poem, and relegating her own concerns to the background of the narrative. At the start of this chapter, we noted that Hypsipyle seeks to retain her connection to Jason, while the reader knows that the hero has no intention of returning. In my reading, the spatial imagery of *Heroides* 6 underlines Hypsipyle's isolation: the poet positions his heroine within her story world in such a way as to highlight for the external reader the heroine's disempowerment. Consider Hypsipyle's account of the Argo's departure:

Ultimus e sociis sacram conscendis in Argon;
illa volat, ventus concava vela tenet.
caerula propulsae subducitur unda carinae:
terra tibi, nobis adspiciuntur aquae.
in latus omne patens turris circumspicit undas;
huc feror et lacrimis osque sinusque madent.
per lacrimas specto cupidaeque faventia menti
longius adsueto lumina nostra vident.

The last of your companions, you embarked upon the sacred Argo. That ship flew; the wind billowed the sails outward. The blue-green wave was churned up from under the hull as the ship was pushed along. You were looking at the land, I at the sea. There is a tower that looks out over the water, lying open on every side. Thither I was carried, and both my face and my breast were wet with tears. I looked through my tears, and my eyes – kind to my desirous spirit – saw further than they are accustomed to.

[*Her.* 6.65-72]

Notice that Ovid emphasises the negative implications of Hypsipyle's physical environment, by drawing an implicit comparison between the departure narrative of *Heroides* 6 and those of the other heroines. Several of the writing women – Phyllis, Oenone, Ariadne and Laodamia – include an anecdote about the departure of the hero, yet Hypsipyle's account is strikingly different in that she watches Jason leave from a *turris*, the only man-made structure to feature in a Heroidean departure narrative.³⁵ I suggest that Hypsipyle's tower forms part of a pattern in the *Heroides* whereby architectural space is characterised as oppressive to the writing heroine. In Penelope's *Heroides* 1, for example, the heroine describes her struggle against the suitors [*Her.* 1.105-6], lamenting her inability to drive them from her home: *nec mihi sunt vires inimicos pellere tectis* [*Her.* 1.109]. Likewise Dido, who indicates that she feels embattled inside her partially-constructed Carthage: *bella tument. bellis peregrina et femina temptor / vixque rudis portas urbis et arma paro* [*Her.* 7.121-2]. If we add to these the catalogue of heroines who are literally imprisoned – Briseis in Agamemnon's tent, the king's battlefield palace; Canace and Hypermnestra, who are detained in their familial homes by their fathers – we realise that few if any of Ovid's writing women are permitted to feel safe or happy in man-made spaces.³⁶

I advocate that we read Hypsipyle's tower as an indication of the heroine's entrapment, both literal and figurative. From this point of view, the tower serves two purposes. First, it tethers Hypsipyle to her landscape in Lemnos, obliquely emphasising the extent to which Hypsipyle is 'stuck' in a place in which the hero is not. However, the *turris* also restricts Hypsipyle to a specific location *within* her home territory. Instead of allowing his heroine the illusion of free movement, Ovid places Hypsipyle in a static environment, in a structure raised high above the earth, depicting the heroine as remote even from her own landscape, inhabiting a space that prevents her from interacting fully with her community.³⁷ Ovid's image of Hypsipyle recalls the introduction of Dido in *Aeneid* 1, where Dido is seated high up on her throne in the temple of Juno.³⁸ The heroine is described as *saepta armis* [*Aen.*

³⁵ Knox (1995), p. 186, draws a parallel with Hero's tower. Cf. *Her.* 19.35-6: *protinus in summa vigilantia lumina turre / ponimus*.

³⁶ Bolton (2009), pp. 275-6, notes that Penelope, Briseis, Hermione and Canace are all stationary inside their bedrooms, arguing for a link with the heroines' poses of wifely fidelity. I do not disagree, but we must acknowledge that for all of the heroines – even the soon-to-be-rescued Penelope – the bedroom is also an expression of the women's entrapment within their domestic spaces. They could not leave even if they wanted to.

³⁷ Knox (1995), p. 189, advocates taking *patens* to mean 'exposed'. This, I think, clearly conveys the sense of Hypsipyle's isolation.

³⁸ Cf. *Aen.* 1.494-508.

1.506], and later she has to turn her face downward to acknowledge the Trojans [*Aen.* 1.561]. As in *Heroides* 6, these images of Dido suggest that she is separated, perhaps unhappily, from her people. However, the scene in *Aeneid* 1 is altered by the preceding simile comparing Dido to Diana.³⁹ The goddess' dancing and the crowd of thronging nymphs create an impression of purposeful and collective movement; it is clear to Virgil's reader that Dido-as-Diana is in control of her own physical space and that she is crucial to the realisation of her community's endeavours. The temple scene turns on the reader's awareness of the unresolved, yet not unhelpful, tension between Dido's public and private selves – she is both the Carthaginians' beloved queen and a lonely widow.

By contrast, Ovid permits Hypsipyle no hopeful tension: the tower works only to highlight her isolation, because the dominant images are those of restriction and stagnation.⁴⁰ Unlike Dido's Carthage, which is quite literally rising up around her, Hypsipyle's *turris* allows for no progress.⁴¹ Instead, Ovid describes his heroine as motionless whilst watching the *hero's* progress – notice the waves moving under the keel of the *Argo*.⁴² Once again, we see Hypsipyle in a situation where she is reacting to other characters' decisions; in line 69, she climbs up to the tower to see the ship, yet even here she selects a passive verb – *huc feror*. I propose that the tower is emblematic of Hypsipyle's epistolary powerlessness, rendered literally through Ovid's spatial framing of the heroine's narrative.

More significant are the elements that Ovid chooses to leave out of Hypsipyle's departure narrative. For several of the other heroines, the shore features prominently in their descriptions either of the hero's departure or of the heroine's anguished wait for his return. Bolton (2009) argues that the shore forms part of the gendered vocabulary of space in the *Heroides*, where the beach delineates the boundary of the women's domestic environments. The heroines are not permitted to cross the sea, which is the domain of male exploration, and so the shore symbolises the women's entrapment by literally (litorally?) confining

³⁹ *Aen.* 1.498-502.

⁴⁰ In this respect, Hypsipyle's departure narrative contrasts with that of Ariadne's *Heroides* 10, which depicts a much greater sense of physical movement as the heroine searches for the absent Theseus. [Cf. *Her.* 10.11-40.]

⁴¹ See Bolton (2009), pp. 280-1.

⁴² The heroine's static pose and the hero's progress recall Kauffman's focus (1986) on epistolarity as a response to 'death' – both the character's literal death, which is put off by inscribing the letter, but also the figurative death implied by a lack of change or growth, which Kauffman sees as inseparable from the feminine narrative. In a similar vein, see Russ (1972), who discusses the limited roles and plots that are permitted to women in written narrative.

their movements.⁴³ However, I propose that the beach serves a second and more complex purpose in the *Heroides*, operating as the space of potential. While the shore is the place of the ship's departure, it is also theoretically the location of the ship's return; the beach is therefore as much a space of hope for the writing heroines as it is a place of loss.⁴⁴ Since there can be no happy endings for the women of the *Heroides*, the 'space of hope' may seem redundant;⁴⁵ nonetheless, the argument holds when we observe that Ovid's heroines move *from* the beach *to* other less accessible locations in parallel with the breakdown of their relationships.

So we find Oenone on the shore when she waves Paris off to Sparta; she tells us that her tears make the sand moist [*Her.* 5.56]. These, however, are the tears of separation: Oenone believes at this point that Paris will return to her, as attested by the hero's vow of fidelity at *Her.* 5.29-32. When it comes to Paris' return, Ovid has his heroine position herself on a *moles nativa* [*Her.* 5.61], a kind of breakwater that serves to 'hold back the waves' [*Her.* 5.62].⁴⁶ Therefore, at the point at which Oenone espies Helen's purple dress on the deck of the ship [*Her.* 5.65] and realises that her lover is lost to her, she inhabits a space where the hero could not reach her, even if he wanted to. Oenone's *moles nativa* underlines in spatial terms the heroine's physical and emotional division from her hero, just as the breakwater offers an obstacle to any approaching ship.

We observe the same dynamic in Ariadne's *Heroides* 10. Since Theseus flees by stealth, Ariadne does not participate in the hero's departure; her letter nonetheless reflects the characterisation of the shore as the place where hope is not yet lost. When the heroine first wakes and realises the hero's absence, she tells us that she wandered up and down the

⁴³ Bolton (2009) also argues that no good comes to the women who *do* successfully cross the sea – Dido and Medea, for example. Key to Bolton's thesis is that mastery of the ocean space is only permitted to men, and that the women who venture into this 'male' space become transgressive, whereas the women who remain behind are not transgressive, but nor are they successful in their love affairs. The women are thus trapped either in one sense or another.

⁴⁴ Just so, Bolton (2009), p. 280, notes that the sea 'both brings and takes [away] love'. The crucial point is that it is a two-way transaction.

⁴⁵ As regards the lack of happy endings, Penelope's *Heroides* 1 is of course the notable exception. In my view, Penelope's letter is curious in that it lacks any kind of departure narrative. Where Laodamia recalls at some length the experience of waving Protesilaus off to the Trojan War [cf. *Her.* 13.9-24], Penelope makes no such reference. Perhaps this is an indication of the Ovidian heroine's preoccupation with the worries of her family and household, but I think that we can also interpret the absence of a departure narrative in *Heroides* 1 – either for Ulysses or for Telemachus – as an indication that Penelope's is one of the most hopeful poems in the collection. None of the heroines who dwell on the hero's departure gets their lover back, and I suggest that Ovid may be consciously trying to separate Penelope from this litany of doomed women.

⁴⁶ Cf. Knox (1995), p. 154.

shore calling for him: *interea toto clamanti litore 'Theseu!'* [*Her.* 10.21]. She tells us that the deep sands impeded her tread [*Her.* 10.20] – an unfavourable sign – but the heroine does not yet despair. When she moves *away* from the beach, however, she climbs up to a cliff – *mons fuit* [*Her.* 10.25] – where she sees the departing sails [*Her.* 10.29-30] and realises that the hero has abandoned her.⁴⁷ Like Oenone, Ariadne ascends to a vantage point that implies division from the hero; Ariadne's cliff, which is pounded by the waves [*Her.* 10.26], is inhospitable to a returning ship just as is Oenone's breakwater in *Heroides* 5.⁴⁸ Both Ariadne's departure narrative and Oenone's support the view that the beach is where Ovid positions the women either when the relationship with the hero is not yet lost, or when the heroine is not yet *aware* that it is lost. The heroines' change of physical context – from the beach as the space of potential to more remote locations – mirrors the disintegration of the women's love affairs.⁴⁹

In light of the other departure narratives, I find it significant that Hypsipyle does not bid farewell to the Argo from the shore. Her placement in the tower suggests that, like the stranded Ariadne, Hypsipyle is divided from the hero even at the moment of his departure. Observe that Hypsipyle watches Jason *depart* from a space that Oenone only inhabits upon the hero's *return*; Hypsipyle is thus denied in a purely spatial sense even the kind of hope that Oenone sustains during the period of Paris' absence. Equally interesting is Hypsipyle's description of the Argo: she writes of the water moving under the keel [*Her.* 6.67]. Oenone, by contrast, focuses on the white foam of the waves as the oars churn through them [*Her.* 5.54]. Oenone's account has the force of a photographic close-up, while Hypsipyle's imagery is panoramic and indistinct; Hypsipyle's recollection suggests that she is too far away to engage in the way that Oenone does. Like Ariadne, Hypsipyle is placed high up, where the hero is quite literally out of her reach.

I suggest that Hypsipyle's account is more pitiable than Ariadne's, in that Hypsipyle appears unaware of the unfavourable spatial organisation of her poem. Whereas Ariadne

⁴⁷ Knox (1995), p. 238, notes the similarity between this aspect of Oenone's letter and Ariadne's, but argues that the function of the *mons* in *Heroides* 10 is different. I disagree, because I read the two departure narratives as part of a broader pattern in Ovid's spatial conception of the collection.

⁴⁸ On this point, see Battistella (2010), p. 57, who focuses on the recognition of the sails as integral to the scene in both *Heroides* 5 and *Heroides* 10.

⁴⁹ In Ariadne's case, Battistella (2010), pp. 4-5, argues that the heroine's physical loneliness is analogous to her poetic isolation, which has come about through the heroine's translation into the *Heroides*. The stranded Ariadne is thus, in Battistella's view, a representation of a character cut adrift from her more familiar poetic landscapes in Catullus 64 and *Fasti* 3. For an alternative view on Ariadne, see Alden Smith (1994).

acknowledges that she confronts her worst fears as she watches Theseus sail away [*Her.* 10.31-2], Hypsipyle attempts to remain hopeful, as she closes the departure narrative with a prayer for Jason's safety [*Her.* 6.73-4]. In my view, Hypsipyle's failure to correctly interpret her physical environment strengthens the reader's impression of her as a reactive character, controlled by everyone but herself – by Jason's lack of desire to return, and just as much by Ovid's orientation of her poem towards its unhappy ending.⁵⁰ On an intratextual level, we might observe that Hypsipyle ought to have read *Heroides* 5 and 10 more carefully, since she might then have realised the powerlessness of her own position.

Medea's spaces of control

Ovid achieves quite a different effect with the spatial framing of Medea's *Heroides* 12. In the preceding section, we discussed Ovid's sudden incursion into Euripides' mythological chronology, as Medea reveals her moment of composition through the account of Jason's wedding to Creusa [*Her.* 12.136-58]. Now I propose that the revelation of the writing heroine's location in Corinth works to highlight the absence of specific physical context in Medea's narrative thus far. In turn, the reader's perception of Medea's unusually 'spaceless' narrative emphasises three key instances where Ovid breaks from the broad brush-strokes of Medea's narration to position his heroine within a clear spatial frame. In my reading, each episode underlines the self-serving and controlling aspects of Medea's epistolary personality.

Est nemus et piceis et frondibus ilicis atrum,
 vix illuc radiis solis adire licet;
 sunt in eo—fuerant certe—delubra Dianae:
 aurea barbarica stat dea facta manu.
 noscis an exciderunt mecum loca? venimus illuc;
 orsus es infido sic prior ore loqui:

There is a grove, dark with pine trees and the boughs of the ilex; scarcely can the sun's rays penetrate there. There is in the grove – or at least there used to be – a shrine to Diana. The golden goddess stands there, fashioned by a barbarian hand. Do you know it? Or have the places escaped you along with the memory of me? We went to that place. Thus you began to speak first with your untrustworthy lips: [*Her.* 12.67-72]

⁵⁰ In this respect, I differ significantly from Lindheim (2003) and Fulkerson (2005), who both treat Hypsipyle as a self-conscious reader of her own and other heroines' poems: hence Lindheim's argument, pp. 115-7, following on from Verducci (1985), p. 80, that Hypsipyle is 'the first and last Medea of Ovid's collection'. In contrast to Lindheim and Fulkerson, I find no evidence that Hypsipyle is reading her letter critically. In my view, this is one of the key elements that makes *Heroides* 6 less overtly 'successful' than some of the other heroines, such as Penelope, who appear to be very aware of how they are presenting themselves and their stories.

These couplets immediately precede Medea's account of Jason's petition for her assistance with his labours. I suggest that the clarity and specificity of Medea's recollection is striking because it differs so markedly from earlier sections, in which we are given no indication of where events take place, or where Medea is positioned while she is observing them. In these lines, it appears that Ovid's writing heroine is suddenly paying attention. Notice that she does not merely recall that the conversation took place in a grove, or that the shrine was to Diana; she draws Jason's attention to the types of trees, to the quality of the light. We can picture our hero and heroine *within* this scene in a way that has not previously been possible in *Heroides* 12, suggesting that Ovid's Medea is more invested in the representation of this particular circumstance than she has been in others. I propose that the key to understanding Medea's heightened investment is the content of Jason's speech. We discussed in Chapter One that Jason's approach to the heroine serves to depict Medea as a character preoccupied with the idea of her own influence. If we now examine Ovid's poetic composition of the scene, we perceive that Medea's narrative space encourages the same view of the heroine's personality as the one allegedly espoused by Jason. Put simply, I suggest that the unexpected vividness of Medea's spatial context works together with the substance of Jason's speech to present to the reader a heroine who relishes reliving a moment in which the depiction of herself was as a character occupying a position of power.

Observe that the fine detail of Ovid's scene functions like a spotlight on a stage. In the early part of *Heroides* 12, the poet provides adequate description for the reader to perceive the scene as a whole, just as a flood-lit stage encourages the audience to focus on the scene in general rather than specific terms. Now, however, Ovid homes in on the figure of Medea, just as a spotlight on a darkened stage manipulates the audience's visual experience, emphasising every detail because divested of distractions in the background. I argue that we observe the characterisation of Ovid's Medea more clearly in the grove scene because she is not partially camouflaged against a backdrop of other characters and mythological events. Curiously, the stage analogy seems to be mirrored in Medea's reminiscence that light hardly permeated the darkened grove – the filtering quality of the trees offers a reflection of the narrative filtering by which the poet directs our reading of his heroine.⁵¹

If we pursue the idea that Ovid's Medea is at her most engaged when recalling events which demonstrate her capacity for control, then we perceive that the rest of *Heroides* 12

⁵¹ Bessone (1997), p. 134, takes the darkness of the grove to foreshadow the dire consequences that will follow from Jason's procuring Medea's assistance.

conforms to a similar pattern. Medea's reaction to her son's reporting of Jason's wedding offers another example:

protinus abscissa planxi mea pectora veste
tuta nec a digitis ora fuere meis.
ire animus mediae suadebat in agmina turbae
sertaque conpositis demere rapta comis.
vix me continui, quin sic laniata capillos
clamarem "meus est!" iniceremque manus.

At once – with my clothes rent – I beat my breast, nor were my cheeks safe from my fingernails. My heart was urging me to go into the midst of the crowd and to snatch away the wreath from Creusa's neatly-arranged hair. My [own] hair dishevelled, scarcely could I restrain myself from shouting "He is mine!" and from laying my hands on him.

[*Her.* 12.153-8]

In the previous chapter, I argued that the boy's narration of Jason's wedding serves to distance Medea from the event being related, casting the heroine as Jason's victim, upon whom decisions are inflicted without her consent. We now perceive that this impression of distance forms a contrast with the passion of Medea's reaction – especially the clarity of the heroine's imagined revenge upon Creusa. No sooner have we observed the peculiar 'spacelessness' of the letter, which leaves us astonished to realise that Medea is composing *Heroides* 12 immediately before her début as Euripides' tragic heroine, than we are thrust into a vivid digression in which Medea reclaims her hero.

As with the grove scene, I note the significance of the level of detail in the wedding incident. Medea does not express a general wish to disrupt the procession; she zeroes in on the floral garlands, on the precise form of words she would employ. Her reference to the *agmen* of the wedding party once again places us inside the story world, in a departure from earlier episodes in the poem. We can visualise the spatial composition of the scene, which makes the episode all the more arresting.⁵² The disconnected and individualised aspects of the account – the torn clothing, the crowd, the garlands – create the impression that Medea has dwelt on this moment, perhaps repeatedly.⁵³ The unexpected physicality of line 154, in which Medea tears at her face with her fingernails, conveys the force of her reaction, intimating to the reader that Medea's indignation can only have increased in the interval between the wedding and her recollection of it in *Heroides* 12. Perhaps the most

⁵² Davis (2012), p. 37, notes the contrast between Medea's violent emotions and Creusa's 'composure', symbolised in the reference to the women's hair.

⁵³ Bessone (1997), pp. 211-12, suggests that this is the moment at which the elegiac Medea begins to show her tragic colours, signified by *animus...suadebat* [*Her.* 12.155], which implies the tragic *animus* which directs Medea's later outbursts in Euripides.

perplexing aspect of the wedding narrative is our realisation that Ovid's heroine expends a great deal more energy in recounting an event that *did not take place* than she has in recounting some of those that *have* – for example, Chalciope's plea on behalf of the Argonauts, which is squeezed into a minuscule two lines [*Her.* 12.65-6].⁵⁴

Most significant for our purposes is the heroine's desire at line 158 to declare '*meus est!*' This is one of only two instances of direct speech in *Heroides* 12 where the speaker is Medea herself.⁵⁵ In this context, I argue that it is crucial that Medea imagines herself making a statement of *possession*.⁵⁶ Where the boy earlier characterises Jason according to his golden garments – *aureus* [*Her.* 12.151] – Medea chooses to define him in relation to herself – *meus*. The child's viewpoint rests on observing, but Medea's shows her seeking control of the hero. Thus, we perceive the connection between this scene and the grove episode. In the grove scene, Medea dwells on Jason's depiction of her own power; in the wedding incident, Medea imagines exercising that same power over Creusa.

Medea's final threat against Creusa furnishes the most extreme example in this pattern of spatial organisation reflecting the characterisation of a controlling Medea.

Forsitan et, stultae dum te iactare maritae
quaeris et iniustis auribus apta loqui,
in faciem moresque meos nova crimina fingas.
rideat et vitiis laeta sit illa meis.
rideat et Tyrio iaceat sublimis in ostro—
flebit et ardores vincet adusta meos.

⁵⁴ As mentioned in Chapter One, I am interested in Medea's near-total failure to engage with the figure of Chalciope. Given that Ovid's heroine seems in other respects to be concerned with downgrading her own responsibility for events, the logical course would seem to be to play up Chalciope's fear for her children and therefore the role of sisterly love in procuring Medea's assistance for Jason. The Ovidian Medea's approach contrasts with *Arg.* 3.688-94, where it is apparent that Medea harbours her own fears for Chalciope's sons, but wants Chalciope to ask for her assistance. Also *Arg.* 3.707-8, where Apollonius states clearly that the sisters *share* their anxiety and despair as to the children's fate. The Heroidean Medea's failure to exploit this obvious loophole seems to me to confirm the heroine's overall lack of emotional engagement with her family.

⁵⁵ The second instance in which Medea is the speaker occurs at *Her.* 12.56: *et dixit tenui murmure lingua: 'vale'*. I here discount Medea's imagined direct speech at *Her.* 12.202: *dos mea: 'quam' dicam si tibi 'redde' neges*. The latter may appear to be analogous to Medea's imagined '*meus est*' in the wedding scene; however, I suggest that there is a difference in the heroine's intention. The subjunctive *dicam* suggests that Medea uses the term rhetorically, to refer to a situation that she does not believe will take place. Put simply, the heroine does not seriously intend to say '*redde*', precisely because she believes that Jason would refuse. In the wedding scene, it is clear to the reader that Medea is recalling an emotional reaction already experienced. The wedding scene's '*meus est*' therefore has a great deal more force from the reader's point of view.

⁵⁶ Medea's focus on possession is reflected in Ovid's choice of vocabulary – *inicare manus* being a legal term referring to the return of stolen property. Cf. *OLD* 15b. Likewise Bessone (1997), p. 214, who notes that the phrase recurs elsewhere in Ovid.

dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt sucusque veneni,
hostis Medae nullus inultus erit.

Perhaps, when you seek to show off to your foolish bride and to say things fitted for her unjust ears, you even invent new charges against my appearance and my behaviour. Let her laugh, and may that woman be happy because of my defects. Let her laugh and lie raised up on Tyrian purple: she will weep, and her fires, once kindled, will dwarf my own. While sword and flame are to hand, and the juice of poison, no enemy of Medea's shall go unpunished.

[*Her.* 12.175-82]

These are some of the most shocking sentiments in *Heroides* 12, because Ovid's reader is looking forward to the Euripidean future in which Creusa will indeed be consumed by flames.⁵⁷ I propose that one of the most striking aspects of the account is the poet's application of spatial imagery. Line 178 is particularly intriguing, as Medea appears to visualise Creusa reclining on a couch. Several of the other heroines invoke the imagery of the bed or couch, generally in one of three ways – to symbolise the heroine's enduring fidelity, as with Penelope's *viduus lectus* [*Her.* 1.81]; to rebuke the hero's broken fidelity, as does Phyllis [*Her.* 2.57-8]; or to serve as the locus of happy memories now lost, exemplified by Ariadne's lament at *Her.* 10.51-2. Still other heroines, such as Hypsipyle and Oenone, draw comparisons between themselves and their heroes' new lovers, centred around the image of the bed: Hypsipyle declares that Jason has given Medea the place that had been promised to her [*Her.* 6.19-20], while Oenone asserts that she is better suited to a prince's bed than is the adulterous Helen [*Her.* 5.88].⁵⁸

In the *Heroides*, then, the couch functions as a physical embodiment of the interpersonal negotiations inherent in the hero-heroine relationship. Medea's account of Creusa's 'Tyrian purple' is thus curious because entirely devoid of the personal symbolism with which the bed is imbued in the other narratives. Not until Ovid's heroine demands that we picture her rival ensconced on Jason's couch do we notice that Medea does not characterise either herself or Jason in any domestic context at any point in *Heroides* 12.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Cf. Eur. *Med.* 1167-1221, where the deaths of Creusa and her father are described in graphic detail.

⁵⁸ Laodamia takes a slightly different tack to Hypsipyle and Oenone, dwelling on her empty bed [*Her.* 13.105-10] and envying the Trojan wives who are at least allowed to welcome their heroes home after the battle [*Her.* 13.137-48]. Fulkerson (2002) offers an excellent study of *Heroides* 13, which highlights some of the other dissimilarities between Laodamia's poem and those of the other heroines.

⁵⁹ The reader will note two minor exceptions. In the first instance, Medea refers to her Colchian bedroom [*Her.* 12.62]. However, the scene is focused around the heroine's tears as an indication of her turbulent state of mind. The bedroom is only relevant insofar as the implied privacy explains how Medea's turmoil went unnoticed. In the second case, when the heroine states that her son

Medea does not trouble to visualise *herself* in domestic spaces, yet she pictures Creusa in one. This, I argue, must be significant. Notice that Creusa inhabits a space in which her relationship with Jason must be at the forefront of the reader's mind, in light of the other heroines' preoccupation with their lonely couches. In contrast to the other heroines' poems, Ovid has his Medea picture Creusa in the space in which Creusa will die, and at Medea's own hand. Medea locates her rival in a space that *should* speak to Creusa's security as Jason's new wife, and thus we observe once more the driving theme of control, as Medea intimates that she can harm Creusa anywhere, even where she ought to be safest. I suggest that the image of the bed is distorted in *Heroides* 12 from its role in the other narratives, reflecting the extent to which Medea's concerns are not domestic or even interpersonal – she remains focused on herself and on her own desires. The spatial organisation of *Heroides* 6 and 12 thus offers implicit support for a reading of Hypsipyle and Medea as fundamentally dissimilar. Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 renders the heroine's powerlessness literally through the depiction of her entrapment on Lemnos, while Medea's poem highlights in dramatic fashion the heroine's love of being the character in control.

observed Jason's wedding from the doorway of their home [*Her.* 12.150], the designation is purely functional, leaving us with a spatial conception of the scene, but no impression of Medea's domestic environment as her home.

Comparative Analysis: Oenone's *Heroides* 5

I turn now to examine Oenone's *Heroides* 5, which offers an interesting counterpoint to the poems of Medea and of Hypsipyle. I propose that Oenone demonstrates a clear sense of her own epistolary identity which is not dependent on the hero's approval – just as does Medea. On the other hand, Oenone differs from Medea in that she constructs her relationship with Paris as mutually beneficial, in contrast to the hierarchical power dynamic we have observed in Medea's *Heroides* 12. As regards *Heroides* 6, Oenone's situation and Hypsipyle's are similar, in that both women have been abandoned for rivals they consider less worthy than themselves; however, I suggest that Oenone's poem is much less hero-focused than Hypsipyle's, intimating that Oenone does not regard her relationship with the hero as an integral aspect of her own identity.⁶⁰

At first glance, Hypsipyle's poem and Oenone's share some important similarities. For example, both women describe the heroes as reluctant to depart, attested by their tears – two of only three 'weeping' heroes in Ovid's collection.⁶¹ Likewise, both heroes embark on a sea voyage, their ships allowing them to cross the ocean, which functions in the *Heroides* as a barrier both literal and figurative to the heroines' realisation of love.⁶² Finally, both Hypsipyle and Oenone write in the knowledge that they have been supplanted in the heroes' affections by women who differ greatly from themselves and whom they believe will bring strife upon the hero. These parallels notwithstanding, I argue that Oenone and Hypsipyle approach their situations in opposing ways. As we have seen, Hypsipyle crafts a letter which reveals how crucial is Jason's approval to the heroine's sense of self. Oenone, meanwhile, does not seek the hero's good opinion, focusing instead on demonstrating her own superiority over Paris' new lover Helen:

Perlegis? an coniunx prohibet nova? perlege! non est
ista Mycenaea littera facta manu.
Pedasis Oenone, Phrygiis celeberrima silvis,
laesa queror de te, si sinis ipse, meo.

Will you read this right through? Or does your new wife forbid it? Read it thoroughly! This letter was not formed by a Mycenaean hand. I, the fountain

⁶⁰ I differ here from Spentzou (2003), who includes an excellent discussion of the pastoral idyll in the *Heroides*, referring to settings such as Oenone's as 'landscapes of lost innocence', pp. 64-76. Spentzou regards all the letters as 'failures' in an important sense, because they do not succeed in recapturing the heroes. I, however, observe that Oenone does not construct herself as having failed in losing Paris to Helen.

⁶¹ The third is Demophoön: *credidimus lacrimis – an et hae simulare docentur?* [*Her.* 2.51]

⁶² Cf. Bate (2004) and Bolton (2009).

nymph Oenone, most renowned in the Phrygian woods, I, the wounded one,
complain about you, my own if you will allow it.

[*Her.* 5.1-4]

The very first line of *Heroides* 5 establishes that Oenone views her narrative as a sort of competition-by-letter.⁶³ The initial *perlegis*? focuses the reader on the hero's reaction to Oenone's writing, while the imperative *perlege* makes a clear statement of the heroine's own wishes. In the middle of the line is Paris' *nova coniunx*, the verb *prohibet* suggesting that the hero is in some measure controlled by Helen.⁶⁴ Notice that Oenone includes all three parties – Paris, Helen, herself – with each permitted one verb; in my view, this suggests that Ovid's Oenone is aware that her situation is now more complex than a binary interaction between herself and Paris. More importantly, Oenone depicts her letter as a tool of subversion. The implicit opposition between the two verbs of reading and Helen's verb of controlling constructs *Heroides* 5 as a two-part challenge: just as Oenone challenges Paris to read her words right through, so she challenges Helen's authority by the very act of writing to Paris.⁶⁵

Oenone appears thus very dissimilar to Hypsipyle, who begins her letter by focusing on what others are saying about Jason [*Her.* 6.1]. Whereas Oenone highlights the act of her own writing and the hero's reading, Hypsipyle turns the critic's attention away from her writing by centring on the recollection of other characters' *speech*, inadvertently weakening her claim on the hero's attention. I suggest that we likewise observe a contrast between Oenone and Medea. Medea's opening couplets are self-focused and make no mention of Jason's marriage to Creusa; on the other hand, Oenone chooses to acknowledge the presence of her rival and thereby establishes herself as an outward-looking heroine, whereas Medea is not.

⁶³ Drinkwater (2007), p. 377-9, argues that Oenone's focus on the act of reading and writing at the start of *Heroides* 5 alludes to the mythical tradition in Parthenius' *Erotica Pathemata* 4, where Oenone's role as sender and receiver of messages is already established. Fulkerson (2005), p. 57, observes that Oenone conceives of Helen as the controller of Paris' reading life, which feeds into her analysis of the collection as depicting a uniquely female model of reading and writing.

⁶⁴ It is thus clear that I read *Heroides* 5 very differently from Lindheim (2000), who argues that Oenone fails in her attempt to compete with Helen, because she secretly wants to be like Helen, but cannot emulate Helen's epic values because of her own pastoral background. Lindheim views Paris and Oenone as generically incompatible. Conversely, I propose that we do not have to read Oenone as disempowered by the 'victory' of epic over pastoral. It is the critic who chooses to regard epic as the conquering genre – Oenone does not appear to subscribe to this view herself.

⁶⁵ Cf. Farrell (1998). Although Farrell does not deal specifically with Oenone's *Heroides* 5, he argues that the epistolary form is in some measure a tool of subversion for all the women, a view largely shared by Alden Smith (1994).

In line 3, Oenone describes herself as *Phrygiis celeberrima silvis*, recalling Medea's confident self-description *regina* [*Her.* 12.1] and setting Oenone apart from the majority of the other *Heroides*, where the women often refer to themselves only in relation to the hero.⁶⁶ In contrast to Hypsipyle, who calls herself *tua* [*Her.* 6.18], Oenone aligns herself with her pastoral origins as a nymph and the daughter of a great river. I suggest that Oenone's sense of her own identity as separate from her relationship with Paris is crucial to understanding the dissimilarity between *Heroides* 5 and the poems of Hypsipyle and Medea. In Chapter One, we observed that Hypsipyle's relationship with Jason appears to have been predicated on the heroine's acquiescence to the hero's wishes; conversely, Medea depicts a dynamic where the hero gives in to Medea's demands. I suggest that Oenone differs from both, revealing a greater degree of mutuality and complementarity in her relationship with the hero than we see in either Hypsipyle's or Medea's.

Nondum tantus eras, cum te contenta marito
 edita de magno flumine nympha fui.
 qui nunc Priamides (absit reverentia vero)
 servus eras; servo nubere nympha tuli!
 saepe greges inter requievimus arbore tecti
 mixtaque cum foliis praebeuit herba torum.
 saepe super stramen fenoque iacentibus alto
 defensa est humili cana pruina casa.
 quis tibi monstrabat saltus venatibus aptos
 et tegeret catulos qua fera rupe suos?
 retia saepe comes maculis distincta tetendi,
 saepe citos egi per iuga longa canes.

You were not yet so great when I, a nymph born of a great river, was content with you as my husband. You who are now a son of Priam were then a slave (let awe play no part in the truth). I, a nymph, submitted to marriage with a slave! Often we used to take our ease in amongst the flocks, with the trees for a roof, and grass mixed together with leaves provided us a bed. Often was the white frost kept at bay by a humble dwelling, as we lay upon straw and in a deep bed of hay. Who used to show you the woodlands suitable for hunting, [who] the cave in which the wild beast concealed her young? As your companion, often have I stretched the wide-meshed hunting net; often have I driven the swift dogs along the long ridge.
 [*Her.* 5.9-20]

Oenone describes Paris as *nondum tantus*, signifying her own superior status over the hero in the early stages of their relationship. Although Oenone's terminology bears some comparison with that of Medea, who describes Jason as a suppliant [*Her.* 12.2], Oenone's

⁶⁶ See, for example, Phyllis [*Her.* 2.65; 2.74], who refers to herself twice as *amans*. The focus on the *act* of loving, which demands an object, means that the heroine is not characterised on her own terms, but is labelled in relation to the hero whom she loves. Phaedra uses the same term [*Her.* 4.154], as do Canace [*Her.* 11.32; 11.126] and Laodamia [*Her.* 13.1]. Dido refers to herself as *Elissa*, suggesting a recollection of her relationship to Sychaeus rather than to Aeneas, but nonetheless of her position relative to a hero. Even Penelope, whose letter is rhetorically very strong, chooses to open with the appellation *tua Penelope* [*Her.* 1.1].

sentiment is modified by her acknowledgement that she was *te contenta marito* – indicating that the heroine is less bothered by hierarchical designations than her sister-writer Medea. The tacit implication of Oenone's repetition of her status as a *nympha* is that pastoral characters, even those who can claim the parentage of a *magnum flumen*, are not swayed by concerns about social standing.⁶⁷ In the same way, the heroine's digression about the simplicity of life amongst the flocks and the trees characterises Oenone as a heroine who derives her happiness not from the acquisition of wealth, power or even love, but from being at home in her natural world. In this respect, Oenone differs significantly from both Hypsipyle and Medea – Hypsipyle who derives satisfaction from being connected to Jason, and Medea who thrives on having control over the hero.

The unusual dynamic of Oenone's relationship with Paris is best illustrated in the heroine's recollection of the hunt. Oenone reminds Paris that she was responsible for honing his hunting skills, that she occupied the role both of instructor and of *comes*. I propose that Oenone's depiction of the transfer of knowledge *from* the heroine *to* the hero constructs a vastly different dynamic to those of *Heroides* 6 and 12. Whereas Hypsipyle maintains a pose of dependence on the hero's opinion, and while Medea intimates that Jason would have died had she not rescued him [*Her.* 12.15-20], Oenone depicts the hunt as a shared activity in which she imparts experience to the hero, but from which both hero and heroine derive mutual pleasure. Oenone's account suggests a greater degree of equality or complementarity between hero and heroine, while Hypsipyle's relationship and Medea's reveal an imbalance of power, although not the same imbalance in each heroine's case.

More importantly, through the image of the hunt Oenone is able to show her reader that she has skills and interests that predate her association with Paris. In *Heroides* 5, the hunt serves as a narrative thread, connecting for the reader the various periods of Oenone's past – both before Paris and while they were lovers – with the heroine's present and future. In other words, Oenone's shaping of her narrative around her own favourite pursuit suggests that the heroine does not view Paris as constitutive of her identity in any way.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁷ Jacobson (1974), pp. 180-1, challenges Oenone's description of the *magnum flumen*, offering the cutting contradiction that the heroine's father was 'more...of a stream'. Where Jacobson argues for a reading of *Heroides* 5 based on Oenone's 'self-aggrandizement', I argue that the literal size of the *flumen* is beside the point. We are concerned here with the heroine's *perception* of her heritage, which in no way designates her as unworthy of Paris.

⁶⁸ My observation would tend to contradict Jacobson's thesis (1974), pp. 176-94, that Ovid's Oenone is consumed by bitterness, that she is a simplistic thinker and a 'moralizing' rather than a moral heroine. Jacobson assumes that Oenone is driven by anger, yet I find little evidence of this;

implication of the hunting episode is that Oenone considers Paris to be one *aspect* of her life, an aspect which does not damage the coherence of the heroine's identity by its absence, nor her pleasure in other parts of her pastoral life. By contrast, neither Hypsipyle nor Medea characterises the hero as a pleasant but non-essential element of their epistolary lives. Both poems depict Jason as being of vital significance to the heroines' worlds: he is necessary to Hypsipyle's illusion that she is the beloved of a hero, and likewise to Medea's self-conception as a heroine who can dominate a hero.

Curiously, Oenone's recollection of Paris' broken vow of fidelity offers perhaps the most compelling evidence of the heroine's acceptance that her relationship is ended.

incisae servant a te mea nomina fagi
 et legor Oenone falce notata tua;
 populus est, memini, fluviali consita rivo,
 est in qua nostri littera scripta memor.
 et quantum trunci, tantum mea nomina crescunt;
 crescite et in titulos surgite recta meos!
 popule, vive, precor, quae consita margine ripae
 hoc in rugoso cortice carmen habes:
 "cum Paris Oenone poterit spirare relictā,
 ad fontem Xanthi versa recurret aqua."
 Xanthe, retro propera versaeque recurrite lymphae!
 sustinet Oenonen deseruisse Paris.

The beech trees, carved by you, [still] preserve my name, and I am read as Oenone, marked out by your blade. There is a poplar tree, I remember, planted on the bank of the river, upon which words are written, reminder of us. And as high as the trunks grow, so high does my name. Grow, and grow straight to become my memorial! Live, poplar, I pray, you who are planted on the edge of the bank, you [who] have this inscription upon your wrinkled bark: "When Paris, having abandoned Oenone, is still able to draw breath, the waters of the Xanthus will run backwards to their source". O Xanthus, turn back at once; waters, return to your source. Paris lives on, having abandoned Oenone.

[*Her.* 5.21-32]⁶⁹

At line 25, Oenone says *memini*, reminding us of Medea's strident opening at *Her.* 12.1. As with Medea, Oenone's *memini* characterises her as a heroine who is confident in her narration of her recollections. We also notice the three instances of Oenone's own name, combining to create an impression of a character who knows who she is, and who allows her own epistolary identity to direct her poem. Moreover, the scene furnishes a neat

in my view, her tone is disappointed rather than bitter. Paris has not lived up to the simple values that she taught him. Cf. Lindheim (2000) on Oenone's pastoral ideal.

⁶⁹ Readers will note that I include *Her.* 5.23-24 as per Knox's 1995 text, which is now regarded as the standard and most comprehensive text of *Heroides* 5. Several earlier editors omit this couplet – including Goold's 1977 Loeb – without explicitly arguing the case for its exclusion. Moreover, the incidence of *memini* is important to my argument about Oenone's letter more broadly.

example of the narrative mirroring of which Ovid is so fond, as Oenone recalls that Paris inscribed their names into a tree. Just as Oenone is engaged in the present in writing about and remembering her past, so in the past Paris was engaged in writing about and looking forward to their future.⁷⁰ I propose that this balanced construction testifies to the dynamic of Oenone and Paris' relationship, which appears to have been better-adjusted than that of Hypsipyle and Jason or of Jason and Medea.⁷¹

For our purposes, the significance of Oenone's account is that the heroine is capable of viewing her relationship as something grounded in a particular time and place. Observe that Oenone does not entertain the resumption of her association with Paris: *sustinet Oenonen deseruisse Paris* [*Her.* 5.32]. When, therefore, the heroine entreats the tree to grow strong – *popule, vive, precor* [*Her.* 5.27] – we perceive that Oenone wants the record of her relationship to thrive *in spite of* the hero's abandonment. The tree functions in *Heroides* 5 as a monument to the lovers' former happiness, the beech's growth reflecting the change that the lovers themselves have experienced, in Oenone's case unwillingly. I suggest that Oenone's enduring fondness for the tree testifies to the heroine's ability to look back, without her vision of the present being overshadowed by the loss of the past.⁷² In contrast to Hypsipyle, whose narrative is consumed by the figure of Jason in the hope that he will return, Oenone urges the tree to grow as a memorial to former happiness, and not because she believes that it will bring Paris back to her. Oenone's narrative suggests that she understands where Hypsipyle does not that the heroine herself provides the common thread and stable point in her own life. Equally, Oenone lacks Medea's difficulty in relinquishing control of the hero to a rival, because Oenone appears to view the hero's treatment of her as separate from her sense of self.

⁷⁰ Farrell (1998), pp. 327-8, draws attention to Paris' inscription as indicative of male deceit in the *Heroides*, which he sets up in opposition to a model of female truthfulness. In Farrell's construction, therefore, Paris' writing and Oenone's are fundamentally opposed: Paris has used deceit as a means of seduction in the past; Oenone is writing an inherently truthful account in the present. Such an observation makes it all the more remarkable that Oenone is sanguine about the tree's survival.

⁷¹ Drinkwater (2007), p. 380-1, observes that Hypsipyle and Jason's relationship is initiated in the *Argonautica* by a herald [cf. *Arg.* 1.640-52]. This is perhaps a pertinent point for our discussion, because it echoes the idea that Hypsipyle is always at one remove from the hero.

⁷² In this respect, I suggest that Oenone offers a useful example of what Kennedy (2008), p. 27, refers to as the 'two temporalities' of the elegiac *ego*: the *ego* of the past that is being narrated, and the *ego* of the present-day narrator who is reflecting on the earlier *ego*. Oenone is capable of distinguishing between these two elements or parts of herself, without one destroying the other.

2.3 The Psychopathic Medea

In this section, I take an interdisciplinary approach to Medea's *Heroides* 12, examining the characterisation of Ovid's heroine alongside some of the key personality traits associated with psychopathy. Although Classical scholarship does not typically make use of criminological or forensic theory, I suggest that an exploration of the psychopath's impaired affective capabilities can help us shape a coherent reading of Ovid's self-focused heroine. Scholars such as Jacobson (1974) have argued that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 does not 'make sense', that Ovid's depiction of her villainy is too caricatured to be believable.⁷³ In my view, an evaluation of the potentially 'psychopathic' aspects of Medea's epistolary identity enables us to establish that Ovid has not necessarily erred in his characterisation of the heroine; rather that he may be conceiving of her as a heroine who thinks and feels differently to the majority of literary characters with whom we critics are familiar.

Readers should note that I do not attempt to 'diagnose' Ovid's Medea.⁷⁴ I merely observe that the concept of psychopathy provides a useful framework within which to interpret some of the heroine's most challenging behaviour. I suggest that several elements of Medea's Ovidian characterisation could be termed psychopathic: her lack of interest in the experiences or feelings of other characters; her dispassionate loss / profit approach to relationships; her use of violence to achieve her ends; her unwavering focus on her own interests.

Why not maternal filicide?

In contrast to previous scholarship, especially pertaining to Euripides' heroine, I do not examine the Ovidian Medea as a case of maternal filicide.⁷⁵ Neither am I focusing on the elegiac Medea as a female multiple murderer, which would seem to fit the heroine's

⁷³ Cf. Jacobson (1974), p. 123, who asserts that Ovid has produced a 'clear-headed villain not terribly concerned with questions of conscience', but that *Heroides* 12 as a whole is diminished by 'its lack of excitement, its frigidity, the absence of spontaneity and passion, those elements which are so crucial in both Apollonius' and Euripides' successes'. I argue that Jacobson's view underpins to some degree the vast majority of subsequent scholarship on *Heroides* 12. Verducci (1985), pp. 56-85, indirectly pursues Jacobson's thesis, by arguing that we have to read Medea and Hypsipyle as having swapped personalities in order to resolve the difficulties with Ovid's characterisation in *Heroides* 12.

⁷⁴ Nor do I suggest that psychopathy is the *only* psychiatric condition which might be useful in developing a reading of Ovid's Medea. I consider it, however, the most useful framework given the aspects of Medea's epistolary personality with which this project is concerned.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Bartel and Simon (2010 eds.). This volume uses a variety of criminological and medico-legal frameworks to develop novel readings of Euripides' *Medea*, although the greatest part of the scholarship is focused around maternal filicide.

criminal ‘profile’ of six murders. In contrast to her tragic counterpart, I propose that the Medea of Ovid’s conception does not appear to belong in either criminological category. Hall (2010) argues that Euripides’ Medea corresponds exactly to the demographic of filicidal mothers advanced by Weisheit (1986): she is aged between 20 and 30, has been married only once with two or three children, has committed at least one serious prior offence, and is socially marginalised.⁷⁶ The Medea of *Heroides* 12, however, appears to lack any motivation typical of filicidal mothers. These stem primarily from the debilitating stress of raising a child in unfavourable circumstances – the burden of childcare and a lack of adequate support systems or financial security.⁷⁷ Although these considerations are by no means exhaustive, I find it significant that Ovid’s Medea makes no mention of any such concern. In contrast to Euripides, where Medea discourses on the difficulties of being both mother and exile, we have observed that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 hardly mentions her children. I suggest that the Ovidian reader would not necessarily anticipate the boys’ deaths, if we did not already know from Euripides that Medea is going to kill them. As noted in Chapter One, Medea does not even refer to the boys in her own voice until line 187 – the final tenth of the letter. In my view, this is inconsistent with a heroine who is about to kill her children out of desperation at their collective abandonment.

Medea is equally problematic as a multiple murderer. There is very little scholarship devoted to the female killer, not least because very few women commit such serious offences, and even fewer commit several over a period of time.⁷⁸ What literature there is focuses predominantly on ‘paired’ killers such as Myra Hindley and Ian Brady, attempting to unravel the relationship between the partners, or examining how the women’s identities have been constructed by the media and law enforcement agencies.⁷⁹ The Ovidian Medea

⁷⁶ In Weisheit’s sample, unemployment is the most common form of social marginalisation, although other studies, such as Meyer and Oberman (2001), suggest that socio-cultural isolation and immigrant status – more akin to Medea’s situation – have very similar effects.

⁷⁷ Wilczynski (1997) presents extensive data on filicide from both Britain and Australia. She concludes that mothers who kill their children deliberately are most often motivated by one of the following: by a physical, financial or logistical inability to raise the child; by altruism, where the mother believes that the child is ‘better off’ dead; or by serious mental illness, such as post-partum psychosis. Adler and Polk (2001) and Meyer and Oberman (2001) provide detailed overviews of the demographics and motivations of maternal filicide: Adler and Polk’s approach is criminological; Meyer and Oberman’s sociological.

⁷⁸ Heberle (1999) posits some possible reasons for the low rate of female homicide, and draws interesting inferences from the sexual and racial distribution of American death row prisoners.

⁷⁹ Harrison (1986) and Cameron and Frazer (1987) address the development and dynamics of these types of male-female relationships. Morrissey (2003) and Birch (1993 ed.) focus on how such women are perceived and assimilated by society. Other interesting studies on the female multiple murderer more generally are Gurian (2011) and Farrell, Keppell and Titterington (2011).

does not fit this profile, but nor is she a ‘serial killer’ of the type made infamous by Aileen Wuornos, amongst whose victims there is a homogeneity entirely lacking from Medea’s erratic course.⁸⁰ Perhaps most crucially, a majority of researchers agree that filicidal women very rarely kill people other than their children, nor do multiple murderers commit filicide.⁸¹ In light of this conundrum, I propose that the psychopathic personality can offer a more useful correlation with Ovid’s construction of Medea.⁸²

Psychopathy in context

Like many psychiatric disorders, psychopathy lacks rigid diagnostic boundaries. Researchers concur that the condition exists on a spectrum: it is rarely as simple as stating that one individual ‘is’ psychopathic whilst another ‘is not’.⁸³ A significant number of subjects may exhibit psychopathic ‘tendencies’, yet they may not meet the check-list of antisocial traits and affective dysfunctions which are measured by the psychiatrist’s formal diagnostic tools. Scholarship suggests that as much as ten per cent of the population may demonstrate some form of psychopathic personality, but only a minority of these will conform to the stereotype of the murderous psychopath.⁸⁴ In my view, this diagnostic complexity lends itself to my examination of *Heroides* 12; likewise the fact that the indicators of psychopathy can appear to varying degrees even in the non-criminal

⁸⁰ Birch (1993 ed.) uses Aileen Wuornos as a case study enabling her to sketch out some of the problems surrounding the definition of the term ‘serial killer’.

⁸¹ Wilczynski (1991, 1995) is emphatic as to the extreme rarity of maternal filicides showing violence towards anyone other than the children. Messing and Heeren (2004, 2009) analyse cases of multiple domestic homicide – where several victims are killed at the same time, all from the same extended family. Nonetheless, even treating the four Corinthian deaths as a case of multiple domestic homicide, this does not resolve Medea’s earlier murders of Absyrtus and Pelias.

⁸² I should note here that there is virtually no research available regarding what proportion, if any, of filicidal mothers may *also* be psychopathic. A small amount of filicide literature includes case studies of women whose personalities are designated ‘psychopathic’ – for example, Schurman-Kauflin (2000). However, it seems that such case studies generally use the term in its colloquial rather than its clinical sense, since the majority of sources agree that testing for psychopathy is all but non-existent amongst female offenders. We therefore do not have the data to posit a uniquely female model of psychopathy. Gurian (2011), Farrell, Keppel and Titterington (2011) and Jackson and Richards (2007) all argue for more specific research into this area.

⁸³ This is a fundamental principle behind Robert Hare’s world-leading diagnostic tool the Psychopathy Checklist (PCL), which is discussed in the following pages. PCL and its successor PCL-R provide a framework for clinicians to ‘score’ different aspects of the patient’s personality that relate to psychopathy. The higher the patient’s score, the stronger the psychopathic personality or tendency. This has helped to increase general understanding that there are gradations of the condition; not all psychopathic personalities will manifest the same symptoms or severity.

⁸⁴ Hare’s 1993 monograph aims specifically to dispel this myth, collating into a highly-readable lay-person’s account his extensive experience with several different types of psychopath, not all of whom are necessarily violent.

population. I propose that the reasoning and motivation typical of psychopathic personalities can shed valuable light on how the Medea of *Heroides* 12 appears to think and feel, in particular as regards her apparent lack of empathy for other characters.

I note also that the epistolary form of *Heroides* 12 is peculiarly suited to this kind of analysis. Clinicians are unanimous that an accurate diagnosis of psychopathy is dependent on compiling a wide range of information pertaining to the subject's life over a long period of time.⁸⁵ Usually such information can only be obtained by extensive interviews between subject and clinician. However, the common psychopathic ability to lie convincingly makes it difficult to assess the veracity of the information which is then assessed against clinical criteria.⁸⁶ I propose that there is a natural correlation between the first-person narrative of *Heroides* 12 and the interview between subject and clinician. Medea – our subject – is presenting her history for consumption by her reader in the position of the clinician.⁸⁷ We as critics must evaluate Medea's testimony in order to develop a coherent interpretation of her epistolary personality. On the other hand, unlike the clinician who may have no access to the corroborative evidence of the friends, family or victims of the subject, Ovid's readers have the literary tradition to assist us in our assessment of Medea. Our knowledge of Apollonius and of Euripides can alert us to aspects of *Heroides* 12 which indicate that Medea is revising her history to present herself in a better light.

The development of psychopathy and the 'Hare psychopath'

The concept of psychopathy was first posited in the nineteenth century by the French physician Pinel, who labelled the condition 'manie sans délire'. In the 1830s, his English counterpart Prichard coined the term 'moral insanity', and this terminology dominated the

⁸⁵ Cleckley (1941, rp 1988) argues that there has to be a persistent pattern of anti-social tendencies to support a diagnosis of psychopathy. He states that collecting information about the minutiae of the psychopath's life is invaluable, because 'the disorder can be demonstrated only when the patient's activity meshes with the problems of ordinary living', p. 22.

⁸⁶ The psychopath's ability to lie is one reason why repeated interviewing is necessary, because consensus suggests that it is relatively uncommon for a psychopath to be able to develop one coherent story and maintain it. This is linked to the psychopath's difficulty in reflecting on how their narrative appears to another person – looking at it from the interlocutor's point of view. The constant reworking of a subject's narrative can help the clinician to identify aspects of the account which the subject is deliberately fabricating. Cleckley (1941, rp 1988) discusses the psychopath's mendacious tendencies at length throughout his case studies.

⁸⁷ This point is more-or-less analogous to Alden Smith's observation (1994) that the women of the *Heroides* are offering detailed interpretations of their own literary histories, acting out the role of literary critic as well as of character.

early decades of clinical research.⁸⁸ In contemporary scholarship, Cleckley's groundbreaking study *The Mask of Sanity* (1941) is regarded as the defining work of modern psychopathy research. However, Pinel and Prichard identified the two enduring pillars of a psychopathic diagnosis: first, the patient is not psychotic, having no intellectual impairment or faulty understanding of reality; second, the psychopath is generally regarded as untreatable, because the condition appears to rest on a lack of emotional capacity, and a physician cannot supply feeling or understanding where there is no facility for it.

Cleckley's monograph presents numerous case studies from his work as a clinician in a closed neuropsychiatric hospital; he asserts that psychopathy is 'a sociologic and psychiatric problem second to none', and that psychopaths cause more damage to society than all other types of mentally disordered patients combined.⁸⁹ Cleckley popularised the term 'psychopath': he argues against Prichard's 'moral insanity', declaring that 'insanity' is a legal term roughly analogous to the medical 'psychotic', and that this is a fundamental misrepresentation of the psychopath's condition.⁹⁰ *The Mask of Sanity* presents Cleckley's personal diagnostic tool – a check-list of some 16 qualities which he finds common to his psychopathic patients. This catalogue has since been discredited, because some of its criteria – for example: 'superficial charm and good intelligence' – are informed by the well-educated and socially-confident population that made up Cleckley's patient list in a fee-paying inpatient facility.⁹¹ Despite weaknesses in Cleckley's individual criteria, his underlying observations have endured: he argues that the psychopath's condition is grounded in his affective dysfunction – the inability to feel empathy – and his consequent dispassion regarding the violation of social norms, especially acts of violence. Cleckley is adamant that psychopaths are not violent in the same way as 'normal' criminals, because they usually do not commit violence out of extreme emotion; rather, they lack the self-control which prevents other people from being violent on a passing whim.⁹²

Cleckley's framework has been substantially revised by Robert Hare, a world-leading psychopathy scholar and developer of the diagnostic tool the Psychopathy Checklist

⁸⁸ Arrigo and Shipley (2001) provide a succinct summary of the historical development of the understanding of psychopathy, including the various shifts in nomenclature.

⁸⁹ Cleckley (1941, rp 1988), pp. 16-18.

⁹⁰ See Cleckley (1941, rp 1988), pp. 3-25, in which he outlines the problem of sanity as a 'protean concept'.

⁹¹ Cleckley (1941, rp 1988), p. 338.

⁹² Cleckley (1941, rp 1988), p. 263.

(PCL).⁹³ Hare's expertise derives chiefly from evaluating prison populations, almost exclusively male and predominantly violent. This, too, has prompted criticism that PCL and its successor PCL-R (Psychopathy Checklist – Revised) represents only a skewed view of psychopathy that is unhelpful in attempting to understand the statistical incidence and behavioural presentation of the condition in the general population.⁹⁴ Many clinicians in non-forensic settings adhere to the diagnostic criteria of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*, which classes psychopathy as an Anti-Social Personality Disorder.⁹⁵ In defiance of the American Psychiatric Association, Hare argues that his Psychopathy Checklist represents a more rounded approach to psychopathy, since the *DSM* definition of an Anti-Social Personality Disorder rests almost entirely on evaluating the subject's behaviour, rather than on analysing the concomitant lack of affective capability which both Cleckley and Hare believe to be integral to the psychopathic personality. In simple terms, Hare is of the view that there are many more sufferers of Anti-Social Personality Disorders than there are 'true' psychopaths.⁹⁶

For this reason, Hare's own model separates psychopathic qualities into two spheres of diagnosis – affective dysfunction and antisocial behaviour.⁹⁷ In this respect, Hare's work derives directly from Cleckley's: Hare argues that empirical research carried out using PCL and PCL-R has borne out all of Cleckley's observations about the emotional

⁹³ See Hare (1980) for an exploration of the original PCL, and Hare (1991) for its revised version PCL-R.

⁹⁴ Skeem and Cooke (2010) are an extreme example of this view. Hare took legal action in 2007, delaying their article's publication by three years. He argued that the authors were willfully misrepresenting his team's research and the implications of PCL-R as a diagnostic tool. Hare and Neumann (2010) offers a detailed refutation of Skeem and Cooke's criticisms.

⁹⁵ Cf. *DSM-IV-TR* (2000), pp. 702-3. The new version of the *DSM* – *DSM-V* – was released in 2013. In this thesis, I cite *DSM-IV-TR* because it remains the most commonly-used version of the text, and because *DSM-V* represents a radical redefinition and reorganisation of the material pertaining to personality disorders, which clinicians have not yet had sufficient time to evaluate and report on. Cleckley (1941, reprinted 1988), pp. 241-2, provides a useful summary of the development of the early *DSM* volumes.

⁹⁶ Hare's critics have observed that PCL is still weighted towards patients who display overtly delinquent or violent behaviour, which is more common both in forensic populations and in male psychopaths rather than female, whose antisocial tendencies may manifest as emotional instability. Cf. Wynn, Høiseth and Pettersen (2012) for a discussion of differing models of psychopathy in women. To address these criticisms, Hare and his team developed the Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version (PCL:SV) and Psychopathy Checklist: Youth Version (PCL:YV) for use by clinicians in assessing members of the general population. For a summary of the development of the so-called 'Hare psychopath' and its influence on psychopathy research, see Hare (2007).

⁹⁷ See Hare and Neumann (2008) for a detailed model.

impairment of his psychopathic patients.⁹⁸ For our purposes, I propose that the Cleckley-Hare model is useful precisely because of its concern with affective dysfunction. The epistolary form of *Heroides* 12 means that we are less concerned with Medea's behaviour than we are with how Ovid presents his heroine as a character – with how she appears to think and feel.⁹⁹ Cleckley states that the psychopath's condition can best be described as a fundamental 'lack' of interpersonal depth and capability, and this is what we have already observed in the characterisation of the Ovidian Medea.¹⁰⁰ I suggest that two aspects of *Heroides* 12 illustrate the apparent similarity between the elegiac heroine and the psychopathic personality: Jason's speech, which we looked at briefly in Chapter One, and Medea's account of her brother's death.

Framing the psychopathic personality

In Chapter One, I argued that the figure of Jason functions in *Heroides* 12 as a secondary narrator whose purpose is to support the view of herself that Medea wishes to espouse. Jason's petition for the heroine's assistance is therefore framed in Medea's recollection so as to suggest that the hero was deceitful, in opposition to Medea's own innocence. By contrast, the content of Jason's speech works to characterise Medea as self-focused, influenced chiefly by Jason's flattery of her self-image. I propose that these observations have a bearing on our examination of Medea's psychopathic tendencies, because they reflect the two 'levels' of epistolary identity operating in Ovid's poem: first, the written

⁹⁸ Cf. Hare and Neumann (2008), in which are discussed the weaknesses of Cleckley's criteria, and their relationship to PCL and PCL-R.

⁹⁹ Moreover, both Cleckley's and Hare's work remains the most influential in the field – Cleckley's as a representation of the psychopathic condition in intellectual and emotional terms, and Hare's as an exploration of the clinical implications of psychopathy. Hervé (2007) traces the development of the 'Hare psychopath', concluding that Cleckley and Hare have been the two most influential scholars of the twentieth century in the area of psychopathy diagnosis and management. One reason why Hare's diagnostic criteria have become so dominant is that PCL and PCL-R have been shown to predict violent recidivism with a very high degree of accuracy amongst forensic populations. Although Hare has explicitly stated that the tool was neither designed nor specifically tested for these purposes (2007), pp. 17-18, this apparent success has contributed to entrenched attachment to PCL and PCL-R. Currently, the vast majority of psychopathy research is carried out on forensic populations, where predicting recidivism is a key concern both of researchers and of law enforcement agencies.

¹⁰⁰ Scholars agree that the psychopath's lack of important interpersonal qualities is probably what non-psychopaths are subconsciously identifying when they report that there is something 'not quite right' about a psychopath. Cleckley defines this as the 'normal' person's sense that 'we are dealing here not with a complete man at all but with something that suggests a subtly constructed reflex machine which can mimic the human personality' (1941, rp 1988), p. 369. For an unusual account of this phenomenon from the other side, see Thomas (2013), who offers a candid narrative from the psychopath's point of view.

Medea who casts herself as the dupe of the hero; second, the writing heroine whose controlling personality suggests that she may be using the ‘first’ Medea as a narrative tool, enabling the ‘second’ to present a version of events that is beneficial to herself.

Scholars generally regard these competing aspects of Medea’s Heroidean personality as resulting from Ovid’s poor assimilation of the Apollonian and Euripidean narrative traditions.¹⁰¹ Conversely, I argue that we can integrate the ‘two personalities’ if we examine them through the lens of psychopathy. In my reading, the ‘second’ Medea corresponds to the psychopathic personality as experienced by an onlooker – self-centred and unfeeling. The ‘first’ Medea is a representation of the psychopathic personality as seen by the psychopath herself – someone whose difficulties are caused by others, who takes no responsibility but desires absolute control.

Let us revisit Jason’s speech:

noscis an exciderunt mecum loca? venimus illuc;
 orsus es infido sic prior ore loqui:
 “ius tibi et arbitrium nostrae fortuna salutis
 tradidit inque tua est vitaeque morsque manu.
 perdere posse sat est, siquem iuvet ipsa potestas;
 sed tibi servatus gloria maior ero.”

 Haec animum—et quota pars haec sunt?—movere puellae
 simplicis et dextrae dextera iuncta meae.
 vidi etiam lacrimas—an pars est fraudis in illis?
 sic cito sum verbis capta puella tuis.

Do you know it? Or have the places escaped you along with the memory of me?
 We went to that place. You began to speak thus with your untrustworthy lips:
 “Fortune has handed over to you both authority and judgement upon my safety,
 and in your hands are both life and death. It is enough to be able to destroy
 someone, if power itself should delight anyone; but I will be a greater glory to you
 once I have been saved.”

 These words – and what a small part are these! – moved the heart of a simple girl,
 and your right hand joined with my right hand. I even saw tears – or was there
 some trickery in these also? Thus was I, a mere girl, swiftly captured by your
 words.

[*Her.* 12.71-6; 89-92]

¹⁰¹ Otis (1938), p. 214, n. 89, first argued that the interpretive problems with *Heroides* 12 derive from Ovid’s unsuccessful reinvention of the mythological tradition. Otis’ view is accepted and further developed by Jacobson (1974), pp. 109-23, whose analysis remains the most substantial available on Medea’s poem. More recent scholarship, such as that of Lindheim (2003), pp. 114-33, makes no mention of the supposed Apollonian-Euripidean division in *Heroides* 12, and indeed altogether ignores the apparently competing personalities of the Ovidian Medea.

Observe that Medea frames her recollection of Jason's words so as to suggest that the account shows the hero in an unfavourable light. Medea refers to his *infidum os*, the focus on the act of speaking implying that Jason's words are themselves untrustworthy. The heroine circles back to the theme of deception at the end of the speech, as she recalls Jason's tears and implies that these, too, had a double purpose. Both instances suggest that there is something untruthful about the way in which the hero seeks to represent Medea. Notwithstanding, we notice that the placement of Medea's allegations – book-ending the speech – obviates the need for the heroine to refute any specific aspect of Jason's approach, by casting a veil of suspicion over the speech as a whole. This allows Medea to create an impression of distrust without committing herself to a detailed critique of the hero.

The heroine sets herself up as a *puella simplex* in contrast to her description of Jason's malevolent intentions: *dextrae dextra* [*Her.* 12.90] draws an implicit comparison between Medea's faith in the hero and Jason's allegedly selfish exploitation of the heroine. The reader observes that the two 'hands' belong to opposing halves of the line, reflecting Medea's depiction of the division between the two parties.¹⁰² On the other hand, we cannot help but remark on the irony that Ovid has Medea chastise the hero for the violation of a moral code – attested by *iuncta* [*Her.* 12.90] – when she exhibits no concern for the moral violations that she herself has committed. Line 92 amplifies the reader's perception that Medea is ill-justified in reproaching the hero for pursuing his own ends: Medea says that she was captured *by* Jason's words, but Ovid's reader might equally say that Medea is captured *in* Jason's words, which furnish us with important evidence of another character's interpretation of the heroine's personality.¹⁰³

In Chapter One, I noted that the Ovidian Jason's approach to Medea differs significantly from that of the Apollonian hero. In the *Argonautica*, Jason's approach is overtly moral, playing on Medea's fear of her tyrannical father, of the hero's death, and on her desire to effect his rescue.¹⁰⁴ The epic hero's speech contributes to a positive characterisation of Medea, presenting her as a heroine led by her best instincts to achieve good deeds while

¹⁰² Sabot (1981), p. 2582, notes that opposing elements are placed side-by-side in the pentameter lines, but are widely separated in hexameter lines.

¹⁰³ This double-edged approach to *cipio* seems to be reflected in the verb's wide range of meanings. Medea uses *cipio* in the sense of 'to take hold of, delight, charm' [*OLD* 17], whereas the reader's perception of Medea's epistolary personality corresponds more the sense of 'to grasp mentally, comprehend, take in' [*OLD* 29]. Bessone (1997), p. 157, remarks on the verb's elegiac connotations of conquest, but I do not think that this precludes a wider interpretation of the line.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Arg.* 3.975-1007.

averting bad ones.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, the Ovidian hero secures Medea's help by dwelling on power rather than on morality: he casts himself as a 'glory' to Medea's self-image [*Her.* 12.76]. Notice that Jason emphasises Medea's control of the situation in negative terms, rather than in the affirmative tone of Apollonius. Where the epic Jason draws out Medea's pity for the likelihood of his own death, the Ovidian hero declares *vitaque morsque manu* [*Her.* 12.74]. This is a statement of dominance rather than of salvation, the opposing images of life and death focusing the listener's attention on the *choice* inherent in Medea's position, and not on the hero's preferred outcome.¹⁰⁶ Line 75 crystallises the situation unambiguously, as Jason argues that Medea should be content with having the ability to destroy others, and not feel the need to actually do so.

I argue that the Ovidian Jason's persuasion is calculated to appeal not to the empathetic young girl of the *Argonautica*, but to a heroine who derives satisfaction from the possession of control over others, who relishes the oscillation between life and death to which Jason refers in his speech. In *Heroides* 12, the hero's logic is that Medea should save him not because either one of them is a moral character, but simply to demonstrate that she *can*. Observe, for example, the juxtaposition between *servatus* and *gloria* [*Her.* 12.76]: Jason addresses the question of his survival solely in terms of the benefits that will accrue to Medea, and not to himself. In contrast to the Apollonian hero, Ovid's Jason does not attempt to persuade his heroine towards the merciful outcome – preventing his death – but towards the realisation that a living hero can offer proof of Medea's extraordinary capabilities. In other words, Jason's speech shows the elegiac hero defining his own worth in terms of Medea's view of *herself*.

In my reading, the Ovidian Jason approaches Medea as though she is a self-centred personality devoid of empathy – the signature trait of the psychopath. In Jason's depiction, the elegiac Medea is more influenced by the promotion of her own self-image than by the hero's imminent demise, and he shapes his speech accordingly. I suggest that Jason's

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Clauss (1997), who argues that Apollonius' Medea is a helper-maiden figure.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Bessone (1997), p. 141, who notes the similarity between Jason's words at *Her.* 12.74 and Medea's own words to the Pelidae in the *Metamorphoses*: '*in manibus vestris vita est aetasque parentis*' [*Met.* 7.335]. I suggest that the correlation between the two myths offers indirect support for my contention that we can treat the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 as the same character. Here in *Heroides* 12, Jason illustrates Medea's control; in *Metamorphoses* 7, Medea lies to the Pelidae, alleging that they are in control of their father's fate, where Ovid's reader knows that it is Medea who influences Pelias' *vita...aetasque*. On a similar point, see Bömer (1976), p. 284.

persuasion in *Heroides* 12 resembles the tactics that law enforcement agencies have developed to facilitate the interrogation of psychopathic criminals. Discussing the development of psychopathy research, Hare (2007) recalls a conference at which he discovered that a significant proportion of law enforcement personnel were unaware that their methods of interrogation were ineffectual on psychopaths.¹⁰⁷ Through the researchers who were mapping the psychopathic personality, the detectives learned that it is impossible to manipulate a psychopath by appealing to his better nature. A psychopath cannot be encouraged to ‘get it off his chest’; this makes no sense to him because he feels no guilt. Instead, the interrogator must appeal to the psychopath’s ego, suggesting that he can only claim recognition, or *glory*, for his crimes if he confesses to them. This strategy has proven effective with psychopathic offenders, because – as Cleckley observed – psychopaths are comparatively unfazed by the prospect of imprisonment.¹⁰⁸ They feel no mortification for the violation of a social norm, and suffer very few psychological ill-effects from incarceration, being virtually immune to depression and other mood disorders.¹⁰⁹ Jason’s approach in *Heroides* 12 is very similar: he shows Medea what she stands to gain by helping him, and so secures the heroine’s cooperation.

From the point of view of Ovid’s external reader, I argue that Medea’s very inclusion of Jason’s speech attests to the validity of examining her as a psychopathic personality. I noted above that Medea frames her account so as to suggest that it exposes Jason as deceitful. This being so, Medea does not appear to understand that the reader’s ability to

¹⁰⁷ See Hare (2007), pp. 19–20 for a full account. Hare includes this anecdote as evidence of how far the collective understanding of psychopathy has progressed in a comparatively short time. Even as recently as 1998, when the conference in question took place, it was by no means unusual for experienced law enforcement personnel to have no idea about the psychopathic personality, although they had probably been interrogating psychopathic criminals for years.

¹⁰⁸ Cleckley (1941, rp 1988) dwells at length on the problems posed by the psychopath’s lack of concern about imprisonment. He argues that the psychopath is ill-suited both to psychiatric hospitals and to prison. In Cleckley’s view, a psychopath does not belong in a hospital because he is not ‘insane’ and is therefore not mentally disordered or vulnerable in the same way as the vast majority of psychiatric patients, upon whom the psychopath can have a deliberately deleterious effect. Cleckley reports that several of his psychopathic patients appeared to enjoy their stints in hospital because of the opportunity it provided to distress more vulnerable patients: see, for example, his case study of ‘Max’, pp. 29–46. Neither is the psychopath suited to a prison, because the penal system derives from the assumption that the threat or experience of incarceration is society’s most powerful deterrent against antisocial behaviour. Since the psychopath appears not to feel this deterrent, nor can his condition be mitigated by pharmaceutical intervention, the vast majority of psychiatrists conclude that psychopaths cannot be treated. Many are even sceptical about whether they can be managed effectively. Hervé and Yuille (2007 eds.) address this topic, and include several articles on current approaches to the clinical treatment of psychopathy.

¹⁰⁹ The psychological resilience of psychopathic patients is linked to Cleckley’s observation (1941, rp 1988), p. 263, that the psychopath rarely feels extreme emotion.

credit her assessment of Jason is damaged by the view of Medea that is espoused by Jason's narrative of control. Ovid's heroine appears not to perceive the contradiction here: she cannot argue *both* for Jason's selfish manipulation of her own naïveté *and* for the persuasiveness – and thereby the veracity – of a speech that depicts her as the controlling and self-interested party. I propose that this aspect of *Heroides* 12 represents a collision between the 'two Medeas' we identified earlier. Jason's speech portrays a relentlessly self-serving heroine; in turn, this raises the possibility that the writing Medea may be trying to rationalise her actions as being the hero's fault, using *Heroides* 12 as her mouthpiece.

The conflict between Medea's Medea and Jason's Medea is consistent with the psychopath's difficulty in understanding how his personality appears to others. Since psychopaths lack the affective capability to interpret a situation from any point of view other than their own, they often struggle to identify flaws in their logical reasoning which proceed from a highly self-centred mode of interacting.¹¹⁰ Seen in this light, the Ovidian Medea's thought process might look something like this: the whole situation is Jason's fault, not Medea's. Therefore, Jason's speech must offer incontrovertible evidence of the hero's culpability because it succeeded in securing Medea's assistance, and because it forms part of the situation which Medea has chosen to designate Jason's fault. From such a self-focused perspective, the heroine would likely not be able to perceive that Jason's speech projects a contrasting portrait of herself as the controlling force, because she would not agree with the view that Jason's manipulative behaviour appears less significant when placed alongside a depiction of a heroine who enjoys having control over life and death. For Ovid's external reader, the striking feature of Jason's speech is that the hero wants to live; Medea, meanwhile, wants to decide whether or not he *can* live. I suggest that this dichotomy highlights the significance of Medea's caprice while diminishing the reader's perception of Jason's wrongdoing in flattering the heroine for his own ends. To the psychopathic personality, however, such judgemental relativism would be incomprehensible.¹¹¹ In my reading, Jason's speech emphasises for Ovid's reader the

¹¹⁰ The fifteen case studies that make up the first section of Cleckley's book (1941, rp 1988) offer perhaps the most succinct illustration of this point. In providing detailed accounts of the progression of conversations with his psychopathic patients, Cleckley exposes the elliptical logic of the psychopath, and the blind spots that inevitably emerge from the patient's being unable to understand how other people perceive them.

¹¹¹ Hare (1993), pp. 9-23, recalls that one of his earliest challenges working in the prison system was in learning how to handle the psychopath's conviction that antisocial acts are roughly interchangeable, that the commission of murder is really no worse than that of fraud. He cites numerous anecdotes from patients which show a completely different moral system to general society: for example, the inmate convicted of theft who responded that he had never committed a

extremity of Medea's elegiac self-focus, although the writing heroine appears to consider it a valuable weapon in her attack against the hero.

Absyrtus' Death

Medea's account of her brother's death offers a second compelling indication that the Ovidian heroine is incapable of empathy. This middle section of *Heroides* 12 has traditionally confounded the critics. Jacobson (1974), in particular, is scathing of the apparent lack of emotional depth in Ovid's heroine, taking it as evidence that the character of Medea does not function outside the epic or tragic setting.¹¹² Conversely, I argue that the heroine's lack of feeling is reflective of her uniquely Ovidian personality:

At non te fugiens sine me, germane, reliqui.
 deficit hoc uno littera nostra loco:
 quod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere dextra.
 sic ego, sed tecum, dilaceranda fui!
 nec tamen extimui—quid enim post illa timerem?—
 credere me pelago femina iamque nocens.
 numen ubi est? ubi di? meritas subeamus in alto,
 tu fraudis poenas, credulitatis ego.

But I did not abandon you, my brother, leaving you alone without me as I fled. In this one place my letter fails. What my right hand dared to do it does not dare to write of. Thus I ought to have been hacked to pieces, but along with you! I did not, however, fear to entrust myself to the sea – for what should I fear after that? – I, a woman and now a guilty one. Where is the divine power? Where are the gods? Let us submit to our deserved punishment in the deep – you for your trickery and I for my credulity.

[*Her.* 12.113-20]

This is a passage full of contradictions, each amplifying the reader's awareness of the personality traits identified through Jason's speech. Perhaps most horrifying is the heroine's apparent inability to perceive that her sentiments reflect poorly on herself. In line 113, Medea claims that she did not 'abandon' her brother in Colchis, *sine me* suggesting an emotional bond between the siblings; the reader, however, is struck by the clear conflict between Medea's account and the literary tradition. In *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle relates the gruesome details of Absyrtus' dismemberment by his sister [*Her.* 6.129-30], which renders Medea's assertions in *Heroides* 12 not only revisionist but markedly unfeeling. Notice that Medea implies that she spared her brother the fate of abandonment, but at no point does

violent offence, but that he had once 'had to kill someone' (1993), p. 151. Psychopaths understand that society deems a range of acts to be criminal, but not why non-psychopaths perceive some acts to be morally 'worse' than others. See also Cleckley (1941, rp 1988), pp. 261-7.

¹¹² Jacobson (1974), pp. 121-3.

she acknowledge the impact of her own actions upon Absyrtus, nor does she demonstrate understanding of or remorse for his physical suffering, which goes unmentioned. In my view, these oversights jar against the label *germane* [*Her.* 12.113], intimating that the Ovidian Medea does not feel the sort of affection that the term usually represents.

As in the case of Jason's speech, we observe that this passage is dominated by the figure of Medea at the expense of the murdered Absyrtus – *sine me, mea dextra, sic ego, credere me*. This is consistent with the psychopathic personality, which engages with the interests of others only as they intersect with the psychopath's own experiences. The passage purports to illustrate Medea's regret at her brother's death, and yet the heroine remains the most visible and important character, damaging the reader's confidence in Medea's representation of her distress on her brother's behalf. Consider, for example, Medea's inconsistent use of the second person: at line 116, she declares that she ought to have died, *tecum* referring presumably to the slain Absyrtus; in line 120, however, *tu* refers undoubtedly to Jason. The sudden switch from one (dead) man to another (living) one suggests that they are in some sense interchangeable in Medea's narrative, creating an impression that the Ovidian heroine is skating across the surface of these events rather than actually engaging with them. Crucially, the only images of pain or distress pertain to Medea herself – she speaks of *her* imagined 'tearing apart', *her* fear, or lack thereof. I suggest that Medea's sentiments depict the heroine as a character whose emotional attachment to her brother, and whose remorse at her role in his death, is so limited as to be overtaken by her concern with her own feelings of discomfort in the situation.

At line 114, Medea states that her letter 'fails' in its narration of Absyrtus' murder; however, the implication that the heroine is repulsed by her actions highlights the growing gulf between Medea's narration and the literary tradition. Medea may 'fail' to *recount* her brother's demise, but the reader knows that she did not 'fail' to deliberately *cause* it.¹¹³ The juxtaposition between the deeds that Medea's hand dared and those of which she dares not write thus becomes an emblem of the Ovidian heroine's penchant for obfuscation.¹¹⁴

Medea's actions are here at their least defensible, and yet the heroine chooses to focus her

¹¹³ Bremmer's discussion (1997) may be useful here: he notes that Apollonian critics have devoted very little attention to Medea's murder of Absyrtus, despite the substantial moral violation that it represents. In highlighting the failure of the scholarly tradition to consider the implications of Absyrtus' murder for a reading of Medea's Apollonian characterisation, Bremmer demonstrates the value of interrogating Medea's apparent attitudes and motivations in the Ovidian context also.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Bessone (1997), pp. 174-5, on *Her.* 12.115.

narrative around what she did *not* do – she did not ‘abandon’ Absyrtus; her letter ‘fails’ – rather than around the deeds that she *did* commit. The Ovidian heroine suggests that her behaviour was not as bad as it could have been, a distortion of reality that attempts to divert the reader’s attention away from Absyrtus’ unenviable fate. This approach speaks directly to the lack of remorse and of empathy which form the bedrock of the psychopathic personality.¹¹⁵ Rather than engaging with the moral violation that the murder of Absyrtus constitutes, Medea places it on a sliding scale of behaviour which demonstrates that she could have done worse if she had so chosen – hardly an attitude of self-reproach from a grieving sibling.

From the viewpoint of Ovid’s external reader, we might observe that Medea’s account of Absyrtus’ death illustrates a fundamental ‘failure’ of *Heroides* 12 as a narrative. Just as the Ovidian heroine is as much captured *in* Jason’s words as she is captured *by* them [*Her.* 12.92], so Medea’s poem ‘fails’ not only to accurately describe the murder of Absyrtus, but also to persuade the reader of the heroine’s genuine regret. On the surface, the elegiac Medea says all the right things, acknowledging the necessity of punishment for her behaviour towards her brother: *dilaceranda fui* [*Her.* 12.116]; *meritas subeamus in alto* [*Her.* 12.119]. In concluding her account, however, Medea alleges that her crime was *credulitas* in contrast to Jason’s *fraus* [*Her.* 12.120], revealing that the heroine regards her own wrongdoing as consisting in allying herself with the hero, rather than in the betrayal and murder of her brother and the desecration of his corpse.

Just as we observed in analysing Medea’s presentation of Jason’s speech, the heroine appears not to recognise the lack of empathy that her description of her actions implies. The Medea who revels in recalling Jason’s description of her self-focused personality cannot now perceive that she has written Absyrtus’ suffering out of her narrative in favour of a focus on what it feels like to be herself. I argue that the significance of *credulitas* lies in its implicit comparison of Jason’s treatment of Medea with Medea’s treatment of her brother.¹¹⁶ Medea’s own suffering at Jason’s hands – note the presence of the hero’s *fraus* – has sidled into a scene that was *supposed* to be about Absyrtus’ suffering at Medea’s.

¹¹⁵ Lack of remorse and lack of empathy constitute item numbers six and eight respectively on Hare’s PCL-R (1991).

¹¹⁶ Cf. Bessone (1997), pp. 172–81; Palmer (1898, rp 2005), p. 395. Bessone observes the significance of Ovid’s choice of vocabulary in this passage for a reading of Medea’s elegiac characterisation; Palmer, however, rejects Ovid’s version completely, arguing either for the deletion of lines 119–20 as spurious, or for the emendation of *credulitatis* to *crudelitatis*.

The suggestion that the failure of the hero-heroine relationship can be compared with the murder of a sibling shows in Ovid's heroine a truly psychopathic level of self-concern.

Returning briefly to the epistolary form of *Heroides* 12, I suggest that Ovid's poem performs a similar function for the external reader to that of Hare's Psychopathy Checklist (PCL) for the forensic clinician. One of the key reasons why PCL has become so popular is that the test is so impenetrable in its logic that it is virtually impossible for the psychopath to manipulate the result. Cleckley (1941) acknowledges that he was sometimes tricked by his psychopathic patients into believing that he perceived in them a greater degree of remorse than was genuine; subsequent interviews demonstrated that the patient had simply told Cleckley what he had divined that Cleckley wanted to hear.¹¹⁷ Hare's PCL thus represented an ambitious – and ultimately successful – attempt to place the psychopath in a situation where he could not resort to the mimicry of socially-acceptable behaviours and attitudes, but was instead compelled to reveal his genuine thought-processes.

I propose that excerpts from *Heroides* 12 such as Jason's speech and Absyrtus' death can be taken by Ovid's reader as literary analogues of Hare's PCL. Ovid provides Medea with a univocal environment, in which his heroine appears to reflect the attitudes that the reader expects to hear – for example, remorse for Absyrtus' murder – but in which the heroine inadvertently reveals more of her own personality than is useful in the pursuit of her attempt at self-exculpation. Put simply, I suggest that in allowing his Medea to attempt to depict herself as the hero's victim, Ovid actually contrives to have his heroine demonstrate how inaccurate a representation of the situation that is. Just as the psychopath cannot usually conceal their own lack of empathy for others, so the elegiac Medea is revealed as a heroine unaware that her modes of thinking and feeling set her apart from her sister-writers of the *Heroides*. Examining the Medea of *Heroides* 12 as a psychopathic personality thus enables us to develop a rationale for some of the heroine's more challenging attitudes within the poem; likewise to establish that Ovid has created for his heroine a stable and coherent epistolary identity, albeit an identity grounded in self-focus and an inability to feel for other characters.

¹¹⁷ Cleckley (1941, rp 1988) refers repeatedly to the fact that he learned to be on guard with his psychopathic patients at all times, so as to avoid inadvertently accepting a patient's statement or anecdote as genuine. His case studies demonstrate the problem most effectively: for example, that of 'Max', pp. 29-46, by whom Cleckley appears to have been especially fascinated. Cleckley notes that Max's file suggested that he was assumed by clinicians, law enforcement and social workers alike to be a person of some intellectual calibre, despite the superficial nature of his learning, which was demonstrable under sustained examination, pp. 38-9.

2.4 Epistolary Self-revelation

In this section, I argue that Ovid uses the multi-layered nature of the epistolary poem to help him expose aspects of the heroines' characters which the writing women would not necessarily choose to include in their narratives. Ovid exploits the external reader's knowledge of the literary tradition, so as to encourage readings of his elegiac heroines that are informed by our knowledge of the women's fates in other texts. Thus our impression of Hypsipyle's disempowerment is compounded when Ovid reminds us of her unenviable fate in Euripides. On the other hand, Medea's controlling personality appears even more noticeable against the backdrop of Euripides' tragedy, in which she escapes punishment for her actions.

Hypsipyle's curse

Near the end of *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle appears to shrug off her epistolary self-restraint, wishing terrible punishments upon Medea for separating Hypsipyle from her beloved Jason. Hypsipyle's curse has divided critical opinion; contemporary scholarship, however, has largely accepted Verducci's (1985) assertion that the violence of Hypsipyle's fury awards her the status of the 'true' Medea of the *Heroides*.¹¹⁸ On the contrary, I suggest that the curse section functions for Ovid's reader as the ultimate depiction of Hypsipyle's powerlessness.

paelicis ipsa meos implessem sanguine vultus, quosque veneficiis abstulit illa suis.	150
Medeae Medea forem. quod si quid ab alto iustus adest votis Iuppiter ipse meis, quod gemit Hypsipyle, lecti quoque subnuba nostri maereat et leges sentiat ipsa suas	
utque ego destituor coniunx materque duorum, a totidem natis orba sit aque viro!	155
nec male parta diu teneat peiusque relinquat: exulet et toto quaerat in orbe fugam. quam fratri germana fuit miseroque parenti filia tam natis, tam sit acerba viro!	160
cum mare, cum terras consumpserit, aera temptet; erret inops, exspes, caede cruenta sua. haec ego, coniugio fraudata Thoantias, oro. vivite devoto nuptaque virque toro!	

¹¹⁸ Cf. Verducci (1985), p. 66. In my view, Verducci's analysis depends on interpreting Hypsipyle's bloody imagery as an accurate measure of the strength of the heroine's feeling. In the sense that Hypsipyle's curse represents a marked departure from the tone of the remainder of *Heroides* 6, Verducci's approach is persuasive. My reading, however, depends on penetrating the superficial violence of Hypsipyle's account, to identify the fundamental disjunction between these images and the nature of the heroine we have been observing. Cf. Bloch (2000), who concurs that Ovid depicts Hypsipyle as being emotionally weaker than the Medea of *Heroides* 12.

But I would have covered my face in the blood of your mistress; yours also, which that woman stole away by her poisons. I would be as Medea to Medea. In any case, if Just Jupiter is on hand from on high for my prayers, may the rival for my marriage grieve likewise, as Hypsipyle laments, and may that woman receive a taste of her own medicine. As I am forsaken, a wife and the mother of two children, may that woman be deprived of just as many children, and of her husband! May she not enjoy her ill-gotten gains for long, and may she abandon them more wretchedly. Let her be an exile and seek refuge across the globe. As bitter a sister as she was to her brother, as bitter a daughter to her wretched father, let her be so bitter to her sons, to her husband! When she has exhausted the sea and the land, let her test out the sky. Let her wander, destitute, hopeless, stained with the bloodshed that she brought about. This I, the daughter of Thoas, pray, having been defrauded of my marriage. Live on, both husband and wife in your cursed marriage bed!

[*Her.* 6.149-64]

Ovid's reader observes that almost all of the misfortunes that Hypsipyle wishes upon her enemy will shortly befall Hypsipyle herself, as treated in Euripides' tragedy.¹¹⁹ In *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle entreates suffering for Medea, but the reader may be distracted by the prospect of Hypsipyle's own imminent agony: she will be exiled from her home, she will lose her sons, she will be destitute and a slave, she will even be implicated in the death of a child, mirroring the *caedes* that she envisages for Medea.¹²⁰ Yet even as we dwell on the spectre of Hypsipyle's unhappy future, Ovid exploits the literary tradition to provoke in his reader a second realisation. The form of Hypsipyle's curse exposes a curious juxtaposition between Hypsipyle's fate and Medea's, for the reader is aware that Medea will go on to experience some of the events that Hypsipyle mentions – the status of exile, and the loss of her husband and children. Nonetheless, where Hypsipyle invokes these circumstances as the most painful she can imagine for her rival, Ovid's reader knows from the poet's depiction of Medea's self-focus that Hypsipyle's enemy will likely not experience these events as a crippling torment.

Hypsipyle's very description of Medea underlines the disjunction between Hypsipyle's fantasy and the actual events of the mythological future. Notice that Hypsipyle says of Medea *a totidem natis orba sit* [*Her.* 6.156], the passive construction intimating that Hypsipyle imagines Medea being acted upon by another character. Hypsipyle envisages Medea as the victim of suffering caused by others, but Ovid's reader knows that Medea's

¹¹⁹ Cf. Collard, Crop and Gilbert (2004) for an evaluation of the available fragments.

¹²⁰ Statius offers a grim account of the infant prince Archemorus' death by snake bite, whilst the child is in Hypsipyle's charge [*Theb.* 5.499-554]. Euripides' fragmentary *Hypsipyle* details the heroine's eventual acquittal from prosecution by the grieving mother Eurydice. See also Hyginus, *Fab.* 74.

mythological future will be directed by her own hand, where Hypsipyle's will not. At the moment, then, when Verducci argues that Hypsipyle is virtually deranged with fury, I suggest that Ovid highlights the dissimilarity between our heroines, encouraging the reader to pity Hypsipyle's total incomprehension of her rival.¹²¹

Significantly, Hypsipyle does not appear to have noticed that her fantasy future for Medea is not borne out even by her own treatment of Medea within *Heroides* 6. Observe, for example, Hypsipyle's use of verbs in the curse passage, which is representative of the general trend within the poem.¹²² The present subjunctives indicate Hypsipyle's wishes for the future, yet the active verbs apply almost exclusively to Medea. When Hypsipyle says *maereat, sentiat, erret*, the actions may be grim, but Hypsipyle nonetheless imagines Medea as the character *doing* the grieving, the feeling, the wandering. In referring to herself, Hypsipyle favours the passive voice: she describes herself as *fraudata* [*Her.* 6.163], she uses the verb *destituor* [*Her.* 6.155], focusing the reader's attention on Hypsipyle as the recipient of other characters' actions. When Hypsipyle does claim an active verb for herself, she persists in ceding the most prominent place in the scene to Medea, as we have observed her to do with Jason – *Medeae Medea forem* [*Her.* 6.151]. In my reading, Ovid depicts Hypsipyle as unable to dwell even on her own feelings without shaping the articulation of them around the actions of another character; in turn, this strengthens our view that Hypsipyle is the victim of other characters' behaviour, whereas we know already that Medea is not.

I suggest that the violence of Hypsipyle's curse fashions a link with Medea's future in Euripides, in which the deaths are described in shocking detail.¹²³ In contrast to Euripides, where we know Medea to be in control, in *Heroides* 6 Hypsipyle can only picture Medea *being victimised* as she herself has been victimised. In my view, this conveys the extent to which Hypsipyle does not understand what it must be like to be Medea, who acts where

¹²¹ Cf. Verducci (1985), p. 65, where she describes Hypsipyle as suffering from 'primordial blood-lust'.

¹²² Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 contains approximately 48% more references to the writing heroine in the passive voice than does Medea's *Heroides* 12. Readers should note that this figure changes depending on whether it is calculated using principle verbs only, or all parts of verbs referring to the writing heroine: for example, Hypsipyle's *fetu comitante gemello* [*Her.* 6.143]. The figure quoted represents all verbs referring to the writing heroine. In general, I concede that statistical analysis is not an ideal tool for evaluating poetry; nonetheless, I suggest that it enables the critic to assess whether an instinctive impression of a poem can be supported by the grammatical construction of the text.

¹²³ Cf. the messenger's account of Creusa's death and Creon's [*Med.* 1167-1221]; and the discussion of the murder of the children when Jason arrives at Medea's home [*Med.* 1306-50].

Hypsipyle does not. The literary tradition tells us that Medea *causes* suffering, yet Hypsipyle's portrait of her rival does not reflect this important trait. A heroine such as Hypsipyle, who misreads crucial aspects of her rival's personality, cannot also be the sort of heroine who genuinely entertains violent revenge against her rival. Ovid here exploits Hypsipyle's distress to emphasise for his reader the heroine's fundamental helplessness: she is play-acting at revenge where Medea's revenge in Euripides is in deadly earnest. Notice, too, that Hypsipyle's curse occupies the very final couplets of *Heroides* 6. There is no closing statement, no farewell. Ovid intimates to his reader that Hypsipyle's anger has petered out, as if the very articulation of her fury has drained the heroine's last reserves of indignation.¹²⁴ Hypsipyle's collapse of emotional intensity reflects once more the heroines' divergent personalities: Hypsipyle's anger withers and dies, confined to the Ovidian sphere, whereas Medea's goes on to affect other plots and texts. One heroine is essentially powerless; the other not.

The three faces of Diana

Just as Hypsipyle's curse illustrates for the reader the heroine's disempowerment, so we have observed that Jason's speech in *Heroides* 12 encourages a reading of Medea as a controlling personality. I now argue for the significance of Ovid's inclusion of Diana in Jason's speech [*Her.* 12.79] – the image of the powerful goddess operating as a mirror for the reader of Medea's view of herself. From the heroine's point of view, Diana forms part of the context of the narrative; for Ovid's reader, the figure of the goddess works to crystallise several important observations about Medea's Ovidian characterisation.

The inclusion of Diana is one of very few instances in *Heroides* 12 where Ovid overtly alters the depiction of Medea's mythological tradition.¹²⁵ Although we have observed that the poet's positioning of his narrative in between the versions of Apollonius and Euripides provokes an atypical reading of Medea's motivations, Ovid generally refrains from changing the 'facts' of Medea's myth as established by the Greek poets. By contrast,

¹²⁴ Verducci (1985), p. 64, provides an arresting description of Hypsipyle's final lines: 'ignited, she goes whizzing like a Roman candle into a final flare of lunatic illumination'. Verducci's premise is that the presence of Medea in Jason's life brings out the 'savage' side of Hypsipyle; mine is that Hypsipyle is trying to work herself up into a frenzy that is not really present.

¹²⁵ The other significant instance is Absyrtus' murder, which Ovid has Hypsipyle tell us was committed by Medea herself [*Her.* 6.129-30]. In Apollonius, of course, Jason wields the knife [*Arg.* 4.464-7].

Jason's petition represents a shift in Ovid's narrative emphasis: the Ovidian hero approaches Medea at a shrine to Diana, whereas in Apollonius the scene takes place at the shrine of Hecate.¹²⁶

Apollonius' decision to treat the scene in Hecate's shrine is unremarkable – the religious setting suits Jason's purposes, emphasising the righteousness of his desire to obtain the Golden Fleece and drive Pelias out of Iolchus. Likewise, the shrine highlights the solemnity of Medea's choice, as she decides whether or not to betray her father. Combined with the long-standing mythological association between Hecate's powers and Medea's, Apollonius' inclusion of the goddess seems logical:¹²⁷ Jason is encouraging Medea to take control of her life, symbolised in the figure of Hecate who is described in the *Theogony* as a powerful goddess 'honoured above all' by Zeus [Hes. *Th.* 410]. For Apollonius, Hecate is emblematic of the powers that Medea can use for Jason's benefit. As Hesiod says: 'whom she will she greatly aids and advances' [*Th.* 428].

I suggest that Ovid does something similar in *Heroides* 12, drawing on the figure of Diana to emphasise specific aspects of Medea's epistolary identity. On one level, this is a straightforward translation of the Apollonian content into a Roman context – Hecate being one of Diana's incarnations.¹²⁸ On the other hand, Jason's invocation of the goddess' 'three faces' makes this divine framing of Medea more intriguing than its Apollonian counterpart.

“per mala nostra precor, quorum potes esse levamen,
per genus et numen cuncta videntis avi,
per triplices vultus arcanaque sacra Dianae
et si forte aliquos gens habet ista deos:
o virgo, miserere mei, miserere meorum,
effice me meritis tempus in omne tuum!”

¹²⁶ Cf. *Arg.* 3.940-6, where Mopsos instructs Jason to go to Medea in Hecate's shrine, and to entreat her there. Arcellaschi (1990), p. 282, argues for the significance of Ovid's inclusion of Roman Diana in naming the shrine in *Heroides* 12. He suggests that the use of Greek names was widespread in Ovid's time-period, and thus the poet's decision to deliberately 'Romanise' the scene must be significant. Arcellaschi is interested in Ovid's depiction of Medea in terms of the Roman / barbarian dichotomy, yet I concur with his view of the significance of Diana's shrine.

¹²⁷ In some strands of the myth, for example in Diodorus Siculus, Hecate is identified as Medea's mother [4.45.2-3]. A greater number of mythographers, however, name Medea's mother as Idyia, daughter of Oceanus. Cf. Apollod. 1.9.23; Hes. *Th.* 961; Hyg. *Fab.* 25.

¹²⁸ Readers will observe that the *Heroides* are replete with anachronisms and incongruities, which Ovid expects his readers either to ignore or to regard as a literary joke between the self-conscious poet and his reader. The suggestion that a shrine to the Roman Diana might be found in the mythical landscape of Colchis is just such an instance. Briseis' *Heroides* 3 offers perhaps the most frequently-cited incongruity: the heroine apologises for the tears that allegedly stain her missive to Achilles, drawing the reader's attention to both her poor command of Greek and to her *barbarica manus* [*Her.* 3.1-2]. Ovid's poem, of course, is written neither in Greek, nor in Briseis' native tongue.

“By my misfortunes I entreat you, the misfortunes of which you can be the relief; by your family and the power of your omniscient grandfather; by the three faces and sacred mysteries of Diana; and if by any chance your race has any other gods: O, maiden, have mercy on me; have mercy on my people! Make me, by your favour, yours forever.”

[*Her.* 12.77-82]

Apart from the reference to Diana, Jason's prayer conforms to a familiar pattern: he draws the heroine's attention to his misfortunes; he calls on her family, focusing on Medea's most powerful ancestor the Sun; and he acknowledges the gods of Medea's race.¹²⁹ I suggest that Jason's call upon the *triplices vultus Dianae* is unusual in its specificity. Readers remember that the goddess' tripartite nature is absent from both the Apollonian text and Ovid's own *Metamorphoses* 7, where Hecate is treated as a single entity.¹³⁰ The Diana of *Heroides* 12 is a more complex figure, her three 'faces' depicting her as inhabiting all three realms of the world: Luna, goddess of the celestial realm; Diana the huntress, connected to the mortal world; and Hecate or Proserpina, goddess of the underworld.¹³¹ Ovid's reader will perceive the connection between the elegiac Diana and the Apollonian Hecate, but Ovid's poetic symbolism seems to be much wider-ranging than that of the *Argonautica*.

An examination of the qualities associated with Diana's incarnations enables us to identify a link between the tripartite goddess and Ovid's characterisation of Medea as an unusually controlling heroine. In the Roman psyche, Diana-the-moon was intimately connected to the cycle of growth and decay which is mirrored in the moon's waxing and waning. Pliny's *Natural History* describes the moon as the controller of *spiritus* [*NH.* 2.221], citing Aristotle, who was of the view that animals only died when the tide was on its way out – a natural phenomenon controlled by the lunar cycle [*NH.* 2.220].¹³² The moon was thus in

¹²⁹ Cf. *Arg.* 3.985-89, where Jason entreats Medea by Hecate, by her ancestors and by Zeus. On the context of Jason's Heroidean prayer, see Bessone (1997), pp. 144-5.

¹³⁰ Cf. *Met.* 7.74. The absence of Diana from *Metamorphoses* 7 makes her inclusion in *Heroides* 12 all the more interesting; however, Ovid does refer in passing to a tripartite goddess at *Met.* 7.94-5. Cf. also *Arg.* 3.477-8; 3.529-30; 3.841-5. Seneca's Medea uses the expression *Hecate triformis* [*Sen. Med.* 7], intimating perhaps the poet's dependence on the Ovidian versions which preceded him.

¹³¹ Green (2007), pp. 112-44, offers a very useful account of the 'many faces of Diana', including the various qualities of Luna, the huntress and Proserpina.

¹³² At *Her.* 12.85-8, Medea alleges that Jason used the term *spiritus*, in attempting to convey to her the depth of his loyalty. The hero wishes that his *spiritus* should leave him before he would ever turn against Medea; the statement foreshadows the deaths of Jason's sons, through whom the hero's legacy will be destroyed.

some sense a force to be feared, in that it spoke to the relentless passage of time and the approach of death.

The figure of Diana the huntress turns on an almost identical tension. Diana's hunting prowess shows her to have control of her landscape and superior ability to the dangerous animals she pursues there. Although the huntress is a symbol of the human mastery of nature, she is also the possessor of lethal force and of weapons usually confined to the male sphere. Diana exists on both sides of the gender boundary, the eternally chaste goddess who is at home in the man's world of hunting, and who is better than any man at her deadly arts. Ovid's own tale of Actaeon illustrates this tension between male and female, life force and deadly force: Actaeon is one moment a loyal student of Diana's hunting arts, and the next his fearsome goddess' prey [*Met.* 3.138-255]. Diana's underworld identity renders explicit the movement between life and death which is represented by the goddess' lunar and hunting incarnations. Proserpina rules the ranks of the dead, Diana-the-huntress the mortal world and Luna the celestial realm, forming a three-dimensional, integrated image of a goddess who is quite literally everywhere.¹³³ Importantly, Proserpina can leave the underworld for specific periods every year: the fact that she can cross and re-cross the dividing line between life and death, albeit in pre-determined patterns, can only underline her power for audiences both ancient and modern.¹³⁴

Taken together, these three elements of Diana – encompassing heavens, earth and underworld, linked by the control over life and death – offer an important reflection of Medea's Ovidian characterisation. We have already observed that Jason's speech makes use of the language of power, portraying Medea as a heroine who relishes knowing that she can either rescue Jason or let him die. In the case of Diana, the goddess' divine status dictates that her influence over mortal lives is integral to her identity; Medea, on the other hand, has no such quality to mitigate the view of her implied by the Diana imagery. Unlike Diana-the-moon, who presides over the cycle from life to death and preserves the balance of the natural world, Jason clearly intimates that Medea seeks power for its own sake:

¹³³ Green's analysis (2007), pp. 112-44, is particularly helpful in its exploration of the Diana figure as traversing boundaries, a goddess who existed in multiple, sometimes ostensibly competing, spaces.

¹³⁴ See *Met.* 5.341-571, in which Ovid treats the myth of the seasons, which are shaped by Ceres' joy at her daughter's reappearance from the underworld, and her grief at Proserpina's subsequent departure.

siquem iuuet ipsa potestas [Her. 12.75]. Likewise, Diana-the-huntress reflects the mortal struggle to acquire the skills to survive in the natural environment; by contrast, Jason characterises Medea's lethal capabilities not as the source of her personal growth, but of her quest for glory: *sed tibi servatus gloria maior ero* [Her. 12.76]. Finally, Diana as Proserpina echoes the oscillation between life and death to which Jason explicitly refers – *inque tua est vitae morsque manu* [Her. 12.74]. Jason's words suggest that Medea sees herself as being like Proserpina, who exists in a liminal space between life and death without being affected by it. Proserpina, however, is wholly dissimilar to our heroine, because we know that Proserpina had her role forced upon her in consequence of her abduction by Pluto – she did not choose it for herself.

The qualities of the tripartite Diana combine to intimate that the Ovidian Medea aspires to the kind of power embodied by the goddess, but without the attention to balance in the celestial, mortal and chthonic realms that is implicitly encompassed in Diana's divine status. Jason's Medea is a heroine who seeks power and control without the responsibility that power necessarily entails. In both Apollonius and in *Heroides* 12, the religious setting of the hero's petition to Medea operates so as to underline a particular view of Medea. Whereas Apollonius' imagery builds a characterisation of a heroine beginning to grow into her own power, Ovid's Diana highlights in unflattering detail the controlling nature of the Heroidean Medea.

Medea and divinity

In contrast to Jason's depiction of Medea as a heroine seeking for herself the power of a goddess, the writing heroine appears to set herself apart from divine influence where possible. I suggest that Ovid shows Medea differentiating herself from Hecate's influence, as though the heroine is unwilling to acknowledge a source of help which could be taken as detracting from the reader's perception of her own abilities. Paradoxically, Medea's approach highlights the accuracy of Jason's depiction of the heroine – it demonstrates that the writing heroine is preoccupied with the notion of her own control.¹³⁵ The same is true of Medea's description of her agonies at Jason's abandonment:

¹³⁵ I suggest that the question of divinity provides a further respect in which Ovid differentiates his characterisation of Medea from that of Euripides. Knox's influential discussion of Euripides' heroine (1977) argues that Medea is constructed as a divine being more than as a mortal woman,

quaeque feros pepuli doctis medicatibus ignes,
 non valeo flammam effugere ipsa meas.
 ipsi me cantus herbaeque artesque relinquunt
 nil dea, nil Hecates sacra potentis agunt.

I who beat back cruel fires with drugs, I have not the strength to flee my very own flames. My very incantations and herbs and arts abandon me. Neither the goddess Hecate nor her sacred rites help me.

[*Her.* 12.165-8]

This passage occurs near the end of *Heroides* 12, preceding Medea's threats against Creusa [*Her.* 12.179-80]. Moreover, it is the first explicit reference to a divine being in Medea's own voice.¹³⁶ In contrast to the *Argonautica*, where Medea acknowledges Hecate's influence in her instructions to Jason, in Ovid the source of Medea's magic is unacknowledged.¹³⁷ Notice that the Heroidean Medea seems keen to maintain an element of distance between herself and the goddess: she mentions Hecate in a negative context only, underscored by the repetition of *nil*. The Ovidian narrative focuses on Medea's actions rather than the goddess' influence, reflected in the heroine's declaration that she was able to subdue a dragon, but not her own feelings.

I propose that Medea establishes a clear division between herself and the world of the supernatural. By saying that *neither* her herbal skills *nor* Hecate are at hand to help her, the heroine intimates that she is totally isolated from any helpful influence, *relinquunt* implicitly casting Medea as the victim of circumstance, required to effect her own rescue. Taken together, the two couplets represent a narrative continuity: the message is that Medea is on her own with her anger, just as she was with the dragon. Here in *Heroides* 12, the heroine seems only to draw on the figure of Hecate so as to emphasise how separate they are from each other. In my view, Ovid is conditioning his reader to conclude that any events yet to come will be of Medea's own making, just as the heroine is keen to highlight her self-sufficiency from Hecate vis-à-vis the events of the labours.

Ovid continues to depict Medea as being independent of divine influence right to the end of *Heroides* 12:

which stands in clear opposition to my view that the Ovidian Medea sets herself apart from divine influence where possible.

¹³⁶ I am here discounting Jason's reference to the gods of Medea's race, which we have lately discussed [*Her.* 12.73-88]; likewise Medea's reference to *quae dispensant mortalia fila sorores* [*Her.* 12.3]. I take the image of the Fates to be a poetic expression rather than a meaningful reference to a divine being.

¹³⁷ For Medea's instructions to the hero, see *Arg.* 3.1026-62, and especially 3.1035, where she refers to the necessary libation to Hecate. For Jason's corresponding deeds, see *Arg.* 3.1194-1224.

dum ferrum flammaeque aderunt sucusque veneni,
hostis Medae nullus inultus erit.

While sword and flame are to hand, and the juice of poison, no enemy of Medea's shall go unpunished.

[*Her.* 12.181-2]

Observe that the poet has his heroine choose three overtly 'human' weapons with which to threaten Jason. The sword belongs to the masculine world of combat, foreshadowing the blade with which she will murder her sons in Euripides. The flames represent a crucial aspect of mortal life and civilisation – both a domestic necessity and a dangerous force. Lastly, poison is found in the botanical world upon which human life depends. For Ovid's reader, the flames and the poison have particular significance in that they bring to mind Euripides, where Creusa will be wreathed in supernatural flames which poison her even as she burns.¹³⁸ In *Heroides* 12, however, the weapons are not characterised as supernatural; they occur in natural environments and have positive purposes as well as negative ones. Ovid seems to be taking great care to set his heroine up as a 'normal' mortal woman, to distance her where possible from the divine connections which have so complicated the interpretation of Euripides' Medea.

The marked lack of divine imagery in the latter part of *Heroides* 12 thus forms a contrast with Medea's closing allegation that her actions are being directed by *ista deus* [*Her.* 12.211]. I argue that the heroine's declaration arouses the reader's suspicion of Medea, in light of her preceding determination to separate herself from the perception of supernatural influence.

quos equidem actutum—sed quid praedicere poenam
attinet? ingentis parturit ira minas.
quo feret ira sequar. facti fortasse pigebit;
et piget infido consuluisse viro.
viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat.
nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit.

Those who indeed... but what good is it to foretell your punishment? My anger brings forth great threats. Whither my anger leads, I shall follow. Perhaps I shall repent of my deeds; I repent, too, of caring for an untrustworthy husband. The god [Cupid], who now sways my heart, will have [fore]seen those things. Assuredly, my mind struggles towards some greater deed.

[*Her.* 12.207-12]

After 200 lines in which Ovid characterises his heroine as the controller of her own and other characters' fates, Medea suddenly introduces the mitigating factor of the *deus*. In my

¹³⁸ Cf. Bessone (1997), pp. 242-3.

reading, the unexpected appearance of the god contrives to end the poem on a discordant note. Up to this point, the reader has observed the poet constructing his heroine according to a consistent set of personality traits – Ovid’s Medea is self-focused and controlling, unwilling to prioritise the interests of other characters above her own, preoccupied with demonstrating her own superiority. The *deus* thus conflicts with the heroine whom we have examined throughout the letter, relegating the figure of the writing heroine to the background of the poem for the first and only time in *Heroides* 12.¹³⁹ I suggest that Ovid includes the *deus* at the end of the letter as an example for his reader of an epistolary ‘error’ on Medea’s part.¹⁴⁰ As we discussed in the section on psychopathy, Ovid’s heroine seems unaware how certain aspects of her narrative might appear to her reader. Just so with the *deus*, which appears to be tacked on to the poem rather ineptly, as though the heroine cannot see that she has established a contradiction between the dominant portrait of the powerful writing heroine and the suggestion that she is being controlled by divine forces.¹⁴¹

As in Chapter One, I draw the reader’s attention to the rhetorical question at line 207: we have observed that rhetorical questions in *Heroides* 12 form part of a pattern in which Medea skates across the surface of complex events by presenting them as unworthy of more detailed exploration.¹⁴² I propose that Ovid uses this final rhetorical question to alert his reader that the heroine is attempting one final piece of obfuscation; this is embodied in the *deus*, which works like some of the other figures in *Heroides* 12, absorbing blame which more accurately belongs to the heroine herself.¹⁴³ Viewed in the context of *Heroides* 12 as a whole, the Ovidian reader has little choice but to interpret Medea’s *deus* as a narrative tool in the heroine’s project of self-exculpation. Just as Medea has earlier suggested that her past crimes were the hero’s fault, so she intimates that the crimes to come in Euripides will be the fault of an unnamed divinity. For Ovid’s reader, however, who by now should clearly understand Medea’s epistolary personality, the *deus* serves to

¹³⁹ Davis (2012), pp. 45–6, approaches this section quite differently, arguing for a reading of the scene as the Heroidean Medea’s attempt to shrug off her elegiac costume in preparation for her reinvention in the tragic mode.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Farrell (1998) who discusses the notion of involuntary self-disclosure in the *Heroides*.

¹⁴¹ Bessone (1997), p. 281, interprets the ‘god’ as an Ovidian joke – in the *Heroides*, of course, the god must be Amor, to reflect the movement of the poet’s subject matter from tragedy to elegy.

¹⁴² Given that we are literally on the verge of entering the chronology of Euripides’ play, we should remember that rhetorical questions are essentially atemporal, blurring the line between different periods of the narrative chronology: drawing on the reader’s knowledge to force a present interpretation of past events that will carry over into the future. Cf. Kennedy (2008), pp. 30–1.

¹⁴³ Cf. Arcellaschi’s analysis (1990), pp. 292–3, where he argues persuasively that Ovid’s use of the *deus* differs significantly from the notion of the divine force in Euripides.

highlight for the last time the heroine's need for control, whether to control the fates of other characters or to influence how she is perceived by the reader of her poem.

Comparative Analysis: Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14

Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14 constitutes our final comparative analysis. For Ovid's reader, Hypermnestra's story functions as a foil to Medea's; both women decide to betray their fathers, but Hypermnestra does so for reasons of morality rather than of personal gain. Medea attempts to diminish the reader's perception of her crimes against her family, whereas Hypermnestra is explicit in condemning the impiety of intrafamilial murder. Moreover, Hypermnestra acknowledges that righteous action is not always rewarded, in stark contrast to Medea's focus on repayment. I propose that the divergence between the two heroines' epistolary personalities highlights for the reader the injustice of each character's situation: Hypermnestra is being punished for an immoral deed which she refused to carry out; Medea is about to evade punishment for a series of immoral actions which she took of her own volition.

Heroides 12 and 14 include by far the highest proportions of direct speech of any of the poems in the collection. In Medea's case, direct speech comprises 21 lines out of 212, or 9.9%; in Hypermnestra's, 17 lines out of 132, or 12.8%.¹⁴⁴ In Chapter One, I argued that readers might interpret Medea's extensive 'quotation' of Jason as an indication that the heroine is revising aspects of her history.¹⁴⁵ In Hypermnestra's letter, the direct speech differs from Medea's in two important ways. First, Hypermnestra is recounting events which cannot be very temporally distant from the composition of *Heroides* 14.¹⁴⁶ From the reader's point of view, the compact mythological chronology increases the credibility of

¹⁴⁴ Canace's *Heroides* 11 includes the next-highest incidence of direct speech at 6.2%; then Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 at 6.1%; Ariadne's *Her.* 10 at 5.3%; Oenone's *Her.* 5 at 5.0%; Phyllis' *Her.* 2 at 3.7%; Penelope's *Her.* 1 at 3.4%; Hermione's *Her.* 8 and Laodamia's *Her.* 13 each at 2.4%; Briseis' *Her.* 3 at 1.9%; Dido's *Her.* 7 at 1.5%; and Phaedra's *Her.* 4 and Deianira's *Her.* 9 each at 0.5%. From these figures, we can observe how unusual is the distribution of speech in Medea's *Heroides* 12 and Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14 – Medea's poem contains half as much again as the next highest incidence; Hypermnestra's letter contains more than twice as much. Readers interested in the statistical analysis of the collection may wish to note that the distribution of direct speech does not correlate to the length of the poem. For example, Hypermnestra, Canace, Ariadne and Phyllis are amongst the shortest letters in the collection, although they have some of the highest proportions of direct speech.

¹⁴⁵ As in Chapter One, cf. Genette (1990), p. 761, who argues persuasively for the role of excessive amounts of dialogue in alerting the reader to the 'fictionality' of a first-person account.

¹⁴⁶ Although we cannot be certain exactly when *Heroides* 14 is written relative to Hypermnestra's disastrous wedding night, at *Her.* 14.3 the heroine tells us that she is in chains. The letter is therefore likely to have been composed in the days or weeks following the failed murder. At the very earliest, it is written on the day following the wedding, because Hypermnestra tells us that Danaus has had time to discover his daughter's defiance [*Her.* 14.79-80] and to act by imprisoning her [*Her.* 14.83-4].

Hypermnestra's report, it being highly likely that the heroine could accurately recall an event only a few days or weeks old. Medea, we remember, alleges that she recounts Jason's words verbatim after a lapse of several years – a much more problematic assertion.

Secondly, the Hypermnestra of *Heroides* 14 reports only her own words, whereas Medea quotes Jason. Hypermnestra's speech unravels for the reader the process by which the heroine resolves not to kill Lynceus. I suggest that Ovid encourages the reader to trust in the veracity of Hypermnestra's account, since it is limited to a discussion of the heroine's own moral reasoning, and does not include information that the heroine has inferred or extrapolated. We know that the *substance* of Hypermnestra's speech must be accurate, if not its precise wording, because the literary tradition tells us that Hypermnestra did not murder her husband, and because we see the heroine suffering for this decision within the story world of *Heroides* 14. In other words, we have external corroboration for the content of Hypermnestra's speech which is lacking in Medea's case, where the epistolary format refuses Jason the opportunity to challenge the heroine's version of events.¹⁴⁷

A more important dissimilarity between *Heroides* 12 and 14 is the heroines' opposing attitudes to murder. Whereas Medea appears to regard the deaths of other characters with equanimity – recall her dismissal of the grieving Pelidae [*Her.* 12.129] – Hypermnestra advocates the indefensibility of murder.

esse ream praestat, quam sic placuisse parenti;
 non piget immunes caedis habere manus.
 me pater igne licet, quem non violavimus, urat,
 quaeque aderant sacris, tendat in ora faces
 aut illo iugulet, quem non bene tradidit ensem,
 ut qua non cecidit vir nece, nupta cadam,—
 non tamen ut dicant morientia “paenitet!” ora,
 efficiet. non est, quam piget esse piam!

It is preferable to be on trial than to please one's parent in such a way; it does me no shame to have hands free of slaughter. My father may scorch me with the fire that I did not defile, and he may hold up to my face the torches which were at hand during the sacred [marriage] rites. Or he might cut my throat with that [blade], the

¹⁴⁷ Even without the corroboration of the mythological tradition, I consider it significant that Hypermnestra's dialogue supports the self-portrayal which the heroine develops throughout the rest of the letter. In Medea's case, perhaps the most interesting aspect of Jason's speech is that it appears to *undermine* the depiction of herself that Medea is attempting to construct. The speech thus encourages the Ovidian reader to be suspicious of the writing heroine more generally. Hypermnestra's monologue depicts a heroine who is all of a piece, whereas Medea's use of dialogue emphasises the aspects of her letter which do not cohere. On a poetic level, I propose that these letters represent two different uses of direct speech for two different ends. Cf. Alden Smith (1994) for some interesting comments on the importance of identifying the implications of the heroines' self-characterisations.

sword that he handed over to me without justification, so that I – the bride! – might fall by the death that did not fell my husband. He will not, however, bring it about that my dying lips should say ‘forgive me!’ She is not pious who regrets being so!
[*Her.* 14.7-14]

Observe that Hypermnestra establishes a polarity between her actions and her father's.¹⁴⁸ The couplets are structured antithetically, so as to keep Hypermnestra and Danaus apart: Hypermnestra's status as ‘defendant’ occupies the first half of line 7; her father's unjust ‘pleasure’ the second. In line 9, the heroine contrasts Danaus' violent actions against the marriage-bond that she would not tarnish – *non violamus. nupta* and *nece* face off against each other at line 12, indicating that the writing heroine is distancing herself from her father's wishes. In the same way, *non bene* in line 11 conveys an explicit moral judgement of Danaus. Most significant are lines 13 and 14, where the heroine declares that her father cannot compel her to regret her decision. Hypermnestra's assertion that true *pietas* does not bemoan the trouble it brings suggests to Ovid's reader that Hypermnestra has moral stature far above Medea's. Hypermnestra's candid confrontation of the implications of murder underlines by contrast the lack of any such moral debate in Medea's *Heroides* 12.

Consistent with our interpretation of the heroines as differing personalities, the reader will observe that Hypermnestra spends considerably more time interrogating the morality of a deed that she did *not* commit than her counterpart Medea does in acknowledging the immorality of the deeds that she *has* committed. At no point in *Heroides* 12 does Medea refer to the reasoning by which she decided to kill her brother and Pelias. Although Medea appears on occasion to regret her brother's murder – *sic ego, sed tecum, dilaceranda fui* [*Her.* 12.116] – it is unclear whether the heroine believes the act itself to have been unjustified, or whether she regrets on her own account the exile which followed. At line 159, Medea instructs her *laese pater* and her *Colchi relict*i to ‘rejoice’ at her Corinthian misfortunes, but the exclamation follows the account of Jason's wedding, making it less an acknowledgment of wrongdoing than it is an attack on Jason for his failure to compensate the heroine for the sacrifice of her family.

¹⁴⁸ I differ here from Fulkerson (2003), whose study of *Heroides* 14 is in my view the most compelling available. Fulkerson argues that Hypermnestra is trying to deflect her father's attention away from her failure to do his bidding. I, however, suggest that Hypermnestra's tone is more defiant than it is contrite. Fulkerson is of the opinion that Hypermnestra is trying to wheedle her way back into her father's favour; I think it more likely that she is attempting to shame him for demanding such terrible deeds of her. This is consistent with the judgemental vocabulary that the heroine employs in this section of the poem.

Emphasising the contrast between herself and Medea, Hypermnestra appears to accept the fact that services are not always rewarded. *Heroides* 14 includes a lengthy digression about Io [*Her.* 14.85-108], who does not deserve her bovine curse; the anecdote implies that Hypermnestra regards her own imprisonment as part of a pattern wherein those who are punished are not necessarily those who ought to be.¹⁴⁹ In the Io tale, Jupiter should suffer Juno's wrath, yet Io pays for the goddess' jealousy.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Hypermnestra is punished because of her father's fear of destruction at his brother's hand.¹⁵¹ Medea's story bears some resemblance to Hypermnestra's, except that Medea occupies a position of power where Hypermnestra does not: in *Heroides* 12, Absyrtus suffers death although Medea and Aeëtes are the warring parties, and Medea escapes punishment just like Jupiter. Moreover, the Ovidian reader knows that this trend remains constant throughout Medea's mythological life: subsequent to Absyrtus' death, Medea flees Iolchus where the Pelidae are punished for their role in the struggle between Medea and their father. Examining Medea and Hypermnestra side by side, I propose that the reader is encouraged to perceive the injustice of Hypermnestra's position, being *clausa domo* and *coercita vinclis* [*Her.* 14.3]; Medea, on the other hand, appears as the sort of character who creates situations in which principled heroines such as Hypermnestra are made to suffer.

The clarity of Hypermnestra's almost-murder narrative serves to underline for the reader the horror of the actions which Medea has taken, but which she elects not to mention.

Excussere metum violenti iussa parentis;
 erigor et capio tela tremante manu.
 non ego falsa loquar: ter acutum sustulit ensem,
 ter male sublato reccidit ense manus.
 admovi iugulo – sine me tibi vera fateri! –
 admovi iugulo tela paterna tuo;
 sed timor et pietas crudelibus obstitit ausis
 castaque mandatum dextra refugit opus.

My violent father's instructions drove away my fear; I got up and I snatched up the weapon in my trembling hand. I shall not speak falsely. Three times I raised up the sharp sword; three times, with the sword barely raised, my hand fell. I held [the

¹⁴⁹ Fulkerson (2003), pp. 136-7, argues for a reading of the Io narrative as integral to an understanding of Hypermnestra's epistolary aims. Reeson (2001), pp. 283-4, reads the Io section as an allegory for Hypermnestra herself, aiming to arouse Lynceus' sympathy – Hypermnestra grieves that she has lost her lover's favour, just as Io does. Cf. *Her.* 14.99-100.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Ov. Met.* 1.588-667. Reeson (2001), p. 285, comments that Hypermnestra's account seems to suggest that Io's transformation came from Juno herself, in contravention of the version in the *Metamorphoses*. I do not consider this a particularly significant point: Hypermnestra frames the anecdote in terms of whom she believes to be to blame for Io's situation.

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Hyg. Fab.* 168: *Danaus Beli filius ex pluribus coniugibus quinquaginta filias habuit, totidemque filios pater Aegyptus qui Danaum fratrem et filias eius interficere voluit, ut regnum paternum solus obtineret, filiis uxores a fratre poposcit.*

blade] to your throat – permit me to tell you the truth! – I held my father's weapon to your throat. But fear and duty stood in the way of cruel daring, and my chaste right hand shirked its appointed task.

[*Her.* 14.43-50]]

Hypermnestra demands recognition of her honesty – *non ego falsa loquar* [*Her.* 14.45].¹⁵² In the epistolary context, this must be an ingenuous statement; however, the heroine's assertion gains traction from her admission that she initially intended to kill Lynceus.¹⁵³ *admovi iugulo* [*Her.* 14.47-8] casts Lynceus in the role of an animal brought to slaughter, and yet the image serves a paradoxical purpose, drawing out the reader's respect for Hypermnestra, who admits even these most unpalatable facts. The phrase *ter acutum sustulit ensem* [*Her.* 14.45] reveals that Hypermnestra was driven to the very brink of homicide, the repetition of *ter* mirroring the struggle between the heroine's fear of her father and of impiety. Importantly, *male sublato* suggests a twofold deficit on Hypermnestra's part – of the necessary physical strength and of the moral corruption needed to commit murder. In line 49, Hypermnestra summarises her dilemma: *timor* and *pietas* win out over the *crudelis ausus*, but the heroine has nonetheless acknowledged that she possessed very nearly enough cruelty to follow through on her father's plan. In my view, Ovid has created in Hypermnestra a multi-faceted heroine – the triumph of a flawed and self-aware character being more complex than the triumph of a heroine whose principles remain unchallenged.¹⁵⁴ Not so Medea, whose *Heroides* 12 neither acknowledges the physical brutality of the murders she has committed, nor the moral violation they represent.

Finally, Hypermnestra differs from Medea in that she depicts herself as a member of a family unit, rather than as a lone actor. In this respect, Hypermnestra is more like her sister-writer Hypsipyle than she is like Medea. Hypermnestra's attitude passes an implicit judgement on the isolationism and self-focus of *Heroides* 12.

femina sum et virgo, natura mitis et annis;
non faciunt molles ad fera tela manus.

¹⁵² Reeson (2001), p. 258, notes that this structure bears some resemblance to Sinon's words at *Aen.* 2.77-8, being one of the few times that Sinon reveals something truthful to the Trojans.

¹⁵³ Fulkerson (2003), p. 131-2, interprets Hypermnestra's words as evidence that she is conscious of her role as story-teller, pitching different parts of the story to different potential readers. This in turn creates a parallel with Ovid, whose audience operates at a different level to that of the heroine.

¹⁵⁴ Jacobson (1974), p. 141, argues that the near-commission of the murder is crucial to the success of Ovid's Hypermnestra. He suggests that Ovid plays down the role of love in the myth – that is, the suggestion that Hypermnestra could not kill Lynceus because of her love for him – so as to be able to play up the role of Hypermnestra as 'heroic martyr', p. 129.

I am a woman and a maiden, gentle in temperament and in years; cruel weapons
are not suited to my hands.

[*Her.* 14.55-6]

Notice that Hypermnestra chooses for herself the dual roles of *femina* and of *virgo*, a statement of identity that sets her apart from Danaus' *fera tela*.¹⁵⁵ A few lines later, Hypermnestra says that she is better suited to wool-work and the distaff than to mortal combat [*Her.* 14.66]. Taken together, these distinctions suggest that Hypermnestra sees herself in a domestic role, just as we observed in Chapter One in the case of Penelope's *Heroides* 1.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, Hypermnestra uses the term *frater* six times, referring both to Lynceus and to her brothers-in-law. The term emphasises the double link between hero and heroine – Lynceus is both her cousin and her husband – but the focus on the blood relationship also highlights the heroine's determination to present herself as a pious member of her family.¹⁵⁷ Hypermnestra's repeated references to her familial responsibilities form a contrast with a heroine such as Medea, whom we have observed to engage with her role as daughter, sister and mother as little as possible. Although the literary tradition tells us that Hypermnestra and Medea both survive the struggles they describe in the *Heroides*, the similarities between the heroines appear to end there.¹⁵⁸ In my view, the characters can be read as exact opposites in their attitudes: one heroine takes punishment on herself so as to preserve the life of an innocent party; the other takes the life of innocent parties so as to avoid pain or inconvenience for herself.

¹⁵⁵ Regarding Hypermnestra's use of *virgo*: Reeson (2001), pp. 256-7, summarises the varying viewpoints as to whether or not we should treat Hypermnestra's and Lynceus' marriage as having been consummated. He argues that there is no unambiguous suggestion either way, and I am of the view that it does not matter very much for the purposes of our discussion. Hypermnestra is stating the roles that she has chosen for herself; whether or not these correspond to her literal social position is beside the point. She *chooses* the pose of purity and femininity, and in her mind this justifies her decision to preserve Lynceus' life. Jacobson (1974), p. 140, takes *virgo* as interdependent with *mitis annis*, and therefore treats it as a general reference to Hypermnestra's youth and inexperience, with which I would tend to concur.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Reeson (2001), p. 213, on the unusually 'formal' tone of *Heroides* 14. Reeson's view appears to derive in part from his attitude towards Hypermnestra's 'social vocabulary' – terms such as *femina* and *virgo*. For Reeson, Hypermnestra seeks to present herself as a dutiful wife because she is uncertain as to how the newly-escaped Lynceus might receive an overture from his bride. In contrast to Reeson, I take the heroine's vocabulary to be more reflective of Hypermnestra's view of herself than of her concern about the hero's view of her. Jacobson (1974), p. 125, pursues a similar tack to Reeson, noting that there is 'no evidence of affection' in this epistle. Jacobson's criticism, representative of his attitude to many of the *Heroides*, seems to me to make no allowance for the significant psychological stress that Hypermnestra has been and is still living under. When would she have had time to develop affection for Lynceus, in between planning her wedding and his murder?

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Her.* 14.1; 14.73; 14.115; 14.117; 14.122; 14.130.

¹⁵⁸ The literary tradition certainly leans away from the view that Hypermnestra was killed. Apollodorus tells us that Danaus gave Hypermnestra back to Lynceus [2.1.5] and that they ended up founding their own dynasty through their son [2.2.1].

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have continued my intratextual reading of *Heroides* 6 and 12, arguing that Ovid's composition of the heroines' narratives supports the views of their characters that we developed in Chapter One. Hypsipyle remains reactive and disempowered, in contrast to Medea's self-focus and preoccupation with control. In examining the question of epistolary purpose, we observe that Medea's *Heroides* 12 is unusual in that the heroine is not physically divided from the hero, as is Hypsipyle. Moreover, Ovid's placement of Medea's narrative, immediately before the events of Euripides' tragedy, provokes the reader's suspicion of the heroine: is Medea crafting an epistolary weapon, putting her allegations of Jason's culpability 'on the record', and in such a way that the hero cannot refute them?

Next, we discovered that Ovid's spatial organisation of the poems contributes to the reader's impressions of the heroines' opposing personalities. The poet places Hypsipyle in heavily circumscribed environments, reflecting the portrayal of a heroine whose world is directed by other characters. On the other hand, Medea's letter uses spatial framing infrequently, so as to draw the reader's attention to instances in which Medea appears as the character in control of her story world. Pursuing the theme of control, I argued that the attitudes of the elegiac Medea appear to make sense if we analyse her alongside some of the key personality traits of the psychopath – in particular, an inability to feel empathy. I suggest that Jason's speech and Medea's account of her brother's death depict her as a heroine unable to engage with the needs of other characters at the expense of herself.

Lastly, we considered the way in which Ovid uses the epistolary format to focus his reader on the heroines' fates in other texts; this strengthens our perception of Medea as powerful and Hypsipyle as disempowered. Hypsipyle's curse against Medea reminds the external reader of Hypsipyle's unenviable fate in Euripides, just as the incidence of divine imagery in *Heroides* 12 brings to the reader's mind the murders of Medea's children in the tragedy, and the heroine's successful escape. Our two comparative analyses, Oenone and Hypermnestra, have helped to underpin our readings of Hypsipyle and Medea. Oenone's poem reveals the extent to which the heroine does not depend on Paris for her sense of self; unlike Hypsipyle or Medea, Oenone views the hero as one aspect of her life without becoming over-focused on what he represents. Hypermnestra, meanwhile, exposes the lack of moral grounding in Medea's *Heroides* 12. In *Heroides* 14, Hypermnestra adopts an

overtly pious stance, arguing for the indefensibility of murder and for her own non-violent nature. The heroine establishes by contrast that not only is the Medea of *Heroides* 12 a less moral character than her sister-writer, but that she appears to regard murder as a necessary method of protecting her own interests.

This chapter concludes my analysis of *Heroides* 6 and 12, in which we have seen that Hypsipyle's letter is characterised by its concern with the hero at the heroine's expense, and that Medea's poem illustrates the writing heroine's impenetrable self-focus. In Chapter Three, I turn to the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, arguing that Ovid's characterisation of the heroine is consistent across the epic and elegiac works. Medea may *appear* to be a 'different' heroine in epic, but this, I suggest, is just another example of Ovidian sleight of hand.

CHAPTER THREE

'deteriora sequor':

Reading the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7

This chapter is concerned with the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, arguing that Ovid's epic heroine shares the same characterisation as the Medea of the *Heroides*. The chapter has two aims. First, I propose that Medea's epic personality appears to remain stable throughout Book 7, in contrast to the prevailing view that the heroine's character alters significantly over the course of her narrative. Second, I suggest that we can identify in the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 many of the same traits and behaviours which have shaped our reading of Medea in *Heroides* 12 – in particular, the heroine's love of control and her self-focus at the expense of other characters.

In the first three sections, I develop readings of key episodes from the first half of *Metamorphoses* 7: Medea's opening monologue, the rejuvenation of Aeson and the murder of Pelias. I propose that each episode can be read in light of the Medea we have met in *Heroides* 12. In the monologue, where Medea deliberates whether to assist the hero in obtaining the Golden Fleece, we observe that the heroine is more concerned with securing her own future than with protecting either her family or the hero. In the case of Aeson, we perceive Medea's determination to prove herself more powerful than other characters; and in the death of Pelias, Ovid documents Medea's capacity for deceit and cruelty. In the final section, I return to the analysis of Medea as a psychopathic personality, arguing that Ovid's depiction of the heroine in *Metamorphoses* 7 conforms to the pattern of escalating criminality which clinicians label the 'psychopathic trajectory'.

As in Chapters One and Two, a crucial aspect of my reading of *Metamorphoses* 7 is the notion of the 'two Medeas'. Whereas scholars have traditionally regarded the Medea of *Heroides* 12 as 'one' Medea, and the heroine of the *Metamorphoses* as 'another', I suggest

that the so-called 'two' heroines are more accurately described as competing identities within each narrative. Thus, in the monologue there exists a tension between Medea's apparent unwillingness to betray her family and her underlying desire to achieve a glorious future for herself. In the Aeson story, we note the heroine's seeming acquiescence to Jason's wishes, and on the other hand her swift appropriation of an opportunity to exercise her powers. Lastly, Pelias' murder illustrates the contradiction between Medea's avowed motivations and her apparent intentions.

I suggest that *Metamorphoses* 7 is a challenging text from which to develop a coherent reading of Medea's characterisation. Ovid devotes 424 lines to the Medea myth in Book 7, yet he presents the various episodes in completely different ways, and at wildly divergent lengths. To some degree, this is true of the *Metamorphoses* generally; nonetheless, the reader is left with the curious circumstance that Ovid treats only cursorily the episodes from Medea's myth which have hitherto been regarded as the most dramatic and the most illustrative in terms of characterisation. The whole of the Corinthian episode occupies only 11 lines, or two and a half per cent of Ovid's narrative, while the *Argonautica* story takes up 158 lines, but treats at most half of the material covered by the third of Apollonius' four books. Still more oddly, Aeson's rejuvenation spreads across 137 lines – a third of the narrative – while the arguably more spectacular murder of Pelias is compressed into a mere 52 lines. Most problematic is the lack of a clear connecting thread between the individual stories. In my view, the reader's sense of disconnection creates an impression that we are dealing with a set of dissimilar Medeas, each presented in snapshot form rather than developed logically throughout the poem, as we observed in *Heroides* 12. The differences between the two texts notwithstanding, I propose that we can identify key similarities between Ovid's epic and elegiac heroines which justify reading them as one and the same Medea.

3.1 Medea's Monologue

Medea's monologue occupies some 60 lines at the beginning of *Metamorphoses* 7.

Scholars have generally regarded this section of the myth as depicting an authentic struggle between the epic Medea's familial loyalty and her passion for the hero.¹ Boyle (2012), for example, asserts that Medea employs sophisticated moral reasoning in examining her desire to assist the hero; in Boyle's view, the epic Medea's monologue sets her apart from her Apollonian and Euripidean predecessors.² In the same way, Jacobson (1974) finds in the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 superior moral stature to that shown by the Medea of *Heroides* 12.³ By contrast, I suggest that we can read the epic Medea's speech as an illustration of a heroine preoccupied with self-interest, determined to secure her own future at any cost. Thus, in turn, we observe the similarity between the heroine of Book 7 and the Medea of *Heroides* 12.

An important aspect of my reading is the observation of the differences between Apollonius' version of the myth and Ovid's. I propose that Ovid 'recycles' elements of Apollonius' narrative in such a way as to highlight how different is the Ovidian heroine from the Medea of the *Argonautica*. It is easy for the reader to *assume* that the heroine of the Ovidian monologue resembles Apollonius', because the mythological material appears to be identical. However, just as we observed that *Heroides* 12 develops a very different heroine to that of Euripides' tragedy, so Medea's monologue in *Metamorphoses* 7 demonstrates how dissimilar a characterisation the poet can build by using familiar mythological components in an unfamiliar way. I suggest that the principal difference between Apollonius' Medea and Ovid's is the attitude of the heroines to other characters. In the *Argonautica*, Medea is tormented by being unable to serve both her family's interests and the hero's; her own future is not her primary consideration. By contrast, the Ovidian heroine shows little concern for the hero's probable demise, appearing to be consumed by what she stands to gain by helping Jason.

¹ Studies which treat the Medea of the monologue as naïve, vulnerable and genuinely conflicted include: Fantham (2004), Liveley (2011), McKinley (2001), Newlands (1997), Nugent (2008), Rosner-Siegel (1982), Salzman-Mitchell (2005) and Williams (2012). Hinds (1993) has indirectly raised the notion of an alternative reading of Medea, as has Pavlock (2009); however, no critic has yet seriously pursued the suggestion.

² Cf. Boyle (2012), pp. 20-22.

³ Cf. Jacobson (1974), pp. 121-3.

Consider the opening lines of the Ovidian monologue:

“excute virgineo conceptas pectore flammās,
si potes, infelix! si possem, sanior essem!
sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido,
mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque,
deteriora sequor. quid in hospite, regia virgo,
ureris et thalamos alieni concipis orbis?”

“If you can, unhappy one, drive out from your maiden's breast the flames that have taken hold [there]. If I were able, I should be healthier. But a new force drags me forward, although I am unwilling, and while I desire one thing, my mind urges another. I see the better way, and I esteem it, yet I follow the worse path. Why, royal maiden, do you burn so for a stranger, and why do you dwell on a marriage in a foreign land?”

[Met. 7.17-22]

Medea focuses at once on the passion that is driving her onward (*trahit*), presenting her desire for the hero as a force that she cannot control.⁴ The repetition of *possum* in line 18 develops the theme: the shift from indicative to subjunctive, from a real to an unreal condition, establishes a downward trajectory of Medea's own agency, implying that she will *not* be able to divest herself of her feelings.⁵ Lines 19 to 21 intimate that Medea is entrapped in some measure by her passion, as the pairs of opposing priorities – *aliud / aliud*; *meliora / deteriora* – position the heroine between two irreconcilable alternatives. Thus far, Medea's apparent distress mirrors that of her Apollonian counterpart; conversely, the reader perceives that the Ovidian monologue suggests a greater degree of self-awareness in the heroine of Book 7 than in the Medea of the *Argonautica*.⁶

In Apollonius, Medea's passion is introduced to the audience by way of a dream, in which the heroine dreams that Jason undertakes his labours not to obtain the Golden Fleece but to

⁴ The line offers an echo of Euripides [*Med.* 1077-80], where Medea says that her anger is stronger than her powers of reason. Cf. Williams (2012), p. 51, who argues that the foreshadowing of Medea's mythological future indicates the early stages of her transformation from a vulnerable young girl into a powerful and ambitious witch.

⁵ Anderson (1972), p. 245, describes *possum* as a 'pathetic qualification' of Medea's true situation. He suggests that *si potes* speaks to Medea's belief in her capabilities, while *si possem* reveals the heroine's actual incapacity to affect events. Anderson contends that Ovid's inclusion of *infelix* locates Medea in a context of sympathy for the lover, established most prominently by Virgil's Dido.

⁶ The reader may wish to note here the differing distribution of direct speech between Ovid and Apollonius. Hunter (1993b), pp. 138-51, observes that the *Argonautica* has a much smaller proportion of direct speech than either of the preceding Homeric epics, or the later *Aeneid*. In Hunter's calculation, direct speech by characters accounts for 29% of Apollonius' epic as a whole. By contrast, the Ovidian Medea's 60-line monologue alone accounts for 14.2% of the myth, suggesting that Ovid allows his Medea a much greater proportion of direct speech than does Apollonius. In my view, this technique helps to persuade the reader that we understand more of Medea's motivations and feelings in *Metamorphoses* 7 than we do in the *Argonautica*.

win her as his wife [*Arg.* 3.616-23]. Upon waking, Medea is distressed, and the poet compares her state of mind to that of a young widow [*Arg.* 3.656-63].⁷ In the *Argonautica*, Medea's passion for the hero is implicit rather than explicit. Crucially, Apollonius' heroine does not acknowledge her feelings in her own voice, referring only to the physical effects of her desire, and not to the existence of the passion itself.⁸ In Ovid, however, even at the very start of Medea's deliberations, the heroine is capable of identifying and articulating the presence of a passion which she alleges to be controlling *her*, rather than which she is herself controlling. In this respect, Ovid's epic heroine resembles the Medea of *Heroides* 12, who fashions herself as the dupe of the hero rather than as the director of her own fate.

In Book 7, Medea's account of her passion is significant because it allows the heroine to build an implicit defence against future criticism of her actions. By drawing the reader's attention to the disjunction between what she desires (*cupido*) and what her brain advises (*mens...suadet*), Medea conveys that she comprehends the danger of her wishes, whilst also portraying herself as the victim of the *conceptae pectore flammae*.⁹ Just so with *meliora* and *deteriora*: Medea demonstrates that she perceives the moral distinction between good actions and bad, yet she enfolds the realisation into a lament that she is at the mercy of her feelings. In effect, the Ovidian heroine is enabled to *appear* as a character of moral stature without having to accept responsibility for her subsequent actions, which are designated as the product of passion rather than of reason.¹⁰ The Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is therefore quite different to the heroine of Apollonius, who throughout

⁷ Giangrande (2000) offers a useful discussion here. He analyses Medea's dream together with two others from the *Argonautica*, debating whether we ought to treat Medea's dream as representing the influence of the gods over the heroine's state of mind, or whether the dream reflects Medea's self-driven desire. Giangrande's argument is interesting for our purposes in that it highlights how oblique is Apollonius' depiction of Medea's internal processes. For further discussion of the dream sequence, see Kessels (1982), pp. 166-7, who argues that Apollonius' gods do not affect Medea's experience of the dream, which in turn alters the reader's perception of Medea as a character.

⁸ Cf., for example, *Arg.* 3.638: 'περί μοι ξείνῳ φρένες ἠερέθονται'. At *Arg.* 3.794-97, Medea imagines that the women of Colchis will revile her for 'giving in' to lust. However, the reader notices that the poet has Medea place this terminology in the mouth of another character. In Apollonius, the heroine declines to label her own feelings in terms of love or desire, in contrast to the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7.

⁹ See Pavlock (2009), pp. 38-60, for an arresting analysis of Medea as a self-conscious reader of her literary tradition. Pavlock's reading harmonises with the sort of rationalisation I suggest is evident in this passage.

¹⁰ Newlands (1997) asserts that the dominance of passion over reason is a key theme of Books 6, 7 and 8 of the *Metamorphoses*. Newlands views these books as being predominantly about the female inability to control emotional responses in favour of logical reasoning. Nugent (2008) makes a related argument, treating the women of the central pentad as the victims of desire which conflicts with their moral responsibilities.

Argonautica 3 dwells on ways in which she might expiate the sin of privileging the hero's interests over those of Acētes.¹¹

A second dissimilarity to the heroine of the *Argonautica* is the Ovidian Medea's focus on marriage. In Apollonius, Medea spends much of Book 3 desiring to prevent the hero's death, yet she does not appear to view Jason's survival as the source of a better future for herself.¹² The poet tells us that his heroine is motivated by pity for Jason [*Arg.* 3.761] and by fear for Chalciopoe's children [*Arg.* 3.688-92].¹³ We know that Medea *wishes* to become the hero's wife [*Arg.* 3.616-23]; nonetheless, she seems to think death the more likely outcome if she defies Aeëtes to rescue Jason [*Arg.* 3.785-90; 3.798-801].¹⁴ By contrast, we observe that the Ovidian Medea is already dwelling on the prospect of a *thalamus alieni orbis* [*Met.* 7.22]. More importantly, Ovid's heroine is unlike Apollonius' in making no mention of pity for Jason, nor any reference to Chalciopoe's sons. The Ovidian monologue presents the narrative as a binary interaction between Medea's personal interests and the hero's. This, too, recalls the Medea of *Heroides* 12, whose letter focuses on the heroine's services and the hero's repayment, to the exclusion of other characters.

As the epic Medea formulates her plan for helping the hero, we note the emergence of the theme which resonated so strongly in *Heroides* 12 – that of the heroine's own gain.

“di meliora velint! quamquam non ista precanda,
sed facienda mihi.—prodamne ego regna parentis,
atque ope nescio quis servabitur advena nostra,
ut per me sospes sine me det lintea ventis 40
virque sit alterius, poenae Medea relinquer?
si facere hoc aliamve potest praeponere nobis,
occidat ingratus! sed non is vultus in illo,
non ea nobilitas animo est, ea gratia formae,
ut timeam fraudem meritique obliviam nostri. 45
et dabit ante fidem, cogamque in foedera testes
esse deos.”

¹¹ Cf. *Arg.* 3.798-801, where the heroine declares that it would be better for her to take her own life than to follow through on her wish to help Jason.

¹² Cf. *Arg.* 3.639-40, in which Medea foresees Jason going back to Greece to find a Greek wife, while she remains in Colchis.

¹³ Readers will note that the poet of the *Argonautica* presents these as Medea's *conscious* motivations for helping the hero. The audience is of course aware that the heroine is also being influenced by the effects of Eros' arrow. Cf. *Arg.* 3.275-98.

¹⁴ Regarding the Apollonian Medea's wishes for her future, Fusillo (2001) offers an excellent discussion of the notion that Apollonius 'invented' the interior monologue. In detailing Apollonius' development of existing narrative technique, Fusillo reveals the way in which Medea's Apollonian characterisation is affected by the poet's presentation of certain events through direct speech.

“May the gods have a better plan than that! In any case, it’s not about my prayers but about my actions. Shall I betray the kingdom of my father? Will an unknown foreigner be saved by my help, so that – safe because of me! – he may put his sails to the wind and be someone else’s husband, while I, Medea, am abandoned to my punishment? If he is able to do this, and to place another woman above me, then let him die, the ingrate! But his face, the nobility of his heart and his handsome form tell me that I should not fear treachery and the forgetfulness of my just desserts. And he will give his word beforehand, and I shall compel the gods to be witnesses to the agreement.”

[*Met.* 7.37-47]

Just as we observed in Ovid’s elegiac Medea, the epic heroine shows an alarming lack of sympathy for the hero’s plight. Immediately preceding these lines, Medea asks herself why she does not sit by and watch the hero’s destruction [*Met.* 7.34-6]; she does not, however, abhor the violence of Jason’s likely end.¹⁵ She says *certe mea pectora movit* [*Met.* 7.28], but the statement is an expression of desire, and does not suggest the empathy which informs the Apollonian Medea’s response to Jason’s labours.¹⁶ I propose that the Ovidian passage is most striking in its revelation of the heroine’s focus on the benefits that she foresees accruing to herself by assisting Jason. At line 43, confronting the possibility of her own abandonment by Jason, Medea declares *occidat ingratus*, mirroring the bargain-based thinking that we identified in the heroine of *Heroides* 12. Ovid suggests to his reader that this is a crucial aspect of Medea’s epic characterisation also, since the heroine acknowledges that she does not wish to save Jason’s life if she stands to gain nothing but the probability of punishment.

I argue that the epic Medea’s concern with marriage reprises the themes of possession and control which we identified in *Heroides* 12. Consider line 42, where the heroine wonders whether Jason might value another woman ‘above’ herself (*praeponere*).¹⁷ Medea’s musing intimates to the reader that the heroine is thinking competitively, that she is

¹⁵ Yet another contrast with Apollonius, where Medea lies awake dwelling on the ‘miserable death’ that awaits Jason [*Arg.* 3.752-5]. The Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 does not entertain the violence of Jason’s likely death even to the same extent as does the Medea of *Heroides* 12 [cf. *Her.* 12.15-18; 12.41-51]. This, too, is consistent with the characterisation of a self-focused heroine. The Medea of *Heroides* 12 has already experienced Jason’s labours, and it is therefore easier for her to recall a horrifying event than it is for the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 to contemplate the same horrors in a theoretical fashion. Cf. Jacobson’s analysis (1974), pp. 115-6, of Ovid’s ‘brilliant’ description of the labours in *Heroides* 12.

¹⁶ Cf. *Arg.* 3.760-1: ὧς δὲ καὶ ἐν στήθεσσι κέαρ ἐλελίζετο κούρης. / δάκρυ δ’ ἀπ’ ὀφθαλμῶν ἐλέω ῥέεν...

¹⁷ Readers of *Heroides* 6 will remember that Hypsipyle uses the same terminology to describe the way in which Jason has allowed Medea to usurp Hypsipyle’s position in Jason’s life: *hanc, tamen o demens Colchisque ablate venenis / diceris Hypsipyles praeposuisse toro?* [*Her.* 6.131-2]. Medea does not use the verb to describe Creusa in *Heroides* 12.

evaluating whether rescuing Jason will secure her own status as the hero's most favoured. Just as we saw in *Heroides* 12, the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 expects Jason to behave according to the same mercantilist principles to which she herself appears to adhere, where women can be 'valued' according to the good they bring the hero.¹⁸ In Ovid's myth, the hero's trials appear to represent for Medea not a question of whether it is possible to save Jason's life – as is the predominant concern of Apollonius' heroine¹⁹ – but rather a question of whether Medea can successfully bind the hero to herself through obligation. In the epic heroine's plan, Jason will acquiesce to her wishes *before* she hands over the drugs: note the certainty implicit in the future tense of *dare* [*Met.* 7.46]. The reader thus observes that the Medea of Book 7 is concerned with securing sufficient reward to offset the risk of betraying her father. Once more, we note the correlation with the elegiac Medea, who organises her narrative in a rigid matrix of risk versus reward, and who repeatedly characterises the hero according to the debts he has incurred for her service.

For our purposes, the most interesting aspect of Medea's Ovidian monologue is the passage which derives from Jason's first speech to the heroine at *Argonautica* 3.975-1007. I propose that Ovid's appropriation of Apollonius' material achieves an opposing depiction of Medea, by altering the identity of the speaking character. In Apollonius, Jason promises Medea a glowing future so as to tempt her out of her hesitancy and secure her aid.²⁰ Conversely, Ovid shows his heroine dwelling on the notoriety she might obtain for herself, which portrays the Ovidian Medea as rather more calculating and self-serving than her Apollonian counterpart.²¹

¹⁸ In Chapter One, we observed that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 compares herself with Jason's new bride Creusa, treating the two women as 'bargains' to be used for the hero's benefit. [Cf. *Her.* 12.25-28]. In that discussion, I argued that Medea assumes the hero to operate according to the same principles as she does herself. Scholars such as Anderson (1973) and Kennedy (2008) consider this reduction of the hero's concerns to the heroine's viewpoint to be part of the elegiac 'self-absorption' of the *Heroides* as a collection. By contrast, I suggest that the technique serves a second purpose in illustrating Ovid's unusual characterisation of Medea, just as it does here in *Metamorphoses* 7.

¹⁹ Cf. Medea's deliberations as to whether she can help Jason without anyone knowing [*Arg.* 3.779-81]. The Apollonian heroine's approach suggests that she considers Jason's rescue to be the most important factor in the situation.

²⁰ Hunter's (1989) commentary on Jason's first speech, pp. 205-9, examines a number of double meanings within the text, offering several useful examples of how Jason's words can be read as manipulating Medea's perception both of Jason as a hero and of her feelings towards him. For further discussion of the portrait of the calculating Apollonian hero, see Hunter's (1993b) chapter on the heroism of the *Argonautica*, pp. 8-25.

²¹ The reader will remember from Chapter One that I made a similar argument about the characterisation of Medea which is achieved by Ovid's inclusion of Jason's 'speech' in *Heroides* 12 [*Her.* 12.73-88]. I propose that this section of *Metamorphoses* 7 serves almost exactly the same

"quid tuta times? accingere et omnem
 pelle moram: tibi se semper debebit Iason,
 te face sollemni iunget sibi perque Pelasgas
 servatrix urbes matrum celebrabere turba. 50
 ergo ego germanam fratremque patremque deosque
 et natale solum ventis ablata relinquam?
 nempe pater saevus, nempe est mea barbara tellus,
 frater adhuc infans; stant mecum vota sororis,
 maximus intra me deus est! non magna relinquam, 55
 magna sequar: titulum servatae pubis Achivae
 notitiamque soli melioris et oppida, quorum
 hic quoque fama viget, cultusque artesque locorum,
 quemque ego cum rebus, quas totus possidet orbis,
 Aesoniden mutasse velim, quo coniuge felix 60
 et dis cara ferar et vertice sidera tangam."

"Why do you fear what is safe? Get organised and dismiss any delay: Jason will owe his life to you always; he will join you to himself with the solemn marriage torch, and throughout Greek cities crowds of mothers shall venerate you as Jason's deliverer. Therefore, shall I abandon my sister and my brother and my father and my gods and my natal soil, having sailed away? Truly, my father is cruel; truly my land is a barbarian one; my brother is still an infant; the prayers of my sister stand with me. The greatest god is within me! I shall not give up great things. I shall pursue great things: the distinction of having saved the Achaean youth; familiarity with a better land and with cities whose reputation extends even here [to Colchis], both the culture and art of these places; and the son of Aeson for whom I would trade all the things that the whole earth possesses. With him as my husband, I shall be called blessed and beloved of the gods, and my head shall touch the stars."

[Met. 7.47-61]

As we have already observed, the Ovidian Medea entertains no outcome except marriage – *te face sollemni iunget sibi* [Met. 7.49]. In Apollonius, this eventuality is first addressed by Jason, not by Medea.²² In describing the Ovidian Jason's position, Medea uses *debeo* in combination with *semper* [Met. 7.48], suggesting that the heroine envisages Jason being permanently constrained by his debt to her.²³ This sentiment has no parallel in Apollonius, where Medea's primary concern is always the hero's welfare.²⁴ When Apollonius' heroine

purpose: by appropriating familiar mythological material and approaching it differently, Ovid highlights how much more self-focused is his Medea than those that have gone before. Cf. Jacobson (1974), pp. 109-23.

²² Cf. Jason's second speech to Medea at *Arg.* 3.1079-1101, especially 3.1100-1, where he draws a link between his own situation with Medea and Theseus' pact with Minos to secure Ariadne. I am here discounting Medea's dreams, since in Apollonius these serve chiefly to distress the heroine, and we have no reason to think that Medea believes her dreams to be representative of her future. Note, for example, her initial rejection of Jason's assurances at *Arg.* 3.1105-17.

²³ For a metapoetic approach to this passage, see Pavlock (2009), pp. 41-3.

²⁴ For an alternative view on the Medea-Jason dynamic in *Argonautica* 3 and 4, see Beye's influential (1982) discussion, pp. 143-66, in which he argues that Apollonius depicts Medea as 'defenceless and exposed by her love for Jason', p. 161, especially in Book 4. Readers will observe that I approach Apollonius rather differently, interpreting Medea as being concerned with her own capacity to affect Jason's future, without wishing to betray her family. For Beye, the Apollonian heroine is not so independent.

considers her *own* position, she is largely consumed with questions of guilt, as evident from her thoughts of suicide and her declaration that any decision she makes will be an evil: 'Alas, which of these miseries am I to choose?' [*Arg.* 3.771].²⁵

The Ovidian Medea's fantasy of being celebrated as the hero's *servatrix* is drawn straight from Apollonius, where Jason vows that Medea will know the gratitude of the heroes, wives and mothers of Greece if he returns with the Golden Fleece [*Arg.* 3.990-5]. In the *Argonautica*, Jason's words depict Medea as a selfless heroine who will be justly venerated for her courage and compassion towards the hero.²⁶ In Ovid, however, we perceive that Medea is dwelling on the benefits she might obtain by saving Jason's life. Crucially, she is weighing up these benefits in order to help her make the decision whether or not to help the hero.²⁷ The situation is reversed in Apollonius, where Jason offers the heroine a positive outcome only *after* Medea has decided to rescue him, and with no view to benefitting from it herself.²⁸ In the *Argonautica*, the gratitude of the Greeks is conceived of as the natural consequence of Medea's brave actions; in Ovid, the heroine evaluates the probability of gratitude to propel herself towards the resolution to assist the hero.

The theme of the Ovidian heroine's gain is highlighted most clearly by one of the poet's favoured pairs of opposing images: *non magna relinquam / magna sequar* [*Met.* 7.55-6]. Here, Medea clearly designates her family and her homeland as *non magna*. She has spent four lines discussing her unhappy position in Colchis [*Met.* 7.51-4], which is juxtaposed with the vision of the heroine's projected fame in Greece to suggest that there is nothing in Colchis worthy of Medea's loyalty or affection. Placed sequentially, the two ideas intimate that our heroine is evaluating reasons why it would not be so very bad if she were to

²⁵ Tr. Hunter (1993): 'δειλὴ ἐγὼ, νῦν ἔνθα κακῶν ἢ ἔνθα γένωμαι' [*Arg.* 3.771]. Hunter (1989), p. 181, notes here the parallel between Apollonius' Medea and Homer's Penelope [*Od.* 19.524]. The correlation between Penelope and the Apollonian Medea distances the heroine of the *Argonautica* even further from the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, who appears very little concerned with protecting the interests of her homeland.

²⁶ Cf. Clauss (1997), whose contention is that Apollonius constructs Medea as the hero's helper-maiden, rather than as a heroic character in her own right. Clauss thus stands in opposition to scholars such as Pavlock (1990), who argues for Medea's heroic characterisation in Apollonius.

²⁷ For a complementary analysis of Jason's speech in Apollonius, see Mori (2007), who argues that the success of the Argonauts' mission hangs almost entirely on the hero's ability to persuade Medea to help him. Mori's chapter helps to illustrate my view of the differences between the Medeas of Apollonius and of Ovid: Mori asserts that the Apollonian Medea is controlled by the hero's powers of persuasion; in Ovid, Medea seems to be driven by her *own* assessment of what she stands to gain by assisting the hero.

²⁸ Readers of Apollonius will remember that Medea responds to Jason's offer to take her to Iolchus [*Arg.* 3.1079-1101] by saying that she hopes he will not forget her when he is back at home and she is still in Colchis [*Arg.* 3.1105-17].

pursue her own interests at the expense of her family.²⁹ The second *magna*, free from the qualifying *non* of the first, reveals the extent to which Medea's thinking is already consumed with her imaginary future in Greece, confirmed by the presence of *relinquam* and *sequar* – the two future tense verbs admitting of neither doubt nor hesitation.³⁰

Sequar is likewise noteworthy because of its connection to our first passage from Book 7, where Medea describes her passion as dragging her onward, although she is *invita* [*Met.* 7.19]. There, too, Medea uses *sequor* to describe her course of action [*Met.* 7.21]. I suggest that the verbal echo serves as a kind of framing structure within the speech – one near the start, one near the end. The effect is to reinforce the notion that Medea is following in the wake of forces greater than herself: at the start it is *deteriora* [*Met.* 7.21]; at the end *magna* [*Met.* 7.56]. This is a similar technique to the one we observed in *Heroides* 12, where Ovid's heroine attempts to position her own responsibility for events in the margins of her narrative. As in *Heroides* 12, the strategy is unsound, because the 'force' to which the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is alluding appears to clash with the controlling heroine whom we have observed to be plotting her own future in Greece. Medea cannot be on the edges of the action and in the middle at the same time.

The final lines of the passage return us once more to the *Argonautica*. Where Medea dwells on the *titulum servatae pubis Achivae* [*Met.* 7.56], we recall Jason's similar sentiments in Apollonius [*Arg.* 3.1005-6]. Likewise, the heroine's assertion that she will be beloved of the gods [*Met.* 7.61] echoes the Apollonian Jason's anecdote about Ariadne, whose courage earned her the respect of the immortals [*Arg.* 3.1001-4].³¹ However, as with

²⁹ Readers will observe that I read Medea very differently to Nugent (2008), pp. 157-9, who argues that Medea manifests a genuine struggle against betraying her father. Nugent labels Medea 'the poster child for akratic conflict', p. 157, appearing to treat Medea as the programmatic example of akratic conflict in the *Metamorphoses*.

³⁰ Although these verbs could technically be taken as subjunctives, I prefer to read them in the future tense. Neither Anderson (1972) nor Bömer (1976) nor Kenney (2011) make any particular mention of these lines. In my view, *relinquam* in line 55 follows on from *relinquam* in line 52, in which Medea is clearly weighing up her options. Therefore, taking the latter verb to be future tense is consistent with the heroine's growing certainty about her course of action as the passage progresses; likewise, taking *sequar* to be the same tense as *relinquam* seems logical.

³¹ Pavlock (2009), pp. 38-43, notes the connection between Medea's *vertice sidera tangam* [*Met.* 7.61] and Horace's *Odes* 1.1.36, using the similarity to argue for a reading of Medea as an analogue for Ovid's poetic genius. However, Pavlock's view of Medea is negative – she asserts that Medea misappropriates an image of poetic notoriety to which she has no valid claim. Pavlock's approach is interesting in that she treats Medea as an ambitious character, as do I, although in a very different sense. For Pavlock, Medea is a self-conscious reader of her tradition, and her ambition is thus literary; for my purposes, it is enough to note that the Ovidian Medea's words recall the similar events of Apollonius and intimate that the heroine is dwelling on a better

Medea's earlier predictions about her future in Greece, our attention is drawn to the heroine's preoccupation with her own advancement. Lines 59 and 60 are unsettling in tone: *quas totus possidet orbis / Aesoniden mutasse velim*. The principal verbs speak to Medea's acquisitive world-view – *possidet*, in particular, connoting possession and therefore control. *Mutare* is perhaps even more significant, in that it implies a dispassionate equation, a 'weighing up' of the world's benefits and those that Jason can bring.³² As Ovid's epic Jason is implicitly compared to the 'things' (*quas*) that the world can provide, the reader remembers Medea's similar objectification of the hero in *Heroides* 12. Anderson (1972) argues that Ovid is exploiting the erotic trope of 'all for love', but *mutare* also opens the door to a time when Medea might decide to 'exchange' Jason for someone or something else.³³ In my reading, these lines foreshadow the disillusionment of *Heroides* 12, strengthening the reader's perception of the likeness between Ovid's epic and elegiac Medeas, and of their concomitant dissimilarity to Apollonius' heroine, whose attitude to Jason is more empathetic and less possessive than those of her Ovidian counterparts.

future for herself within the story world of *Metamorphoses* 7. Hunter (1989), p. 209, calls Ovid's reference to Ariadne a 'witty reworking' of the equivalent verses in Apollonius [*Arg.* 3.1000-4], appearing to concur with my view of the differing focus in Ovid, where Medea is concerned with herself rather than with the hero.

³² Cf. *OLD* 1 and 2 for the use of *mutare* meaning to 'exchange' or 'substitute', especially in a trading context.

³³ See Anderson (1972), p. 250. Unusually, Bömer (1976), p. 215 makes no comment on the connotations of *mutare*.

The Ovidian narrator

Readers of *Metamorphoses* 7 will observe that my interpretation of Medea's character is quite different to the view of the heroine presented by the Ovidian narrator. The poem's narrator appears to accept the monologue as representing a genuine struggle between Medea's loyalty to her family and her passion for Jason. Immediately preceding the heroine's soliloquy, the narrator says of Medea *luctata diu* [*Met.* 7.10], an assertion appearing to stand in opposition to my reading, which treats Medea as a single-minded character with limited concern for her family's interests. The divergence between my approach to Medea's character and that of the Ovidian narrator mirrors the difference between my approach to *Metamorphoses* 7 and those of other Ovidian scholars. I suggest that the significant proportion of critics who treat Medea as vulnerable and naïve in the monologue section are those who implicitly accept the Ovidian narrator's view of the heroine's character.³⁴ That is, the narrator does not *tell* us that Medea is self-aware or manipulative, and the critics tacitly concur.³⁵ By contrast, I propose that the narrator's account of Medea's thoughts and feelings is inconsistent with what Ovid has his heroine say and do within the story world of *Metamorphoses* 7.

I suggest that the conflict between my reading of the epic Medea and that of the narrator creates a space within Ovid's text, enabling the poet to demonstrate that the words and actions of a character can be read in more than one way, depending on the reader's own point of view. We might say that Ovid uses the figure of his narrator to remind the external reader that the narrator offers only an *interpretation* of the heroine's motivations, an interpretation which the external reader might wish to challenge or to reject altogether according to our own assessments of Medea's character.³⁶ The presence of the Ovidian

³⁴ Very few critics acknowledge the role of the poem's narrator in informing their view of Medea. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the Ovidian narrator is the most probable source of the scholarly assertion that Medea shows very little self-awareness or manipulative tendency in the monologue. For analyses of the monologue which treat Medea as genuinely conflicted, I refer the reader to the list of scholars cited at n. 1 above: Fantham (2004), Liveley (2011), McKinley (2001), Newlands (1997), Nugent (2008), Rosner-Siegel (1982), Salzman-Mitchell (2005) and Williams (2012).

³⁵ Salzman-Mitchell (2005) comes closest to articulating the role of the Ovidian narrator in directing the reader's experience of Medea. Salzman-Mitchell situates her analysis in the realms of reader-response criticism, pp. 17-19, which demands that the external reader examine his own role in shaping possible readings of the text. However, Salzman-Mitchell does not deal specifically with the figure of the narrator in her treatment of Medea, pp. 104-8, which seems to me to leave a gap in the interpretive framework. If the external reader affects the way in which Medea appears to her audience, then surely the narrator, as a sort of internal reader, must do likewise.

³⁶ Barchiesi (2002) is of interest here: his chapter is predominantly an assessment of narratological scholarship on the *Metamorphoses*, but he also offers insight into Ovid's use of narratorial voice

narrator is more apparent in the monologue section than anywhere else in Book 7, which draws the external reader's attention to the very process of reading, to the fact that Ovid's poem invites us into the realms of supposition and inference, where we, like the poem's narrator, have to draw our own conclusions about what Medea says and why.

Two passages from the Colchian narrative illustrate the argument. First, Medea's initial encounter with Jason, when she decides to help him win the Golden Fleece [*Met.* 7.77-88]. Second, the narrator's address to Medea after Jason has successfully concluded his labours [*Met.* 7.144-8]. In both cases, Ovid has his narrator offer an explanation of Medea's behaviour, in such a way as to highlight for the external reader the narrator's role as an observer of the story world instead of a participant. In turn, this reminds us that the narrator's evaluation of the heroine is partial and speculative. Ovid's positioning of the narrator within the narrative frame thus creates an opening for the external reader to disregard the narrator's view, if we so choose:

cum videt Aesoniden exstinctaque flamma reluxit.	
erubere genae, totoque recanduit ore,	
utque solet ventis alimenta adsumere, quaeque	
parva sub inducta latuit scintilla favilla	80
crescere et in veteres agitata resurgere vires,	
sic iam lenis amor, iam quem languere putares,	
ut vidit iuvenem, specie praesentis inarsit.	
et casu solito formosior Aesone natus	
illa luce fuit: posses ignoscere amanti.	85
spectat et in vultu veluti tum denique viso	
lumina fixa tenet nec se mortalia demens	
ora videre putat nec se declinat ab illo;	

When she saw the son of Aeson, the flame that had gone out was reignited. Her cheeks turned red and her whole face glowed, as when a small spark, which has been hidden beneath the ashes, is accustomed to take heart from a breeze. [The flame] grows, and – having been stirred – it regains its old strength. So now did Medea's frail love, which you would think had already died away, catch fire at the sight of the one before her, when she saw the young man. And by chance the son of Aeson was more handsome than usual on that day: you could [surely] forgive her for loving him. She looked at him, and she held her eyes fixed on his face as though she had never seen him before, nor did she think – being out of her mind – that she looked upon a mortal face, nor did she turn away from him.

[*Met.* 7.77-88]

I suggest that Ovid here invites his readers to interrogate our own assumptions about Medea's mental state and motivations, as the narrator proffers 'insight' into the heroine's feelings that appears to be unsubstantiated by the earlier narrative. Immediately before the

and technique, examining some of the effects of the epic narrator upon the reader's experience of the poem.

passage quoted, Ovid's narrator asserts that Medea's passion had been subdued prior to her setting out to meet the hero – *et iam fortis erat, pulsusque recesserat ardor* [*Met.* 7.76].

The pluperfect tense establishes a time-line of events which demonstrates that the failure of Medea's passion preceded her new-found strength of character, which is described in the imperfect tense (*fortis erat*). The narrator's presentation of the incident encourages the reader to construe one state as proceeding directly from the other: Medea's passion has died away, hence she is strong. On the other hand, this straightforward account appears to be undermined by the sudden and powerful resurgence of Medea's feelings – the narrator likens them to a flame buried beneath ashes, brought to life by a breeze [*Met.* 7.79-81].³⁷ In my view, the simile acts not only as a representation of Medea's inner processes, but of the narrator's process of interpretation also.

The crux of the matter is this: the flame of Medea's feelings became invisible, and thus the narrator concludes that it had been subdued. This is not the same thing as the passion actually *being* subdued. I propose that Ovid shows his narrator presenting a conclusion drawn from an evaluation of the available evidence. However, the poet does not offer any indication as to whether or not the external audience ought to treat the narrator's assertions as 'true' within the context of Ovid's story world. The simile obviates the need for Ovid to take an unambiguous position on Medea's feelings, blurring the lines between the audience's perception and the story world 'reality'; in turn, the reader realises that all observations of Medea and of other characters are deductive, and therefore potentially subject to reversal.³⁸ In this reading, it is irrelevant whether the narrator is 'correct' in his assumption that Medea's passion died and was then rekindled – it matters only that Ovid's external audience is aware that we are dealing not with an indisputable recitation of events, but rather a flexible interpretation of them.

More interesting still is Ovid's choice of verbs in this passage. At line 82, the narrator says *putares*; at line 85 *posses*: note that the second-person form invites the reader to participate in the narrator's evaluation of the heroine. Although the verbs undoubtedly represent a generalising use of the subjunctive, they nonetheless show the Ovidian narrator implicitly

³⁷ Cf. Anderson (1972), p. 253, who draws an explicit link between the flame imagery of the simile and the occurrence of *ardor* at *Met.* 7.76. Likewise Bömer (1976), pp. 222-3.

³⁸ Pavlock (2009), p. 48, argues for the inherent ambiguity of this simile, suggesting that the effect of Ovid choosing to focus on the flame rather than on the heroine is to present Medea as 'a force of nature' rather than as a human being. In Pavlock's reading, the simile is part of a pattern wherein Ovid rejects the notion of divine influence over Medea's behaviour, setting himself apart from Apollonius. Cf. also Kenney (2011), pp. 226-7.

enfolded the external audience into his own vantage point. I suggest that the occurrence of these second-person verbs enables Ovid to remind his audience that we and the poem's narrator are engaged in the same act of deconstructing the characters' motivations, based on an observation of the events of the narrative. Ovid thus demonstrates to the reader the narrator's role as an intermediary between the external audience and the text. The narrator is 'within' the poem in a way that is not possible for Ovid's external reader, yet he remains a commentator upon the characters of Ovid's narrative because he is not one of them. The subjunctive mood plays a role by tacitly acknowledging that the narrator's assessment offers only one possible solution to the events at hand. A generalisation is inherently speculative: it raises the possibility that we *may* think like the Ovidian narrator, but then again we may *not*. I propose that Ovid's construction of this section of the myth encourages the audience to build their own analysis of the passage, to observe the narrator's viewpoint, but not necessarily to agree with it. Instead of using the narrator to circumscribe his readers' experience, Ovid appears to be alerting his audience that the evaluative process is fluid and uncertain, as is the heroine's behaviour within the story.

We observe a similar dynamic in the narrator's subsequent address to the heroine:

tu quoque victorem conplecti, barbara, velles:
obstitit incepto pudor, at complexa fuisses,
sed te, ne faceres, tenuit reverentia fama.
quod licet, adfectu tacito laetaris agisque
carminibus grates et dis auctoribus horum.

You, too, barbarian girl, would have wished to embrace the victor. Modesty obstructed you from the start, but you would have been embraced by him, yet concern for your reputation held you back, such that you did not do it. [However] you rejoiced with silent affection – which is allowed – and you gave thanks for your spells and to their creators, the gods.

[*Met.* 7.144-8]

This episode is particularly interesting in that the narrator attempts to explain why Medea does *not* do something, rather than interpreting an event that has actually taken place.³⁹ Here, the narrator bases his conclusions on the heroine's *lack* of action – a far more tenuous premise than in the passage preceding, where the narrator offers a resolution of competing forces within the narrative itself, in the form of what Medea says and what she subsequently does. In the passage where Medea resolves to help Jason, the external reader

³⁹ Anderson (1972), p. 260, labels *velles* a potential subjunctive, contrary to fact. This is a small but important point, since it reflects in grammatical terms the hesitancy that I argue Ovid is attempting to foster in his reader, regarding the distinction between poetic interpretation and narrative 'reality'. For a concise discussion of a similar point, see Ong (1975), on the notion of the writer's assumed audience.

has two sources of information – Medea's behaviour and the narrator's interpretation of it – which allows us to form our own reading on the basis of the ground between the two. In this later episode, however, the reader might well be at a loss: how can we evaluate the accuracy of the narrator's assertions without any word or action from the heroine either to corroborate or to undermine them?

I suggest that this second passage works as a natural extension of the first. In the earlier passage, Ovid alerts his reader to the possibility of multiple readings and flawed interpretations; in the second passage, Ovid invites his external audience to be circumspect in our response to the narrator's version of events, given the apparent lack of evidence for the narrator's conclusions. Just as the reader is beginning to grasp that there can be no 'definitive' explanation of Medea's behaviour, but at best an educated inference, Ovid has his narrator make a leap of logic which we cannot help but feel is inconsistent with the heroine whom we have been observing. As we have already discussed, the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 shows no particular concern for the hero's well-being, such as is implied by the narrator's account of her feelings after the labours. Neither does the heroine's entertainment of her own glorious future appear to fit with the *pudor* which the narrator asserts is the cause of Medea's reticence [*Met.* 7.145]. In both passages, Ovid's narrator is a literary device, enabling the poet to expose the difficulty of building a comprehensive analysis of a character's motivations; Ovid achieves this by alerting the reader to a potential discrepancy between the narrator's view of Medea and our own. This realisation reinforces the reader's suspicion that it is not necessary to treat the narrator's view of Medea as 'true' or 'correct', since the poet appears to be hinting that his text admits of more layers of complexity than those of which the narrator is aware.

Comparing Approaches: Medea and Scylla

As scholars have observed, Medea's narrative shares some important similarities with that of Scylla in Book 8.⁴⁰ Notably, both heroines deliver soliloquies wherein they debate whether or not to betray their fathers in favour of their beloveds. Like Medea, Scylla is apparently torn between her duty to Nisus and her passion for Nisus' enemy Minos. I suggest that there is a second resemblance between Medea and Scylla, in that the women's monologues are less indicative of the heroines' hesitation than they are representative of the women's determination to rationalise the decision to aid the heroes at the expense of their fathers.⁴¹ For our purposes, the speeches are significant because they reveal the very different personalities of Medea and Scylla. In my view, Scylla appears naïve and self-deluding, while Medea remains dispassionately calculating.⁴²

The dissimilarity between Scylla's approach and Medea's is evident from the opening lines of the heroines' soliloquies. Scylla laments that she does not know whether to be happy because the war in Megara has brought Minos into her life, or to grieve because of the suffering that the war inevitably brings [*Met.* 8.44-6].⁴³ She then hypothesises that Minos might be able to finish the war, if only she could be his hostage:

“me tamen accepta poterat deponere bellum
obside: me comitem, me pacis pignus haberet!”

⁴⁰ Newlands (1997) offers the most influential analysis, in terms of arguing for thematic unity between these two heroines. She treats Medea and Scylla as part of a 'marriage group' spanning Books 6, 7 and 8 of the *Metamorphoses*, in which the heroines' stories are all concerned with questions of familial loyalty and betrayal. Others featuring in Newlands' analysis are Procne, Procris and Orythia. Cf. also Fratantuono (2011), pp. 213-5, who regards Medea and Scylla as *appearing* to resemble each other owing to the structure of Books 7 and 8, rather than necessarily being presented as similar types by Ovid. My approach is thus more similar to Fratantuono's than to Newlands'.

⁴¹ While scholarship has already argued this position in the case of Scylla, most analyses of Book 7 treat Medea's monologue as 'authentic', in the sense of dramatising a genuine struggle between Aeëtes' interests and Jason's. As regards treatments of Scylla, Newlands (1997), pp. 196-200, is particularly condemnatory; Salzman-Mitchell (2005), pp. 108-11, is more even-handed, interpreting Scylla in terms of the damage that the female gaze inevitably brings about in the *Metamorphoses*. For specific defences of Medea's monologue as 'authentic', see Anderson (1963), Newlands (1997), Nugent (2008), Rosner-Siegel (1982) and Williams (2012).

⁴² For a completely opposite reading of the Medea and Scylla narratives, see Tsitsiou-Chelidoni (2003), who treats Medea as a moral heroine facing a genuine dilemma, while arguing that Scylla deliberately manufactures her quandary, pitting Nisus' interests and Minos' against each other for her own purposes.

⁴³ Although scholars such as Newlands (1997), p. 196, have derided Scylla for her apparent lack of morality in these lines, Anderson (1972), p. 338, observes that Scylla's opening conforms to the structure of a *dubitatio*, as well might be expected at the start of a speech.

"Still, if he received me as his hostage, he could put an end to the war: he would have, in me as his companion, a pledge of peace."

[*Met.* 8.47-8]

Scylla's solution is placed prominently at the start of her 36-line speech, suggesting that the heroine has her course of action mapped out – or at least the *outcome* that she desires. Like Medea, we have in Scylla a heroine with a clear idea of how she is to feature in the resolution of her own narrative. On the other hand, the image of Scylla as hostage establishes a link between the indulgence of the heroine's passion and the cessation of hostilities between Nisus and Minos – a theme which persists throughout Scylla's monologue and which sets her apart from the epic Medea. In contrast to Medea, Scylla prefers to approach the topic of her own desire in terms of the wider good it might do; this conveys that the heroine understands that other characters must be affected by the realisation of her passion, whether for good or ill. In Book 7, Medea focuses chiefly on herself:

"frustra, Medea, repugnas:
nescio quis deus obstat" ait, "mirumque, nisi hoc est,
aut aliquid certe simile huic, quod amare vocatur."

"In vain, Medea, do you resist," she said. "I know not what god stands in your way, and I wonder whether this is what they call love, or something very like it."

[*Met.* 7.11-13]

As Medea debates whether she ought to label her feelings for Jason as 'love', the anonymous god in line 12 works to remove the heroine from the centre of the scene.⁴⁴ As I argued earlier in this chapter, the epic Medea depicts herself in the early part of Book 7 as being controlled by external forces, although the effect proves incompatible with the heroine who is revealed in subsequent passages. From the beginning, then, Medea and Scylla appear to be different personalities – Scylla allowing her own agency to come to the fore, and Medea highlighting the presence of Amor. Equally dissimilar is the way in which the heroines represent their passions for the heroes. Scylla draws a parallel between her own love for Minos and Jupiter's for Minos' mother Europa [*Met.* 8.49-50]. By declaring Jupiter justifiably infatuated with Europa's beauty, Scylla situates herself in a context of passion rather than of reason. In contrast to Medea, Scylla gives no indication that she

⁴⁴ Most scholars agree that the *deus* of *Metamorphoses* 7 must be Amor, in contrast to the *deus* of *Heroides* 12, which can be read either as Amor, consistent with the poem's elegiac metre, or as an intrusion from the tragic sphere. On *Metamorphoses* 7, see, for example, Anderson (1972), p. 245, who observes the military metaphor implicit in *obstat*. Others of a similar view include Bömer (1976), Rosner-Siegel (1982), McKinley (2001) and Williams (2012). Kenney (2001), p. 271, notes the similarity of *Met.* 7.12-13 to Phaedra's enquiry in Euripides' *Hippolytus*: 'τί τοῦθ' ὃ δὴ λέγουσιν ἄνθρώπους ἐρᾶν;' [*Hipp.* 347].

esteems Minos because she thinks that she might benefit from him – she appears to be wholly consumed by what she *feels* for him. In Book 7, Medea styles Jason not as the object of her passion, but as a collection of physical and social attributes. Unlike Scylla, Medea makes no mention of attraction or of emotion after her initial reference to the *nova vis* that is dragging her onwards [*Met.* 7.19].

“quem, nisi crudelem, non tangat Iasonis aetas
et genus et virtus? quem non, ut cetera desint,
ore movere potest? certe mea pectora movit.”

“Whom does Jason's youth, and his family and his courage not affect, except a cruel person? Whom could he not move by his face [alone], though the other things were lacking? He has surely moved my heart.”

[*Met.* 7.26-8]

Medea draws our attention to Jason's youth (*aetas*), to his family credentials (*genus*) and to his heroic credentials (*virtus*). Whereas Scylla seems to be carried away by her desire for Minos, Medea focuses on the qualities that would make Jason a favourable bargain in marriage terms. The passage intimates that Medea's approbation of Jason stems from a reasoned analysis of the hero's prospects; the poet offers no evidence that Medea is motivated primarily by attraction. Even the structure of the lines testifies to Medea's dispassionate approach: *quem non tangat* equates Medea's own concern for Jason's well-being with that of any other character capable of evaluating the hero's worth. There is no suggestion that Medea's interest in Jason is any more substantial than his personal qualities must naturally inspire. Medea's reference to the hero's *os* is perhaps most interesting: the heroine intimates that, even if Jason proved lacking in *aetas*, in *genus* or in *virtus*, at least he is handsome.⁴⁵ Compared to the passionate declarations of Scylla's Book 8, Medea's assessment appears flippant, even superficial.

The greatest divergence between Scylla's narrative and Medea's is the way in which each heroine justifies her determination to help the hero at her father's expense. Scylla argues that the realisation of her personal desire will benefit the people of Megara. In the early part of her speech, Scylla explicitly denounces the sacrifice of Nisus' interests – ‘*tantum patrias ne posceret arces!*’ [*Met.* 8.54] – yet her resolve is short-lived. Following on from the idea that she could end the war if she were Minos' hostage, Scylla reframes her

⁴⁵ Anderson (1972), p. 246, finds this section evidence of Medea's 'irrational' feelings, although Bömer (1976) does not consider the lines of any great significance. In contrast to Anderson, I find Medea to be unemotional rather than irrational. The epic heroine's focus on Jason's *os* recalls the elegiac Medea's attack on the hero's *infidum os* at *Her.* 12.72.

thinking about her *patria* in terms of the benefits that might accrue to Megara if she were to betray her father:

“nam pereant potius sperata cubilia, quam sim
proditione potens!—quamvis saepe utile vinci
victoris placidi fecit clementia multis.
iusta gerit certe pro nato bella perempto:
et causaque valet causamque tuentibus armis.
at, puto, vincemur; qui si manet exitus urbem,
cur suus haec illi reseret mea moenia Mavors
et non noster amor? melius sine caede moraque
impensaue sui poterit superare cruoris.”

“I would rather give up the hoped-for marriage bed than to have it by treachery! However, the mercy of a victor appeased often makes life better for the conquered many. Certainly, [Minos] is justified in waging war, because his son was snatched away from him: his cause is strong, and with the arms that he bears he is strong in that cause. And yet I think that we shall be conquered. If this is the destruction that awaits the city, [then] why should [Minos'] warfare take by storm these battlements of mine, and not my love? It would be better if he could conquer without protracted slaughter and the outlay of his own blood.”

[*Met.* 8.55-63]

Observe that the image of Scylla's betrayal is juxtaposed with the vision of the *clementia victoris* which she believes could be secured by preventing a lengthy campaign. Our heroine seems to be suggesting that the outcome of any treachery against Nisus would not be wholly bad – the *multi*, at least, would benefit from such an unorthodox move. Intertwined with Scylla's portrait of the city spared is her obvious concern for Minos: the *caedes* of line 62 must apply to the community as a whole, but the *cruor* of the following line refers to Minos alone. The interplay between Scylla's view of Megara's interests and of Minos' shows our heroine presenting herself as the servant of the greater good as well as of her own desires. In line 60, Scylla acknowledges that she believes the city will be conquered, and so she positions her impending betrayal of Nisus not as a manipulation of the *outcome* of the war, but as an alternative – and less destructive – route to the resolution that she believes is coming anyway.⁴⁶

Although Scylla's monologue suggests that the heroine is as much invested in the hero's well-being as she is in Megara's, for our purposes the point is that Scylla does not conceive of her betrayal of Nisus as a competition between her own interests and everyone else's. On the contrary, Scylla argues that everyone's interests *except* Nisus' can be safeguarded if she pursues her passion. The heroine establishes an implicit tension between what would

⁴⁶ For a contrasting view on this passage, see Kenney (2011), pp. 312-3, who states that ‘il tono legale rinforza la pretesa, insinuata maliziosamente da Scilla per giustificare le proprie anzioni, che Megara meriti di perdere la guerra’, p. 313.

be good for Megara – and by extension for Scylla's love affair – and what would be good for Nisus. From the reader's point of view, we are confronted with a heroine who is not arguing that her own desires are more important than the welfare of anyone and everyone, but only more important than her *father's*. This is undoubtedly a rationalisation on Scylla's part, yet it serves to portray Scylla as self-deluding rather than self-absorbed, and therefore unlike the Medea of Book 7.

As we observed earlier in the chapter, the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* depicts her decision to help Jason as a straightforward interaction between the interests of Aeëtes, which do not matter, and the heroine's own ambitions, which do:

nempe pater saevus, nempe est mea barbara tellus,
frater adhuc infans; stant mecum vota sororis,

"Truly, my father is cruel; truly my land is a barbarian one; my brother is still an infant; the prayers of my sister stand with me."

[*Met.* 7.53-4]

This is the only part of Book 7 in which Medea explicitly states *why* she considers it defensible to help Jason at Aeëtes' expense, and her premise highlights her dissimilarity to Scylla. Medea's reasoning amounts to an assertion that the future the heroine stands to gain is more valuable than the interests that will be damaged if she betrays Aeëtes. On the face of it, Medea's sentiments echo Scylla's, but there is an important inversion. Scylla argues that *only* Nisus will suffer by the realisation of her passion for Minos; Medea, meanwhile, acknowledges that *everyone* except herself will suffer if she helps Jason. Medea's attitude reflects a heroine who is chiefly concerned with promoting her own ends. The dominant images in Medea's monologue are those of the heroine's personal gain; in Scylla's account, the focus is the *clementia* which she hopes for [*Met.* 8.57], juxtaposed with the *exitus* [*Met.* 8.60] that awaits the city if the heroine cannot prevent it. The reader perceives that Scylla's attention is directed outwards towards other characters as much as it is inwards towards her own desires; by contrast, Medea's sole concern appears to be with justifying her failure to consider anyone except herself.

A final disjunction between Scylla and Medea is the enactment of the heroines' betrayals. Medea remains calculating, doing nothing to jeopardise her own future in Colchis until Jason has agreed to her terms and assured her of her reward [*Met.* 7.46-7]. In Book 8, Scylla demonstrates a lack of caution, carrying out her betrayal of Nisus without consulting the hero, and apparently without considering whether her actions are likely to

turn out well or badly for herself. The reader notices that at no point in her narrative does Scylla reflect on whether Minos is likely to acquiesce to her plan; the heroine approaches the conquest of her beloved as though it is a foregone conclusion. In lines 51 to 54, Scylla reveals the extent to which she chooses to focus the question of her own desires through the frame of the hero's benefit:

"o ego ter felix, si pennis lapsa per auras
Cnosiaci possem castris insistere regis
fassaue me flammisque meas, qua dote, rogarem,
vellet emi, tantum patrias ne posceret arces!"

"Oh, I would be happy, happy, happy, if I could stand in the camp of Knossos' king, having flown thorough the air on wings. And if I could ask him – having confessed my feelings – what dowry he would want to purchase me...as long as he does not demand control of my homeland!"

[*Met.* 8.51-4]

I am interested here in the question of the *dos*. On one level, Scylla appears as an impetuous young girl who longs to throw herself at the beloved's feet. From another point of view, we observe that Scylla does not envisage Minos accepting her for herself: she imagines asking him what price he would seek for her, underlined by the mercantile connotations of *emi* in line 54.⁴⁷ This theme recurs near the end of Scylla's monologue, when she resolves to carry out her plan – *stat sententia tradere mecum / dotalet patriam* [*Met.* 8.67-8]. Throughout her planning, Scylla appears to be dwelling on what Minos will gain from her treachery; at no point does she ask herself whether *she* stands to benefit from betraying Nisus.⁴⁸ The heroine's unenviable fate is foreshadowed in the flight imagery at line 51, intimating that Scylla is incautious in her appraisal of her father's enemy, but at the same time setting her apart from the Medea of Book 7, who is driven by self-preservation.

At the end of her monologue, the epic Medea declares that to betray Aeëtes would be a *culpa* and a *crimen* [*Met.* 7.69; 71], exhorting herself to turn away from *quantum nefas* [*Met.* 7.70-1]. In my view, Medea's apparent resolution against Jason's cause is unconvincing, comprising only three lines disjointedly tacked on to 57 lines of concerted

⁴⁷ Anderson (1972), p. 338, describes Scylla as acting here as 'her own marriage broker'. I suggest that this is a particularly apt image, in that it underlines Scylla's determination to act on her own behalf, destructive though her action will ultimately prove.

⁴⁸ For Salzman-Mitchell (2005), pp. 108-11, Scylla's failure of critical thinking is emblematic of the unhappy outcomes inevitably brought about by female desire – outcomes which the heroines rarely, if ever, foresee.

self-persuasion *towards* the decision to assist the hero.⁴⁹ While Medea's sudden reversal may seem suspicious to her external reader, within the story world of Book 7 it obviates the need for Medea to take personal responsibility for the decision to betray Aeëtes. Instead, we are encouraged to attribute Medea's final capitulation to Jason's three lines of indirect speech at lines 89 to 91, in which the hero promises to marry Medea, just as she envisaged in her soliloquy.⁵⁰ Medea then gives her final utterance for this episode:

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

"I see what I am doing: it is not ignorance of the truth that will deceive me, but love. You will be saved by my gift; once you have been saved, give [me] what you promised!"

[*Met.* 7.92-4]

Notice that Medea *appears* to acknowledge the gravity of her betrayal – *quid faciam, video*. However, she attributes her behaviour to *amor*, recalling the 'unknown god' of line 12 and side-stepping for the final time in this episode the issue of responsibility for the impending betrayal of Aeëtes.⁵¹ We are supposed to understand that this is not 'really' Medea, because the forces of love have framed her monologue so as to divert attention away from the heroine herself.⁵² On the other hand, the last line reflects a heroine more in keeping with the calculating Medea who has been in evidence through the largest part of the speech. Medea instructs Jason to do as he has 'promised', the sense of obligation emphasised by the repetition of *servo*: both forms are in the passive, thereby focusing our attention on Jason's role as receiver of Medea's services, and Medea's as the provider of assistance.

⁴⁹ We must remember that Medea does not actually *state* that she is not going to help Jason. Instead, the Ovidian narrator tells us that *pietasque pudorque / consisterant* [*Met.* 7.72-3], implying that the heroine's resolve is against Jason, but not articulating this unambiguously.

⁵⁰ I consider it significant that the Jason of *Metamorphoses* 7 is permitted no direct speech in this episode. This is a crucial change both from the Jason of *Heroides* 12, who 'speaks' at some length in Medea's recollection [*Her.* 12.73-88], and from Apollonius, where Jason addresses Medea repeatedly [Arg. 3.975-1007; 3.1079-1101; 3.1120-30]. Some critics, such as Boyle (2012), Williams (2012) and Rosner-Siegel (1982), observe that Jason is largely ancillary to the depiction of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7, but they typically attribute this to Ovid's concern with showing Medea's metamorphosis into a witch. Only Pavlock (2009), pp. 47-8, appears to agree with me that speech distribution is of particular importance in this section.

⁵¹ Anderson (1972), p. 254, is one of few critics who seems to have spotted the flaw in Medea's logical reasoning here. As he observes, the verb *decipiet* must belong with *amor*, yet 'how can Medea admit that love "will deceive" her? If she recognizes the deception in advance, then she is not deceived'. This, I think, fits nicely with my argument that Medea is less convinced of her own 'deception' than she is looking for reasons outside herself to justify her imminent actions.

⁵² Some scholars appear to take it as read that Medea is being directed by Amor in this section. See, for example, Kenney (2001), p. 278. For a contrasting view, Pavlock (2009), pp. 48-9 treats Medea's invocation of Amor as a blind, misdirecting the reader to conceal the heroine's self-conscious reading of her narrative.

The heroine who styles herself the victim of *amor* and of the hero's persuasion cannot help but leave her reader with the impression that she is the character who is truly in control, just as she is in *Heroides* 12.

3.2 Medea and Aeson

In this section, I analyse Ovid's account of Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson, an episode which represents one third of the Medea myth in Book 7.⁵³ I argue that the heroine of this episode shares the same concern with self-promotion as do the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and of the epic monologue. In particular, I suggest that Ovid invites his reader to examine the question of Medea's motivation. On the one hand, the Ovidian narrator interprets the rejuvenation as deriving from Medea's approbation of Jason's love for his father; on the other, the reader observes that the direct speech of both hero and heroine imply that Medea is driven by the chance to secure for herself the veneration to which we saw her aspiring in the earlier soliloquy. Scholars have typically argued that Ovid's presentation of Medea's character alters dramatically between the monologue and the rejuvenation, shifting from a portrait of a naïve young girl to that of a powerful witch.⁵⁴ Conversely, I propose that the Medea of the rejuvenation appears entirely consistent with the heroine of the monologue and of *Heroides* 12.

This reading is founded upon the premise that Ovid sets up the Aeson story from an angle which partially obscures the consistency of Medea's personality between the monologue and rejuvenation narratives. I suggest that we are pre-disposed to read the rejuvenation episode from Jason's perspective, and thus are inclined to privilege the observation that Medea acquiesces to the hero's request, rather than enquiring how the heroine's apparent motivations reconcile with the character that we have been studying. I propose that the reader's perception either of change or of stability in Medea's character is a question of framing – if we resist the temptation to read the Aeson tale in terms of the benefits that the hero obtains from Medea, then we are able to perceive the similarities between the epic and elegiac heroines, and between the different sections of *Metamorphoses* 7.

⁵³ The Aeson episode comprises 137 lines [*Met.* 7.159-296], or 32% of the Medea narrative. The rejuvenation thus represents a similar proportion of the Ovidian myth to the Colchian material which is drawn from Apollonius. Ovid's treatment of the *Argonautica* story occupies 158 lines [*Met.* 7.1-158], which is 37% of the total Medea narrative in Book 7.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Rosner-Siegel (1982), p. 234, who argues that the Aeson narrative constitutes the second stage in Medea's three-stage psychological metamorphosis. Even scholars who read the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 as a self-conscious reader of her tradition, and therefore regard her as less naïve in the monologue section, treat the Aeson narrative as indicative of a distinct shift in Medea's Ovidian personality. In this vein, see Kenney (2001), pp. 281-3. By contrast, Pavlock (2009), pp. 49-53, seems to regard the deterioration in Medea's behavior as starting *after* the rejuvenation, in the Pelias story [*Met.* 7.297-349] which is preceded by a flight narrative [*Met.* 7.179-233]. Similarly, Wise (1982) focuses on Ovid's use of magical language to signal the alteration in Medea's characterisation, which commences at the end of the Aeson narrative.

The Aeson episode marks a change in Ovid's presentation of the hero: after lurking in the background through much of the Apollonian material, Jason suddenly becomes visible to the external reader.⁵⁵ The effect of the hero's rise to prominence is to encourage the reader to focus on Jason's experience of the events Ovid is describing, rather than Medea's.

Critical editions of *Metamorphoses* 7 usually segment the text so that the Aeson episode begins at line 159 – immediately after Jason arrives in Iolchus. We should note, however, that the poet's shift towards Jason's point of view precedes this division, commencing when the lovers are about to flee Colchis:

et auro
heros Aesonius potitur spolioque superbus
muneris auctorem secum, spolia altera, portans
victor Iolciacos tetigit cum coniuge portus.

...and the hero, Aeson's son, proud of his spoils, took possession of the Golden Fleece, carrying the engineer of that gift along with him as another prize. And [so] the victor reached the harbour at Iolchus, along with his wife.

[Met. 7.155-8]

Here the poet positions the hero centre stage, after 154 lines devoted largely to the exploration of the myth from Medea's point of view. The reader remembers that the epic Jason has thus far voiced no direct speech, and that the story of his labours is punctuated with exclamations that highlight the heroine's influence rather than the hero's.⁵⁶ Kenney (2001) and Fratantuono (2011) both argue for the significance of Jason's background positioning during the narrative of the labours, taking it as evidence that the poet is more interested in Medea than he is in the hero.⁵⁷ Jason's ascent from secondary character to

⁵⁵ Jason's high profile is of short duration: as scholars have observed, by the Pelias narrative [Met. 7.297-349] Jason has vanished altogether. It is not even clear how Ovid envisions Jason making the journey to Corinth, since he does not appear to accompany Medea on her flight over Greece [Met. 7.350-90]. See here, for example, McKinley (2001), pp. 21-3 and Rosner-Siegel (1982), p. 240. Also Lenoir (1982), who reads the flight narratives as emblematic of Medea's ascent into the realms of 'dream' or meta-narrative, p.55, and therefore suggests that the logistics of the hero's and heroine's travel from place to place are not relevant, because they lie outside Ovid's poetic purpose. Fratantuono (2011), p. 193, makes a similar argument to Lenoir, viewing Ovid's lack of concern with specificity as part of the technique of syncopation which he suggests Ovid uses repeatedly in Book 7.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Met. 7.116: *tantum carmina possunt!* Also Medea's unexpected intervention at Met. 7.134. The effect of these interjections is to break up the story of the hero's struggle and ensure that the reader cannot focus on Jason for more than a few lines at a time – Medea is always competing with the hero for the reader's attention. For an alternative and more sympathetic reading of Medea's intervention, see Williams (2012), p. 53, who treats it as evidence of Medea's insecurity about her powers at this early stage of the narrative; Williams argues that the scene 'humanises' Medea for the reader. Also relevant is Keith's assertion (1999), p. 239, that the epic hero often becomes 'unmanned' by prolonged contact with a strong female influence.

⁵⁷ Kenney (2001), p. 263, goes so far as to label Jason's labours a 'put-up job', likening the Ovidian Medea to the hero's puppeteer. Fratantuono (2011), p. 190, is more measured, noting Jason's

heros Aesonius thus conflicts with the earlier narrative; *heros* is the most favourable characterisation of Jason to date, and one of very few instances in Book 7 where Ovid uses a nominative noun to refer to the hero.⁵⁸ Our impression is that the poet has changed gear: Jason is no longer the lover who entreats aid *submissa voce* [Met. 7.89-90]; instead, he is *superbus*, the verb *potitur* depicting him as a man of decisive action.⁵⁹

More interesting still are the *spolia* of lines 156 and 157 – one referring to the Golden Fleece, the other to Medea. In contrast to *Heroides* 12, where we observed that Medea objectifies the hero, in Book 7 it is Jason who objectifies Medea, as the reader perceives that the heroine is being implicitly equated with the magical artefact. Rosner-Siegel (1982) asserts that these lines demonstrate the ‘failure’ of Medea’s love for Jason, because the hero proves himself unworthy of Medea’s assistance by treating her as cargo.⁶⁰ For our purposes, however, the point is that Ovid invites his reader to privilege Jason’s point of view, as the poet presents Medea as Jason’s subordinate for the first and only time in either *Heroides* 12 or *Metamorphoses* 7. Observe the dissimilarity between the descriptions of hero and heroine: Medea may be the *muneris auctor*, but she derives the status of *auctor* from the Golden Fleece (*munus*), and is not depicted as a heroine in her own right. Likewise, Medea is a *spolium* in direct comparison with Jason’s role as *heros*, and the

gradual suppression from the narrative in favour of Medea. Fratantuono argues that the prominence of the figure of Medea is indicative of Ovid’s concern with love over heroism in Book 7, p. 183.

⁵⁸ I find it surprising how infrequently Ovid refers to Jason as an active agent in *Metamorphoses* 7 – the hero features most often as the direct or indirect object. Even when Jason is the subject of a verb [cf. Met. 7.152 – *sparsit*], he is not usually permitted an accompanying noun, which would focus the reader’s attention more fully on the hero, as well as fleshing out his characterisation. Prior to the passage I have here cited [Met. 7.155-8], Jason is referred to in the nominative only seven times: twice as *ille* [Met. 7.23; 7.139], twice as *Iason* [Met. 7.25; 7.48], twice as *Aesone natus* [Met. 7.84; 7.110] and once as *hospes* [Met. 7.90]. This is an average of once every 22 lines – hardly consistent with a character who is supposed to be the hero of the narrative. Cf. Fratantuono (2011), p. 213, on Jason’s role as a foil to Medea. Fantham (2004), p. 90, argues that Jason is an exception to the pattern of how Ovid deals with heroes in the *Metamorphoses*, declaring the term *heros Aesonius* to be ironic, given that Jason is otherwise ‘diminishe[d]’ by the figure of Medea.

⁵⁹ My reading here contrasts with Kenney’s assertion (2001), pp. 263-6, that Jason is presented as wholly emasculated by the end of the labours. For Kenney, as for Fantham (2004) in the note above, Ovid’s description of Jason as *heros Aesonius* [Met. 7.156] must be ironic. Conversely, I suggest that Ovid’s shift towards a focus on Jason serves a larger purpose within the narrative of Book 7.

⁶⁰ Cf. Rosner-Siegel (1982), pp. 237-8. Rosner-Siegel views Jason as materialistic towards Medea throughout *Metamorphoses* 7, arguing for the hero’s tendency to approach Medea in terms of practical gain. My reading is rather the opposite: I agree that material benefit is an important theme of the Medea-Jason narrative; however, I do not concur that it is Jason whom Ovid depicts as driving this concern. Kenney (2001), pp. 266-7, offers an interesting counterpoint to Rosner-Siegel’s approach. Kenney regards the use of *spolium* to describe Medea as a conspiratorial wink to Ovid’s audience – a reminder that Jason may regard Medea as a prize; nonetheless, Medea will be the source of Jason’s destruction, and therefore not so much a reward as a punishment.

heroine is labelled the *coniunx* to Jason's *victor*, relegated to the ablative case while the hero occupies the nominative.⁶¹

The above passage forms a prologue to my reading of the Aeson episode, because it enables the reader to perceive that Ovid is priming his audience to approach the subsequent narrative from the hero's perspective. The Apollonian material has been dominated by Medea's feelings and desires, yet in the final lines Ovid relegates his heroine to the background and highlights the figure of Jason, who is all the more interesting to the reader because we have hitherto seen so little of him. I propose that the same Jason-centric premise characterises the opening stages of the Aeson narrative, in which Medea is conspicuous largely by her absence:

Haemoniae matres pro gnatis dona receptis
 grandaevique ferunt patres congestaque flamma
 tura liquefaciunt, inductaque cornibus aurum
 victima vota cadit, sed abest gratantibus Aeson
 iam propior leto fessusque senilibus annis,
 cum sic Aesonides: "o cui debere salutem
 confiteor, coniunx, quamquam mihi cuncta dedisti
 excessitque fidem meritorum summa tuorum,
 si tamen hoc possunt (quid enim non carmina possunt?)
 deme meis annis et demptos adde parenti!"

Thessalian mothers and aged fathers brought gifts on behalf of their sons who had been saved, and they melted with flame the piled-up incense, and the sacrificial victim that they had promised – the one with gilded horns – was felled. But Aeson was not present with those who were giving thanks, for he was already quite near to death and exhausted by his great age. Then Jason, son of Aeson, spoke thus: "O my wife, I acknowledge that I owe to you my [very] safety. Although you have given me everything, and the magnitude of your good deeds has surpassed my confidence in them, nonetheless if your incantations can do this (for what can your incantations not achieve?) – take away some of my years and add them to those of my father!"

[*Met.* 7.159-68]

Notice that Ovid sketches his scene so as to leave no space for Medea. *Haemoniae*, emphatically placed at the start of line 159, reminds us that we are now in Thessaly; the change of location mirrors the poet's change in narrative focus, and alerts the reader that

⁶¹ Fratantuono (2011), p. 187, notes that Medea hardly merits the descriptor *coniunx* from the point of view of a Roman audience; he advocates a clear parallel with Dido and Cleopatra. For our purposes, Fratantuono's observation is significant, because it reminds the reader that Medea's status in these lines – defined primarily in terms of her relationship to Jason – is little more than a fantasy on the hero's part. Just as Medea will prove to be no true 'prize', so she will be a bad wife. I propose that, in turn, Ovid encourages his reader to wonder whether Jason deserves the titles *heros* and *victor*. Fratantuono sees in this section a reflection of the 'perversion of...admirable behavior', p. 187, which he argues is representative of the Medea-Jason narrative as a whole.

Medea is now divided from the Colchian setting in which she formerly dominated.⁶² Ovid places his characters in Jason's territory, marking a clear disconnection from the earlier section of the myth, which is concerned with Medea's experience of her *barbara tellus* [*Met.* 7.53]. More importantly, Ovid's focus in this new episode seems to be on the parent-child relationships of the returning heroes: *matres* and *patres* are mentioned individually, the phrase *pro gnatis* underlining the bonds of duty and affection which craft a literary lens through which we are to interpret Jason's petition on behalf of the aged Aeson. The rounded conception of Ovid's scene is particularly significant – on one side we visualise the joyful parents, on the other the returned sons, and in between the ritual elements which symbolise the recommencement of the heroes' lives in Greece. Not only is Medea missing from this important opening scene, but there is no obvious place for her: the parents and children constitute a relationship circle in which there is no gap for a foreign wife.

The heroine's absence from the homecoming scene suggests that the veneration which Medea envisaged for herself has not come to pass. Earlier in Book 7, Medea is influenced by the chance of being known as Jason's rescuer – *perque Pelasgas / servatrix urbes matrum celebrabere turba* [*Met.* 7.49-50] – yet no such reward is apparent in Ovid's account of the Thessalian celebrations.⁶³ The description of the religious ritual intimates that the families of the heroes believe that the gods are responsible for their sons' safe return, not Medea. If we put this together with our preceding analysis of Medea's monologue, in which we observed that the heroine appears to be consumed with the idea of a glorious future in Greece, then I suggest that Ovid opens the door to a reading of Medea's motivation for the rejuvenation as an opportunity to reassert her status as the most important and influential character in the narrative.

⁶² We should note that this scene takes place before either of Medea's 'flight' narratives, which scholars such as Newlands (1997), Rosner-Siegel (1982), Pavlock (2009) and Williams (2012) read as indicating Medea's dominance over her mythological landscape and – in the case of Pavlock and Williams – her text as well. In my view, the temporal placement of this scene is significant: at the start of the Aeson episode, Medea is separated from Colchis, but she has not yet acquired mastery of her Greek landscape. This observation contributes to the reader's sense that Medea is 'nowhere' at this point in the story. Her status is uncertain, both geographically and within the narrative – a problem that the heroine will soon rectify. See also Anderson (1972), pp. 262-3, regarding Ovid's composition of this scene as centered on Aeson and – by extension – on Jason. Likewise Bömer (1976), pp. 242-4.

⁶³ Williams (2012), p. 54, is one of the only scholars who notices this peculiarity. I am indebted to Williams' reading of this section, since he, too, argues that the rejuvenation can be interpreted as offering Medea a way to secure the adoration that she foresaw for herself in the monologue section. Such a view feeds into Williams' focus on ambition as the driving force of the Medea narrative in *Metamorphoses* 7.

In the Thessalian scene, we observe that Ovid does not even allude to Medea's role in the Argonauts' escape, reinforcing the reader's sense that the parent-child relationship is the most significant aspect of this episode, and establishing a clear contrast with the Medea-centric narratives of *Heroides* 12 and the epic monologue. The *gnati* and *patres* who crowd the heroine out of the scene draw an implicit parallel with Jason and Aeson, focusing attention on the hero and his father at the heroine's expense. The reader notes that Aeson is set apart from the fathers of Jason's comrades: *abest gratantibus Aeson* [*Met.* 7.162]. The ablative case highlights the separation between Aeson and the other men, allowing Ovid to cut away the backdrop of the other happy families to expose the central purpose of his scene.⁶⁴ I suggest that the poet moves from a general to a specific description in such a way as to draw the reader with him into the narrative, and from an angle of the poet's choosing. At first, Ovid places Jason and Aeson within a broad context of familial affection, but now he fixes attention on their particular relationship; this represents a gradual narrowing of the narrative focus which pointedly excludes Medea, an event without parallel in either *Heroides* 12 or *Metamorphoses* 7.

Medea makes a dramatic re-entrance into the epic at line 164, where Jason appeals directly for her aid. For our purposes, the most interesting aspect of Jason's speech to Medea is the resemblance between his approach here in *Metamorphoses* 7 and the hero's earlier speech which Medea records in *Heroides* 12. In contrast to *Heroides* 12, here in Book 7 Jason refers to Medea as *coniunx*, reflecting the later period of the mythological chronology; otherwise, there is a remarkable similarity between the hero's two appeals. This suggests to me that Ovid conceives of his epic and elegiac Medeas as one and the same character-type, since he has the figure of Jason petition for help in much the same way in each text. Notice, for example, the repetition of *salus*. In *Heroides* 12, Jason begins by declaring '*ius tibi et arbitrium nostrae fortuna salutis / tradidit*' [*Her.* 12.73-4]; in Book 7, he confesses that he owes his very safety to his wife – '*cui debere salutem*' [*Met.* 7.164].⁶⁵ In both cases, Jason's opening statement centres around Medea's role as controller of the hero's fate, making an unambiguous claim about the interdependency between Medea's actions and the hero's own survival. Next, the Jason of Book 7 focuses on Medea's extraordinary

⁶⁴ Anderson (1972), p. 263, describes this as one of Ovid's 'favourite narrative topoi: all gather but the person on whom he intends to concentrate'. Anderson's observation suggests that the most important person in this episode is going to be Aeson, yet – as I shall argue – Aeson occupies very little space in this narrative, which suggests to me that Ovid is interested less in the figure of Aeson himself than in the relationships and affections which Aeson represents.

⁶⁵ Cf. Bömer (1976), p. 244.

abilities, just as he did in *Heroides* 12. The epic hero alleges that Medea's powers have surpassed his expectations [*Met.* 7.166], just as the Heroidean Jason declared that '*inque tua est vitaque morsque manu*' [*Her.* 12.74]. Thus, Ovid's reader notes that the Jason of Book 7 seems to be approaching Medea – like the hero of *Heroides* 12 – as though she is a heroine influenced by deference towards her own importance.

Cuncta, in line 165, forms another link with the speech from *Heroides* 12, but it also marks a key development between the hero's two appeals to Medea. In *Heroides* 12, the elegiac hero appeals to Medea's grandfather: '*per...numen cuncta videntis avi*' [*Her.* 12.78], apparently believing that divine intervention is necessary either to persuade Medea to help him, or to allow her to effect his rescue. In *Metamorphoses* 7, however, Jason uses *cuncta* rather differently – '*mihi cuncta dedisti*' [*Met.* 7.165]. I suggest that these two accounts show the growth of the hero's thought processes, consistent with the fact that *Metamorphoses* 7 is dealing with a later period of the mythological chronology. In *Heroides* 12, Jason represents Medea as an extraordinary individual, yet he calls on the heroine's powerful allies – Sol and Diana in particular – as though to lend credence to his portrayal of Medea by familial association. By contrast, the hero of the *Metamorphoses* has moved beyond the need for divine imagery, and depicts Medea as an agent in her own right. Put simply, the reader perceives an increase in Medea's supernatural 'capital' between the two texts – in the elegy, Medea's forebear Sol *sees* all, but by the time we arrive at *Metamorphoses* 7, Medea herself is described as being able to *give* all, in an indisputably more powerful role. The repetition of *cuncta* makes an indirect but important comment about the characterisation of Ovid's heroine, implying that the Medea of the epic has surpassed in the hero's estimation even the influence of her divine ancestors.

Medea's response to the hero is entirely consonant with Jason's approach. As in *Heroides* 12, the heroine seems unabashed at Jason's flattery; in Book 7, she seems eager to prove that she has not yet reached the limits of her abilities.⁶⁶

nec tenuit lacrimas: mota est pietate rogantis,
dissimilemque animum subiit Aeeta relictus;
nec tamen adfectus talis confessa "quod" inquit
"excidit ore tuo, coniunx, scelus? ergo ego cuiquam

⁶⁶ This is one point on which I am in complete agreement with Newlands (1997), pp. 186–7, who notes the lack of apparent feeling in Medea's response to Jason, despite the emotive nature of the hero's request. For Newlands, Medea's focus on the practicalities of the magical possibilities is evidence of the heroine's 'remoteness from ordinary humans', p. 186, and of Medea's newly-formed megalomania. On the other hand, I propose that we can observe Medea's dispassion without necessarily attributing it to a change in her epic personality.

posse tuae videor spatium transcribere vitae?
 nec sinat hoc Hecate, nec tu petis aequa; sed isto,
 quod petis, experiar maius dare munus, Iason.
 arte mea soceri longum temptabimus aevum,
 non annis revocare tuis, modo diva triformis
 adiuvet et praesens ingentibus adnuat ausis.”

Nor did [Jason] hold back his tears. Medea was moved by the piety of the one petitioning her, and the thought of the abandoned Aeëtes came into her mind, which was so dissimilar to Jason's. However, she did not admit that she was afflicted by such things. She said [to him]: “What wickedness comes out of your mouth? Do I, therefore, seem to you to have the power to transpose a portion of your lifespan onto another's? Neither does Hecate permit this; nor do you make a righteous request. But I shall try to give you, Jason, a greater gift than the one that you seek. By my skill I will attempt to call back your father's long life, not by using your years, but only if the three-formed goddess will help me, and – being present – will give her assent to such a daring deed.”

[*Met.* 7.169-78]

This passage reprises a key theme of *Heroides* 12. First, Medea positions Jason as the transgressive party, arguing that he seeks a favour both unnatural and forbidden. Second, the heroine intimates that she is even more powerful than the hero could believe – she offers, in effect, to ‘go one better’ than Jason requests of her. In line 172, Medea describes Jason's request as *scelus*, an echo of *Heroides* 12, where she also labels the hero's conduct as wickedness: *nec adhuc tantum scelus esse putabam* [*Her.* 12.141]. In the elegy, *scelus* seems an appropriate term for Jason's abandonment of Medea in a hostile country, but here in *Metamorphoses* 7 the description jars. After all, Jason advocates giving up a portion of his *own* life to revive Aeson – he does not suggest that anyone else should suffer for Aeson's advantage. Medea chooses to regard Jason's plan as ‘wicked’, when the reader is more likely to notice the hero's proffered self-sacrifice. As in *Heroides* 12, Ovid's epic heroine prefers to position Jason in the role of transgressor, which allows her to appear superior by comparison.

The reader observes Medea's strategy still more clearly in line 174, where the heroine says ‘*nec tu petis aequa*’, suggesting that Jason is lacking in moral stature by asking such a favour. Consider, however, that while Medea uses Hecate to justify her condemnation of the hero – ‘*nec sinat hoc Hecate*’ [*Met.* 7.174] – she does not state that she is *unable* to do what Jason asks. If we examine lines 172 and 173, we notice that Ovid frames Medea's refusal by means of a rhetorical question: instead of saying ‘I cannot transpose a portion of your lifespan’, the heroine asks ‘do you think that I can...?’ Such a structure obscures the reader's perception of the precise boundaries of Medea's skills. Taken in the context of the *scelus* which precedes Medea's enquiry, and the (*non*) *aequa* which follows it, the effect of

the rhetorical question is to focus attention on Jason's wrong in petitioning Medea at all. The implication is that Medea refuses to comply with Jason's wish because it is wicked and because Hecate forbids it; she does not refuse because she is not capable of making it happen. Within the story world of Book 7, Ovid allows his heroine to depict herself as the character occupying the moral high ground and Jason as the immoral hero, fashioning a clear parallel between the Medeas of the epic and the elegy.

As regards Medea's motivation, line 175 represents the crucial element of the scene, where Medea leaves off remonstrating with the hero and explains her own plan. In saying that she will attempt to give Jason more than he asked for – '*experiar maius dare munus*' – the Medea of Book 7 harks back to the epistolary vocabulary of *Heroides* 12. The recurrence of *maius* is particularly important. In *Heroides* 12, Medea concludes her poem with the portentous observation that *mens mea maius agit* [*Her.* 12.212]. This is an ominous foreshadowing of the filicide of Euripides' play, but also an illustration that the heroine of Ovid's epistle is a woman concerned with ambition and the pursuit of ever greater glories (*maius*). Moving across to *Metamorphoses* 7, we are dealing with an earlier period of Medea's mythological life, but a later period of Ovid's compositional chronology; nonetheless, the epic Medea appears to be driven by the same considerations as her elegiac counterpart. In Book 7, Medea does not describe her plan as an *alterum munus*, but as a *greater* gift, the reappearance of *maius* recalling the rigidly hierarchical thinking which characterises the Medea of *Heroides* 12.⁶⁷ We have observed that the elegiac heroine does not consider deeds to be different from each other, only better or worse; just so, apparently, with the Medea of the *Metamorphoses*.

Moreover, the *maius munus* of Book 7 demonstrates the appropriateness of Jason's flattering approach to Medea, thereby supporting our reading of the epic heroine as a character motivated by self-promotion. At line 167, Jason delivers the aside '*quid enim non carmina possunt?*', which functions as a double-edged sword in characterising the epic Medea. Anderson (1972) notes that the prefacing *quid enim* effectively removes the hesitation from what would otherwise appear to be a genuine question on the hero's part, a desire to know how far Medea's abilities might stretch. For Anderson, Jason's question is

⁶⁷ Newlands (1997), p. 187, asserts that the Medea of this scene is like a heart surgeon 'who refuses to do a transplant but insists on the impossible, the rejuvenation of the heart itself'. This analogy is pertinent both to my reading of the Aeson scene and to my later discussion of the murder of Pelias, in which I argue that Medea's behaviour becomes more extreme – just as Newlands observes in the case of Aeson.

not so much an enquiry as it is an expression of the hero's boundless confidence in Medea.⁶⁸ I, however, suggest that we can equally interpret Jason's words in the context of the hero's speech in *Heroides* 12 [*Her.* 12.73-88], in which Jason appears to be enticing Medea into helping him for the sake of an opportunity to demonstrate her own skill.

In Book 7, I propose that Jason's exclamation contains an implicit challenge for Medea to reveal exactly how much her *carmina* can achieve.⁶⁹ The reader remembers Jason's recent admission that Medea's abilities have exceeded his expectations – '*meritorum summa tuorum*' [*Met.* 7.166] – and now we perceive that the declaration carries a hidden barb, a suggestion that Jason has already seen the upper limit (*summa*) of Medea's capabilities. Such an implication is consistent with the epic Medea's assertion that she will give Jason a *maius munus* – proof that she has not overextended herself. In the same way, in line 178, Medea entitles her plan an *ingens ausus*, setting herself up in favourable comparison with Jason, whose solution was *scelus* [*Met.* 7.172].⁷⁰ Medea's reply in Book 7 gives every impression that the heroine is embracing the opportunity to show herself to be more powerful than Jason; more powerful, even, than Jason can imagine. In my reading, this scene from *Metamorphoses* 7 acts as a precursor to the epistolary anger of *Heroides* 12, where Medea rages that everything Jason possesses is thanks to her: *hoc ipsum, ingratus quod potes esse, meum est* [*Her.* 12.206]. The epic and elegiac heroines appear to be alike in their motivations and concerns, although separated by the range of experience which informs their characters at different points in the mythological chronology.

If we consider the role of the Ovidian narrator in this episode, then we perceive a disjunction between the narrator's account of Medea's feelings [*Met.* 7.169-71], and the way in which the heroine's own direct speech to Jason depicts her motivations [*Met.* 7.171-8]. At line 169, the narrator informs us that Medea *mota est pietate rogantis*, intimating that Medea complies with Jason's petition because she feels guilty about her

⁶⁸ Cf. Anderson (1972), p. 263. Bömer (1976), pp. 245 does not appear to share Anderson's interest in the point; neither does Kenney (2011), p. 238.

⁶⁹ See Williams (2012), pp. 64-5, on the interplay in this passage between *carmen* as magic and as poetry, arguing for a metapoetic reading of Medea. Ovid will of course expect his reader to be familiar with the double-meaning of *carmen*. [Cf. *OLD* 1b and 2.] In a similar vein, Wise (1982) offers a discussion of the role of magical language in the Medea narrative more generally.

⁷⁰ Cf. Keith (1991), pp. 73-4, who notes the negative connotations of *ingens*, which can be taken as a play on words meaning 'against the family'. Keith's analysis deals with Medea's attempted murder of Theseus in Athens [*Met.* 7.402-24], and the way in which the familial imagery affects our reading of Medea in this episode. I suggest that the same points are valid in the Aeson narrative, where Medea's 'great daring' can equally be said to recall for the reader how dangerous Medea has already proved to her own family, if not yet to Jason's.

treatment of her own father. This seems to be the substance of the narrator's assertion that Medea's mind and Jason's are *dissimiles* [Met. 7.170] – Medea endorses Jason's *pietas*, although she has none herself.⁷¹ Whatever the narrator's view of Medea's motivation, the reader should note that Ovid chooses not to reconcile the narrator's viewpoint and Medea's. Rather, the poet preserves within his narrative the division between what the narrator alleges Medea to be thinking, and the way in which the heroine represents herself to the hero. The narrator tells us that Medea conceals her feelings when she replies to Jason – *nec tamen adfectus talis confessa* [Met. 7.171] – yet the heroine's 'own' words show her approaching Jason's request as though it is a straightforward negotiation between the outcome that the hero wants and the services that Medea is capable of providing.

I propose that Ovid portrays his heroine as choosing to shape her response around the twin concepts of Jason's unacceptable petition and her own extraordinary talents. Observe, for example, that Medea makes no open protestation of regret, nor any commendation of Jason's affection for his father. In contrast to the narrator's assertion that Medea reacts emotionally to Jason's request, the poet appears to be depicting his heroine as concerned with her own notoriety and self-representation. This strongly resembles the Medea of *Heroides* 12, who recalls in detail her deeds on the hero's behalf. As I argued in the earlier analysis of Medea's monologue, for our purposes it does not matter whether the Ovidian narrator is 'correct' in his account of Medea's inner workings. What matters is how Medea chooses to represent herself to the hero, and the way in which Ovid appears to be using the narrator to expose to the reader the extent to which his heroine's self-portrayal differs from what we might expect.

The apparent dissimilarity between the narrator's view of Medea and Medea's view of herself operates within the story world of *Metamorphoses* 7 as a snapshot of my argument that the reader's perspective on a text must alter the reader's interpretation of the narrative, and of the characters within it. If we read the Aeson episode 'through' the bias of the Ovidian narrator, we are inclined to see in Medea's response a heroine who seeks to

⁷¹ See here Fratantuono (2011), p. 188 and Rosner-Siegel (1982), p. 238, who both argue for the significance of Medea's recognition and approbation of Jason's *pietas*; in their view, Medea's response to the hero shows that she is not yet transformed into the monstrous witch of the Pelias narrative. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, I do not agree that it is necessary to take the narrator's view of Medea as definitive. Given my reading of Medea as consistent throughout *Metamorphoses* 7, I do not consider it plausible that Medea is primarily motivated by Jason's *pietas*, although I can see why Ovid might have his narrator suggest this as one possible reading of the scene.

perform at least one good deed, possibly in expiation of the sins she has committed against her natal family. From this point of view, Medea is affected by Jason's love for Aeson, and so she fulfils his request. If, however, we approach the scene by looking through the lens already established by Ovid's portrayal of Medea in *Heroides* 12, then we perceive that the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is not so straightforward, in that she appears to share the elegiac heroine's preoccupation with self-promotion, if necessary at the expense of other characters. In this reading, Aeson's successful rejuvenation becomes a by-product of Medea's actual aim, which is to demonstrate her own powers. Two very different readings can therefore be supported by a comparatively small change in the reader's perspective upon the text.

Ovid's depiction of Medea's witchcraft is a final complicating factor in the Aeson story, making it more difficult for the reader to perceive the similarity between the characterisations of Medea in the monologue and Aeson narratives. Scholarship on *Metamorphoses* 7 gives a great deal of consideration to the magical elements of the Medea narrative, arguing that the two witchcraft episodes – Aeson and Pelias – signpost a change in the epic Medea's personality, from a young girl to dangerous witch. Rosner-Siegel (1982), for example, contends that the Medea of Book 7 undergoes a 'psychological metamorphosis' in three distinct stages: from the monologue, to Aeson, to Pelias.⁷² In Rosner-Siegel's analysis, as in others, Medea's magical abilities are an instrument in Ovid's narrative armoury, the means by which her character is altered: Medea begins *Metamorphoses* 7 as a girl and then 'becomes' a witch.⁷³ The implication of this reading is that Medea was not a witch beforehand, or at least not the 'demonic figure' she allegedly becomes by the murder of Pelias at line 297.⁷⁴

By contrast, I propose that we do not have to interpret the witchcraft episodes as signalling an alteration in Ovid's characterisation of Medea. In this respect, I disagree with scholars

⁷² Rosner-Siegel (1982), p. 234.

⁷³ Treatments which subscribe to this view include: Fantham (2004), Fratantuono (2011), Frécaut (1989), Kenney (2001), McKinley (2001), Newlands (1997), Salzman-Mitchell (2005), Williams (2012) and Wise (1982). Pavlock's analysis (2009) provides an interesting counterpoint, in that she argues, as do I, that Medea is much more influential from earlier in the monologue than other studies choose to acknowledge. However, Pavlock's analysis depends on treating Medea as an analogue for the poet; in my view, this is not necessary to achieve the same reading of Ovid's characterisation of Medea.

⁷⁴ Kenney (2001), p. 267. Kenney's terminology is amongst the strongest I have found used in describing Medea. Although Kenney is much more critical of *Metamorphoses* 7 than other scholars, most analyses share Kenney's premise that Medea's behaviour can be clearly divided into 'young girl', 'good witch' and then 'bad witch'.

such as Newlands (1997), for whom the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 hardly makes sense if we do *not* treat her as undergoing a radical change in personality across the 424 lines of her myth.⁷⁵ Instead, I treat the magical scenes as the backdrop against which the external reader comes to understand Medea's epic personality, as laid down by Ovid from the opening of Book 7. In my reading, the instances of witchcraft function not to bring about a change in Ovid's epic heroine, but as the poetic means by which Ovid reveals to his reader the consistency of Medea's character-type as the myth progresses. In this context, it becomes possible for us to interpret the supernatural slant of the Aeson episode as part of a pre-established pattern wherein Ovid's Medea does exactly what suits her: she assists Jason with his labours so as to access a more appealing future for herself; she rejuvenates Aeson so as to confirm her role as the most important and influential character in the narrative.

The figure of Aeson supports my reading of the heroine's character:

Quos ubi placavit precibusque et murmure longo,
Aesonis effetum proferri corpus ad auras
iussit et in plenos resolutum carmine somnos
exanimi similem stratis porrexit in herbis.

When she had appeased [the gods] with prayers and lengthy murmuring, she ordered Aeson's worn-out body to be brought out into the open; and having put him into a deep sleep with a spell, she stretched him out on a bed of herbs, as though he were dead.

[*Met.* 7.251-4]

Here we discover that Aeson is to be unconscious for the duration of the ritual. Unlike his unfortunate brother Pelias, Aeson will not experience his own exsanguination [*Met.* 7.343-7].⁷⁶ However, this brief interlude reminds the reader that Aeson has been curiously absent from the story thus far. At the start of the episode he is *abest gratantibus* [*Met.* 7.162], and he is permitted no direct speech, even after Jason has secured Medea's promise to attempt

⁷⁵ Cf. Newlands (1997), pp. 178-81. Newlands argues that Ovid's epic Medea lacks 'psychological unity', p. 178, a claim that seems to have become the foundational principle for a number of subsequent readings. See, for example, Williams (2012), who largely agrees with Newlands; also Kenney (2001), who tackles the problem of disunity from a different angle, arguing that the problems with the Medea of Book 7 derive from Ovid's unsuccessful attempt to rewrite the heroine of Apollonius. In my view, a number of the discussions which argue that Medea 'changes' in *Metamorphoses* 7 are those which expect the heroine of the monologue section to closely resemble the Medea of Apollonius.

⁷⁶ Aeson suffers less than Pelias, but the irony of Pelias' suffering is that it brings him much closer to the centre of the story. He retains more significance and centrality for the reader because he is awake – and we are aware that he is awake! – and because he participates in the story. Aeson's unconsciousness relegates him to the fringes of the narrative, because he can have no effect on Medea's actions.

the rejuvenation. We are told nothing about Aeson's reaction to Jason's scheme, and nothing about his physical or psychological health, beyond the fact that he is very old [*Met.* 7.163]. The effect of Aeson's absence from the narrative is to portray him not as a character in his own right but as an *object*, a point around which Ovid can focus the illustration of a negotiation between hero and heroine – a negotiation about something Jason wants, and which Medea must decide whether or not to provide.

In the passage above, Aeson is strongly depersonalised. Notice that he is labelled *effetum* – referring only to his body. The aged hero is presented not as a human being but as a *corpus*, reinforcing the objectified status that he occupies in the mediation between Jason's wishes and Medea's capabilities. More importantly, Medea has no interpersonal contact with Aeson. She orders him to be brought out (*proferri*), the passive verb suggesting that she has no intention of participating herself. Although the heroine has spent a great deal of time in prayer and self-purification [*Met.* 7.179-250], for our purposes it is significant that the magical elements of the scene reaffirm the portrait of the heroine whom we have observed to be more interested in herself than in other characters, consistent with Medea's physical distance from Aeson. In this scene, the powerless Aeson – symbolised in the phrase *exanimi similem* [*Met.* 7.254] – operates not as a father-in-law but as a vehicle for the expression of Medea's supernatural abilities. In contrast to the earlier section of *Metamorphoses* 7, where Jason objectifies Medea as a *spolium* [*Met.* 7.157], Medea is now back in control, the objectification of Aeson recalling the heroine's mercantilist approach to Jason in *Heroides* 12, and thereby strengthening the reader's perception of the similarity between the epic and elegiac heroines.

Williams (2012) comments on the surprising brevity of the actual rejuvenation: Aeson's return to youth occupies only nine lines [*Met.* 7.285-293], or less than one tenth the number that are devoted to Medea's preparations for the ritual [*Met.* 7.179-284]. Williams declares that the act of rejuvenation is 'procedural and even anticlimactic in feel', positing that the disparity between the detail of the preparations and the sterility of the rejuvenation implies that Medea's interest 'lies more in the anticipation than in the fulfilment' of the ritual, that Medea is 'already looking forward to her next challenge'.⁷⁷ Williams' argument runs in parallel to my reading of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7, supporting my view that Medea appears to be motivated by the likelihood of benefits for herself, rather than for

⁷⁷ Williams (2012), p. 56.

Jason or for Aeson. Instead, as Williams contends, the heroine's thrill comes from the opportunity that the rejuvenation affords her for demonstrating her powers. With the rejuvenation effected, however, both thrill and opportunity cease, and so Medea must seek out a new avenue for the exercise of control. Once again, the reader is reminded of the elegiac Medea's declaration that her mind is pursuing something 'greater' [*Her.* 12.212] – a theme to which we return in the narrative of Pelias.

3.3 Medea and Pelias

In this section, I examine Ovid's treatment of the murder of Pelias – a narrative comprising only 52 lines, although depicting the single most violent episode of Medea's Ovidian history.⁷⁸ Ovid's account is the longest extant version of the Pelias myth, in which the poet presents us with a different set of events to those established by Apollodorus and Hyginus. In the narratives of the Greek mythographers, Jason instigates the murder of his uncle, in revenge for Pelias' attempt to have Jason killed during the quest for the Golden Fleece.⁷⁹ Ovid, however, makes no mention of Jason's role in Pelias' murder, thereby directing the reader's attention towards Medea as the driving force of the narrative.⁸⁰ I propose that Ovid's omission of Jason from the Pelias story encourages the reader to interpret Medea as being motivated by the opportunity to exercise control over other characters. Without the figure of the wronged hero to mitigate the audience's view of the heroine's behaviour, Medea appears as a character who revels in asserting her power over others, no matter how grim the outcome. In turn, this aspect of Medea's epic characterisation establishes a link between the heroines of the monologue and the Aeson episodes, and the Medea of *Heroides* 12, where the heroine repeatedly presents herself as the most important and influential character.

Immediately preceding the Pelias narrative, Ovid includes a brief digression about Bacchus, in which the poet tells us that Bacchus was so impressed by the rejuvenation of Aeson that he sought from Medea the same service for his own nurses – *capit hoc a Colchide munus* [*Met.* 7.296]. The Bacchus anecdote indirectly supports my view of Medea as a character motivated by the pursuit of power, since the god's approach to Medea highlights for the reader the extent of the heroine's supernatural abilities: she is now so powerfully magical that even the gods are seeking her assistance. On the other hand, the depiction of Medea's

⁷⁸ Readers will remember that the murder of Medea's children is not treated in any detail in either *Heroides* 12 or *Metamorphoses* 7. For this reason, I consider the murder of Pelias to be the most violent episode of the Ovidian Medea's history.

⁷⁹ Cf. Apollodorus 1.9.27 and Hyginus, *Fab.* 24.1.

⁸⁰ See here Fratantuono (2011), p. 190, who posits the significance of Ovid's silence regarding Medea's precise motivation for Pelias' murder. Like Fratantuono, I consider it important that Ovid does not specifically refute the tradition in which Jason is the instigator of the revenge. In passing over the question of whose idea it was to kill Pelias, Ovid is able to suppress the figure of Jason so that the reader is wholly focused on Medea. At the same time, the ambiguity of the situation leaves readers to draw their own conclusions as to what the apparent lack of motivation indicates about the figure of Medea herself. I suggest that this is an excellent example of Ovid's facility for indirect characterisation. Cf. Anderson (1972), pp. 275–6, who observes that Ovid's failure to provide a motivation for the Pelias story contributes to the portrait of Medea the 'malevolent' witch. On a similar point, see also Bömer (1976), pp. 278–9.

extraordinary influence sets an uncomfortable tone for the Pelias episode to follow. As Fratantuono (2011) notes, ‘the seemingly pious presence of the god signifies an ominous turn in the story’, given Bacchus’ unfavourable associations in this section of the *Metamorphoses*.⁸¹ In the final fifth of Book 6, just before Medea enters Ovid’s epic stage, Procne is in the grip of a Bacchic frenzy when she concocts her terrible plan for revenging Philomela against Tereus [*Met.* 6.287-600].⁸² Procne’s wild cries – *exululatque euhoëque sonat* [*Met.* 6.597] – connect the image of Bacchus with scenes of uncontrolled violence, alerting the reader that no good is likely to come of this god’s incursion into Medea’s myth.⁸³ Likewise, the reader observes that Ovid describes Medea’s service to Bacchus as a *munus* [*Met.* 7.296], reminding us that all of Medea’s ‘gifts’ come at a price – a recurrent theme of *Heroides* 12 and of the monologue in Book 7.⁸⁴ Thus, I propose that we commence the Pelias story with the shadow of intrafamilial violence already hanging over the narrative.

In the opening lines of the Pelias episode, Ovid emphasises Medea’s love of controlling other characters, as he draws the reader’s attention to the heroine’s penchant for deception.

Neve doli cessent, odium cum coniuge falsum
 Phasias adsimulat Peliaeque ad limina supplex
 confugit; atque illam, quoniam gravis ipse senecta est,
 excipiunt natae; quas tempore callida parvo
 Colchis amicitiae mendacis imagine cepit,
 dumque refert inter meritorum maxima demptos
 Aesonis esse situs atque hac in parte moratur,
 spes est virginibus Pelia subiecta creatis,
 arte suum parili revirescere posse parentem,
 idque petunt pretiumque iubent sine fine pacisci.

⁸¹ Fratantuono (2011), p. 189.

⁸² There are other links, too, between Medea and Procne. In Book 7, for example, Medea herself is likened to a Bacchant during her preparations for Aeson’s rejuvenation: *passis Medea capillis / bacchantum ritu flagrantis circuit aras* [*Met.* 7.257-8]. Moreover, Procne’s speech deliberating whether or not to kill her son [*Met.* 6.619-35] has been compared to a similar soliloquy delivered by Medea in Euripides [*Med.* 1040-52]. Larmour (1990) provides a short but compelling analysis of the connection between the Procne and Medea myths in the *Metamorphoses*. For a reading of the Procne-Philomela myth more specifically, see Feldherr’s detailed examination (2010), pp. 199-239.

⁸³ In this respect, I disagree with Anderson (1972), p. 275, who suggests that the interjection about Bacchus is ‘not terribly important’. Anderson seems to be of the view that the aside is not valuable because we cannot know the details of the relationship between Bacchus and his nurses, nor exactly how the god received (*capit*) Medea’s assistance. In my reading, the implied rejuvenation of the nurses is beside the point: it is enough that Bacchus’ presence forges a link between the overtly ‘positive’ narrative of Aeson which precedes it, and the unambiguously negative murder of Pelias which follows it. The image of Bacchus focuses the reader’s mind on Medea’s capacity for cruelty and deceit, which must inform our reading of the Pelias episode. Cf. Fratantuono (2011), p. 208, who also finds Anderson’s lack of interest in this scene perplexing.

⁸⁴ Cf. Kenney’s comment (2001), p. 267, about the *munus* of *Met.* 7.157, which he argues anticipates the ‘gift’ of the poisoned robe that will kill the Corinthian Creusa.

So that trickery should not cease, Medea contrived a false quarrel between herself and Jason, and she fled to Pelias' home as a suppliant. His daughters received her there, since old age lay heavily upon Pelias himself. In a short time, the cunning Colchian ensnared the daughters with the appearance of a feigned friendship. She related the greatest of her good deeds, in amongst them the way she had taken away Aeson's decrepitude, and as she dwelt upon that tale, hope rose in Pelias' daughters that their own father could be rejuvenated by the same skill, and they begged her [to do it] and instructed her to name any price at all.

[*Met.* 7.297-306]

Ovid positions Medea's trickery emphatically at the beginning of the account; in line 297, the subjunctive *neve...cessent* implies that the heroine is most at home in situations where she is exercising her capacity for *dolus*. This line represents hitherto the most unequivocal depiction of Medea's epic personality. In earlier sections, the narrator has avoided making observations about Medea's preferred mode of interaction; instead, he offers explanations of the heroine's responses to other characters, as we saw in the Aeson episode, where the narrator tells us that Medea *mota est pietate rogantis* [*Met.* 7.169]. I suggest that the marked shift in narratorial approach in the Pelias story is consistent with the broader change in the tone of this episode, as Ovid appears to be giving his Medea the chance to show her 'true colours'. In contrast to previous episodes, where Medea employs deceit to achieve a specific end – for example, betraying Aeëtes to allow Jason to obtain the Golden Fleece – here the poet tells us that the heroine is using *dolus* as an end in itself, creating an ominous impression of the events to come.⁸⁵

The passage above also reprises the theme of the 'two Medeas', which we examined in the analyses of the epic monologue and of *Heroides* 12. The reader observes that there is a contradiction in the Pelias story between the heroine who is described as a *supplex* [*Met.* 7.298] and the heroine whom we know to be feigning the quarrel that is her pretext for seeking the help of the Pelidae – *odium cum coniuge falsum* [*Met.* 7.297].⁸⁶ Even before she has crossed Pelias' *limen*, our heroine is exposed as a false suppliant and a false guest.

⁸⁵ Rosner-Siegel (1982) regards this as a key moment in Medea's psychological change – a sign that her personality is evolving as she grows more powerful. See too Pavlock (2009), pp. 38-60, for whom Medea's growing powers represent Ovid's poetic presence throughout the *Metamorphoses* as a whole.

⁸⁶ For the reader of the literary tradition, Medea's feigned quarrel with Jason here in *Metamorphoses* 7 looks forward to the genuine conflict which lies at the heart of Euripides' tragedy. I suggest that the foreshadowing highlights for the reader the unfavourable outcomes for other characters when Medea is in control of her narrative. Whether or not the quarrel is feigned, in both epic and tragedy the heroine's actions are most often to the detriment of other characters. On this passage, see Kenney (2011), pp. 253-55, and Fratantuono (2011), pp. 190-1. Kenney's view of the episode is generally unfavourable; he appears to regard Jason's role as 'un complice silenzioso', p. 253, as a mistake on Ovid's part.

This dichotomy reiterates for the reader the depiction of Medea as a character of extreme influence: we are reminded that Medea knows the falsity of her own behaviour where the Pelidae do not, which places the heroine in a position of power over her hosts, although they are not aware of it. The narrative of Pelias' death is not yet properly begun, and Medea's need for control is already centre stage. Moreover, this passage illustrates the dissimilarity between Medea and the Pelidae: the emotional vulnerability of the daughters, which is implied by the acknowledgement of their father's decrepitude [*Met.* 7.299], contrasts sharply with the *amicitia mendax* that Medea offers. In line 301, *imago* compounds the reader's view, underlining the discrepancy between the appearance and the reality of Medea's intentions, a disjunction similarly encapsulated by the description of our heroine as *callida* [*Met.* 7.300] where she was *supplex* only moments before [*Met.* 7.298].⁸⁷ In this opening section of the narrative, Ovid appears to be at pains to alert his reader that there are two levels of his heroine operating at the same time – the non-threatening impression that Medea is determined to convey (*supplex*), and the controlling heroine underneath (*callida*).

Running in parallel with the motif of deception is Medea's capacity for emotional manipulation. As the heroine relates the 'greatest' of her 'good deeds' (*meritorum maxima*), she dwells at length on the story of Aeson's rejuvenation – *hac in parte moratur* [*Met.* 7.303]. The narrator does not tell us that Medea is deliberately inciting the hopes of Pelias' daughters, yet the preceding portrait of the calculating heroine suggests that Medea's words are carefully calibrated, so as to give the Pelidae the impression that their father's rejuvenation is their own initiative. Ovid's construction of line 304 is interesting: the phrase *spes est subiecta* is impersonal, as though the daughters' hope and Medea's words have nothing to do with each other, although the reader knows that they must be intimately linked. I suggest that the technique invites the reader to momentarily contemplate the situation from the perspective of the Pelidae: they do not perceive that Medea's *ars* [*Met.* 7.305] is already at work in persuading them, and thus from their point of view the hope of rejuvenation simply arises.

⁸⁷ Anderson (1972), p. 276, notes that *imago* often refers to a god in disguise. This ties in with our earlier discussion of the role of Bacchus in contextualising Medea's abilities. Ovid describes Medea's behaviour in the same language that Virgil uses, for example, to describe Aeneas' recognition of his mother's disguise at *Aen.* 1.407-8: '*Quid natum totiens, crudelis tu quoque, falsis / ludis imaginibus?*'

I suggest that lines 304 and 305 enable the reader to observe the extent to which the Pelidae are already in Medea's power, because they appear to be unaware that Medea's *artes* serve no character's interests but her own. Line 306 exposes for the reader the irreconcilable difference between how Medea appears to the characters within the story world, and to external readers familiar with the literary tradition. As the Pelidae 'instruct' Medea to name her price – *pretiumque iubent sine fine pacisci* [*Met.* 7.306] – the reader realises that this is the final order the daughters will give, and that they have no idea what Medea's *pretium* will cost their family. More importantly, *pretium* takes us back to Bacchus' *munus* of line 296, emphasising that Medea provides no service without extracting a price, just as she impresses upon Jason in *Heroides* 12 and in the monologue of Book 7. Unlike the hero, however, who must be familiar with Medea's concerns about compensation, our impression of the Pelidae is that Medea has manipulated them so convincingly that they do not realise the powerlessness of their own position relative to the heroine's.⁸⁸

Before subjecting Pelias to the knife, Medea demonstrates her skills to the Pelidae by rejuvenating an aged ram. This is a perplexing charade, for which none of the commentators offers a convincing explanation of why Ovid should have included this scene.⁸⁹ In my view, the poet does not need a magical test-run to draw an explicit link between the life-saving ritual performed upon Aeson and the murderous one about to be visited upon Pelias.⁹⁰ The reader can easily identify the parallels between the two episodes – both involving old men, both kings, both handed over to Medea by family members concerned to prevent their deaths. Even within the story world of Iolchus, it is unnecessary for Medea to prove her skills, because the Pelidae have already begged for Medea's assistance solely on the basis of her own account [*Met.* 7.306]. Nonetheless, the passage does support my reading of Medea as being motivated by a love of having control over

⁸⁸ See Frécaut (1989), whose analysis centres on Ovid's presentation of the Pelidae as caricatures of foolish women.

⁸⁹ Anderson (1972), p. 277, makes no comment at all, except to note that both Apollodorus and Hyginus also include the ram scene in their versions of the myth. Bömer (1976), pp. 280-1, seems wholly uninterested in the point, as is Kenney (2011), p. 255. Fratantuono (2011), p. 190, limits himself to observing that the test-run with the ram suggests 'a sadistic streak in this witch'. For an attempt at resolving the situation, see Winter (2009), whose reading I discuss below.

⁹⁰ Bömer (1976), pp. 278-86, notes more than once the apparent mirroring of elements of the Aeson and Pelias scenes, seeming to conclude that they detract from the impact and interest of the Pelias narrative. This, I think, is a question of perspective: it depends what Ovid might be trying to convey by drawing parallels between the two episodes.

other characters, as the poet emphasises the heroine's duplicity and foreshadows the carnage to come.

illa brevi spatio silet et dubitare videtur
suspēditque animos ficta gravitate rogantū.
mox ubi pollicita est, "quo sit fiducia maior
muneris huius" ait, "qui vestri maximus aevo est
dux gregis inter oves, agnus medicamine fiet."

[Medea] was silent for a short while, and she seemed to be pondering, and she held the spirits of her petitioners in suspense with her feigned deliberations. Presently, once she had given her promise, she said "So that I might increase your confidence in my gift, the leader of your flocks, whichever of your sheep is the oldest, shall become a lamb through [the application of] my drugs."

[*Met.* 7.307-11]⁹¹

Observe that the ram scene commences – as does Medea's initial approach to the Pelidae – with an illustration of the opposition between how Medea contrives to appear to her audience, and her actual intentions. In line 307, Medea 'seems' to be pondering the daughters' request, the passive form of *video* a powerful reminder that we are dealing here with the realms of perception rather than reality.⁹² More important is the *ficta gravitas* of line 308, continuing the theme of opposition and contradiction which we observed in the earlier passage (*supplex/callida; amicitia/mendax*).⁹³ Within the story world, *gravitas* refers to the intense consideration that the heroine appears to be applying to the daughters' request for assistance. By contrast, the term has a double edge for Ovid's external reader, who approaches the Pelias episode in light of the literary tradition: we can also take *gravitas* as an Ovidian nod to Medea's established capacity for violence, in the noun's secondary sense of severity or harshness.⁹⁴ I suggest that Medea's *ficta gravitas* encapsulates the two competing layers of the heroine's Ovidian characterisation. For the

⁹¹ Readers will observe that here I take Kenney's (2011) text over Anderson's (1972). At *Met.* 7.308, Anderson labels *rogantū* 'suspect', p. 277; in the absence of justification for Anderson's view, I defer to Kenney.

⁹² The recurrence of *videtur* offers an interesting parallel with Ovid's construction of *Heroides* 12. In Chapter One, I observed that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 does a surprising amount of watching or 'seeing' for a heroine who is intimately involved in the action of the events that she is describing. The reappearance of *video* here in *Metamorphoses* 7 encapsulates the difference in perspective between the two texts: in *Heroides* 12, Medea is concerned with presenting herself as the viewer, an active role in the context of the letter, but a passive role in the context of the events of the narrative. In *Metamorphoses* 7, the situation has changed slightly, and we are now concerned with how Medea seems, or is *being seen*, by other characters. In other words, the same two-layered illusion is presented in both texts, but in two different ways according to the differing narratorial perspectives of the poems. For a fascinating discussion of Ovid's use of seeing and watching vocabulary more generally – the creation of 'word pictures' – see Claassen (2013).

⁹³ Anderson (1972), p. 277, calls Medea 'the consummate actress here', noting that the characterisation of her in this scene coincides with her portrayal in Euripides.

⁹⁴ Cf. *OLD* 5 and 6b for the use of *gravitas* to mean 'severity in one's treatment of others' versus serious in one's approach to a task.

Pelidae, *gravitas* represents the skill that Medea can bring to their father's rejuvenation; for the reader, it hints at the danger in which other characters inevitably find themselves when Medea occupies a position of power.

Winter (2009) argues that Medea's decision to experiment on the ram must relate to objections raised by the Pelidae outside the scope of the Ovidian narrative. In Winter's reading, there is a whole conversation missing from Ovid's version of the myth – disagreements between the sisters that take place in line 309, literally in between *mox ubi pollicita est* and '*quo sit fiducia maior*'.⁹⁵ This view is consistent with Hyginus' account [*Fab.* 24], in which at least one daughter, the Alcestis of Euripides' eponymous tragedy, opposes Medea's plan for rejuvenation. Conversely, I suggest that there is a more straightforward explanation for the ram scene as a whole, deriving from Williams' shrewd observation (2012) that the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is depicted as a thrill merchant, driven by the potential for 'showmanship' that another successful rejuvenation will provide.⁹⁶

Like Winter, I propose that the key to the scene lies in line 309 – '*quo sit fiducia maior*' – yet I interpret it differently. Medea's direct speech in this passage echoes her earlier manipulation of the Pelidae [*Met.* 7.300-3]. Ovid's heroine admits that she wants to *increase* the daughters' confidence in her, intimating that she is not satisfied with the level of trust that they have thus far shown, despite the Pelidae having already committed themselves to Medea's plan [*Met.* 7.306]. Examining the scene in terms of power dynamics, we should note that Ovid characterises the Pelidae as appealing to Medea from a position markedly less influential than the heroine's own: *idque petunt* [*Met.* 7.306]; *rogantum* [*Met.* 7.308]. Most significant, however, is the recurrence of *maius* – a term which is by now synonymous with the Ovidian Medea. In *Heroides* 12, Jason describes himself as a *gloria maior* for the heroine [*Her.* 12.76], and Medea herself says *mens mea*

⁹⁵ Cf. Winter (2009), pp. 3-5. Despite Winter's ingenuity in tackling one of the most perplexing episodes of *Metamorphoses* 7, I cannot concur with her reading. In my view, Winter's conclusions depend too much on extrapolations from the Ovidian text – speculation as to what is missing from Ovid's account that ought not to be. Moreover, her argument attempts to reconcile Ovid's version of the story with other available accounts, such as the tradition that Alcestis – being the most pious of the Pelidae, as established by Euripides – was unhappy with Medea's plan. Given that Ovid's treatment of the Pelias murder is the longest extant version of the myth, it seems to me that we should be less concerned here than anywhere with trying to manipulate Ovid's narrative so that it does not contradict those of other mythographers. For a completely contrasting reading to Winter's, see Frécaut (1989), who deconstructs the idea that the Pelias murder is tragic in format.

⁹⁶ Williams (2012), p. 57-8.

maius agit [*Her.* 12.212]; in *Metamorphoses* 7, Medea offers Jason a ‘greater gift’ than he has imagined [*maius...munus* – *Met.* 7.175], and now Medea seeks ‘greater faith’ from the Pelidae [*Met.* 7.309].⁹⁷ The reader’s impression is that Medea is concerned here, as she has been in both *Heroides* 12 and elsewhere in *Metamorphoses* 7, with the pursuit of everything ‘greater’ – greater influence, greater trust, greater skill. This, according to Williams, is the substance of the tension in this episode between Medea and the Pelidae: the Pelidae want Medea to *repeat* her magic, to do the same and no more for Pelias than she did for Aeson. However, Medea has shown herself to be unsatisfied with repeating her deeds; she seeks something not the same but *greater*.⁹⁸

This observation feeds into the element of dramatic irony which frames the ram scene for Ovid’s external reader: unlike the Pelidae, we know that the greater the trust Medea commands, the greater and more shocking the eventual disillusionment for her audience. From this realisation, we derive a valuable comment about the place of the Pelias narrative in Book 7. Pelias’ murder is the most confronting episode of the Ovidian Medea myth: it is violent, unnecessary and apparently unmotivated.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, if we interpret the episode with the ram in light of what we have identified about Medea’s love of control in Ovid’s corpus more generally, then we perceive that the ram assists the poet in building dramatic tension over the duration of the Pelias episode.

Consider this: had Medea simply arrived at Pelias’ door, related an account of Aeson’s rejuvenation and murdered Pelias at his daughters’ request, then Ovid’s myth would be a straightforward morality tale about girls who should have performed a reference check

⁹⁷ *Maius* occurs twice more in *Metamorphoses* 7, though not in the same way as the instances I have cited above. See *Met.* 7.225, during Medea’s journey over Greece before Aeson’s rejuvenation; and *Met.* 7.276, where Medea is preparing to rejuvenate the aged king: *propositum instruxit mortali barbara maius*.

⁹⁸ Cf. Williams (2012), p. 57. For an alternative view of Medea’s Ovidian characterisation, see Frécaut (1989), p. 68, who labels the relentless pursuit of greater notoriety ‘le machiavélisme [de Médée]’. The difference between Williams’ reading and Frécaut’s lies chiefly in their approaches to Medea’s morality – Williams is less concerned with moral judgement than Frécaut, who seems to struggle to see the point of the Pelias episode at all.

⁹⁹ I contend that the murder is unnecessary in the sense that it is not apparent to us, from within Ovid’s story world, why Pelias needs to die. The Aeson narrative suggests that Jason and his men have achieved their triumphant homecoming [*Met.* 7.159–62], and there is no mention of any tension as to who is ruling Iolchus after Jason’s return from Colchis. Therefore, Pelias’ death appears unnecessary to the external reader because it does not answer any pressing narrative problem, whether a question of succession or simply of revenge.

before handing their father over to the knife.¹⁰⁰ Alternatively, if we accept that Ovid appears to be depicting his heroine as motivated by the desire to possess and exercise power, then the focus of the story changes, becoming an exploration of Medea's ruthless manipulation of other characters. This elevates the episode above the level of filial stupidity and into the realms of dramatic pathos, because the central struggle is the inability of the parent-focused child to identify and combat Medea's abuse of the child's emotional vulnerability.¹⁰¹ In other words, the seemingly pointless cruelty revealed by Medea's use of the ram to ensnare the Pelidae alters the myth as a whole: it is no longer a tale about a murder, but a tale about *why* a character like Medea commits murder. I suggest that Ovid calibrates the Pelias episode so as to encourage his reader to focus on what Medea's actions tell us about the heroine's characterisation, rather than on the actions themselves – a technique which highlights the similarity between the epic and elegiac Medeias in their pursuit of influence.

The role of the blade in the Pelias episode fashions a final link between the heroine of Book 7 and the Medea of *Heroides* 12, underlining the heroine's curious lack of feeling in the face of other characters' suffering.

his, ut quaeque pia est, hortatibus in pia prima est
et, ne sit scelerata, facit scelus: haud tamen ictus 340
ulla suos spectare potest, oculosque reflectunt,
caecaque dant saevis aversae vulnera dextris.
ille cruore fluens, cubito tamen adlevat artus,
semilacerque toro temptat consurgere, et inter
tot medius gladios pallentia brachia tendens 345
“quid facitis, gnatae? quis vos in fata parentis
armat?” ait: cecidere illis animique manusque;
plura locuturo cum verbis guttura Colchis
abstulit et calidis laniatum mersit in undis.

With these encouragements, each daughter was at once impious, just as she had been pious; each, so that she might not become wicked, committed a wicked deed. Nonetheless, none could bear to watch the blows [they delivered]: they averted their eyes, and they inflicted the wounds blindly with their cruel right hands, having turned away. [Pelias], awash with blood, raised himself up anyway on his elbow, and – half-mangled though he was – tried to get up from the bed. In

¹⁰⁰ This is the substance of Frécaut's criticism of this episode (1989). He is of the view that the Pelias myth functions to depict the Pelidae as the sort of women whom Roman society both feared and frowned upon – '[femmes qui souffrent] de l'incapacité à dominer leur caractère passionné', p. 71. Frécaut's argument appears to hinge on his perception of Ovid's having depersonalised the Pelidae – they are an amorphous group of women with no names, no opinions and no distinguishing features. Thus, for Frécaut, the episode is little more than a caricatured tale of the evil witch versus the foolish girls.

¹⁰¹ On this point, see Wise (1982), p. 24, who notes that the fault of the Pelidae lies not in their evaluation of Medea's capabilities, but in their 'unexamined belief' that Medea is going to use her abilities on Pelias' behalf.

amongst so many blades, stretching out his whitening arms, he said: "Daughters, what are you doing? Who arms you against your father's life?" Their spirits and hands both failed; before he could say any more, the Colchian snatched away his throat along with his words, and submerged his butchered body in the boiling liquid.

[*Met.* 7.339-49]

At this point in the narrative, Medea has just encouraged the Pelidae to take up arms against their father [*Met.* 7.332-38]. The passage is full of oppositions, indicating an irreconcilable disjunction between the epic personalities of the Pelidae and their present behaviour: the daughters are *impiae* where they used to be *piae* [*Met.* 7.339], the competition implicit in *prima* demonstrating the women's incomprehension of their situation. Likewise, they commit a *scelus* in attempting to avoid becoming *sceleratae* [*Met.* 7.340]; they deliver grievous blows but cannot face the carnage they are inflicting – *oculosque reflectunt* [*Met.* 7.341]. Each line of Ovid's poetry emphasises how great is the divide between what the Pelidae want – Pelias' rejuvenation – and what they are capable of personally carrying out – his exsanguination. Our impression is that the daughters are naturally unsuited to violence, whether or not they view it as a necessary part of achieving a better outcome in the long term. I propose that Ovid's portrait of the Pelidae is important, because it enables the poet to draw a distinction between action and motivation which must affect our reading of Medea's character in this episode. Through the Pelidae, Ovid suggests that characters who may be justified in a course of action are not necessarily prepared – mentally or physically – for the actions required to bring about their chosen end.¹⁰² In this context, the reader's sympathy for the Pelidae derives largely from our sense that they are not really 'themselves' in this scene, that under Medea's influence they have become different and more terrifying characters by taking up their blades.

Pelias' awakening mid-slaughter acts as the dramatic centre-point of the scene, but it also emphasises the dissimilarity between the Pelidae and Medea. Unlike Aeson, who remains unconscious during the ritual and who is thus depersonalised from the reader's perspective,

¹⁰² A useful example here would be Hypermnestra, whose *Heroides* 14 I discussed in Chapter Two. When the time comes for Hypermnestra to kill her new husband Lynceus, she finds herself unequal to the task of wielding the sword – *ter acutum sustulit ensem / ter male sublato reccidit ense manus* [*Her.* 14.45-6]. However, she is in some ways equally unprepared to endure her father's wrath – a key theme of the poem as a whole, as Hypermnestra writes to persuade herself, Lynceus and her father that she did the right thing [cf. *Her.* 14.7: *esse ream praestat, quam sic placuisse parenti.*]. *Heroides* 14 is thus an excellent illustration that no course of action – moral or immoral – guarantees that the agent will prove capable of facing the challenges ensuing. For a reading of *Heroides* 14 which discusses Hypermnestra's complex response to her situation, see Fulkerson (2003).

Pelias is permitted to voice his disbelief that his daughters could be so misguided. Notice that Pelias' words take the form of two questions. The first, '*quid facitis, gnatae?*' [Met. 7.346], is in one sense redundant, since it is apparent both within the story world and without exactly what the Pelidae are doing. Nonetheless, the direct speech invites the reader to approach the scene from the daughters' perspective, which in turn underscores the contradiction between illusion and reality, between the daughters' intent and Medea's: the Pelidae think that they are saving Pelias' life; the external reader knows that Medea is making them kill him.¹⁰³ The second question, '*quis vos in fata parentis / armat?*' [Met. 7.346-7], is more interesting still, because it shows that Pelias is convinced – even as he is being murdered – that his daughters are incapable of such actions without external influence. The construction *quis...armat* likens the Pelidae to soldiers, taking up arms and following orders without necessarily understanding the implications of their actions, or bearing responsibility for the deadly outcomes of those actions.

Pelias' few words enable Ovid to alter the reader's perspective upon the Pelidae as characters, and in turn upon Medea. Pelias' implicit conviction that his daughters' behaviour does not reflect their true natures allows the poet to elide the experience of father and daughters, transforming them both into victims of Medea's double-dealing. As the arms of the Pelidae fail in line 347 – *cecidere illis animique manusque* – we are abruptly catapulted back into Medea's point of view, as she 'takes away' Pelias' throat along with his words (*abstulit*). The euphemistic expression for the final slaughter is a shocking anti-climax that is entirely consistent with Ovid's characterisation of Medea in this episode. While the daughters and Pelias are described in terms of great emotion and terrible injury – consider the stomach-turning *cruore fluens* [Met. 7.343] – Medea accomplishes the final execution with as little warning, and as little forceful vocabulary, as if she had simply finished a conversation and left the stage. I suggest that the contrast between Pelias' impassioned exclamations and Medea's final act reflects the difference between the characterisations of the Pelidae and of Medea: for the daughters, the violence of Pelias' would-be rejuvenation is appalling; for Medea, it is the natural end to a complex

¹⁰³ On the question of contrast, *bracchia tendens* [Met. 7.345] is also interesting, in that it harks back to the same phrase used of Medea during her preparations for Aeson's rejuvenation: *sidera sola micant, ad quae sua bracchia tendens / ter se convertit* [Met. 7.188-9]. The two images of outstretched arms serve to highlight how different are the positions of the people in each – where Medea's gesture is one of dominance and control, Pelias' is one of suffering and supplication. The dissimilarity between the two scenes reinforces the dichotomy wherein Medea occupies the position of power, and other characters the position of her victims. In my view, a detailed study of Medea's use of gesture in *Metamorphoses* 7 would be a useful complement to analyses such as Wise (1982), who focuses on Medea's use of language in the magical setting.

charade. The very horror of the Pelidae serves to point out to the reader Medea's commensurate lack of discernible feeling, recalling the heroine of *Heroides* 12 who reveals no compassion for her brother's murder.

Thus we arrive at the role of the Pelidae in establishing a foil to the controlling character of Medea. Most instructive is Medea's second speech, immediately preceding Pelias' death:

intrant iussae cum Colchide limina natae
ambierantque torum: "quid nunc dubitatis inertes?
stringite" ait "gladios veteremque haurite crurorem,
ut repleam vacuas iuvenali sanguine venas!
in manibus vestris vita est aetasque parentis:
si pietas ulla est nec spes agitatis inanis,
officium praestate patri telisque senectam
exigite, et saniem coniecto emittite ferro!"

[Pelias'] daughters crossed the threshold when Medea instructed, and they stood around his bed. [Medea] said: "Why do you now hesitate, idle ones? Draw your blades and pour out his aged blood, so that I can refill his empty veins with the blood of a young man! Your father's life and his youth are in your hands: if you have any piety, if you do not stir up empty hope, do your duty to your father and drive out his old age with these weapons; let out his sickly blood by driving your blades into him!"

[*Met.* 7.331-8]

Bömer (1976) is of the view that this speech is redundant, in terms of the progression of Ovid's narrative. By contrast, I interpret it as an important summary of the dissimilarities between Medea and the Pelidae whom she is manipulating.¹⁰⁴ Notice, for example, that the daughters are described as waiting upon Medea's instruction in the passive voice (*iussae*). They begin this new scene separated from Medea by the threshold of their father's room, a division embodied in the composition of line 331 – *Colchide limina natae* – where Medea is figuratively 'in front of' the *limen* and the daughters 'behind' it, echoing the extent to which the Pelidae are participating at one remove in a ritual of Medea's making. Once again, the poet's emphasis appears to be on Medea's role as director of the scene, even

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Bömer (1976), p. 279. He notes the correlations between this scene and the Aeson one preceding it, but he does not appear to regard Medea's speech as being of any use at all in characterising her for the audience. Anderson (1972), p. 279, observes that the speech begins 'dramatically rather than according to any epic traditions', since Ovid does not bother to introduce his speaker, leaving the reader to infer that it is Medea. Williams (2012), p. 59, also draws attention to the analogy between Medea's role vis-à-vis the Pelidae in this scene and the dramatist's relationship to his written text. Anderson's point relates to my argument that Medea is always the central or most important character in Ovid's conception of her: the speech's abrupt commencement implies that the poet has grown weary of the magical preparations [*Met.* 7.324-30], and so plunges straight back into the material that interests him most. On this point, see also Genette (1990), whose analysis of the effect of direct speech upon the tone and emphasis of a narrative is relevant here.

though she is not explicitly the focus of the first two lines. The Pelidae are the subject of line 331 (*intrarant*), yet their autonomy is diminished by the passive *iussae* – we are reminded that the Pelidae *take* orders rather than give them.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Medea's opening description of the daughters as *inertes* reiterates her power over them: as Anderson (1972) observes, Medea effectively labels them 'cowards' in a situation that demands definitive action.¹⁰⁶ Fratantuono (2011) also remarks on the significance of the *torum* in line 332, noting that it recalls the *torum* which Jason promised to Medea at *Met.* 7.91.¹⁰⁷ Fratantuono's point reminds the reader how far Medea's powers have progressed since then, and how much more horrifying she appears to us now. Then, she sought for herself a marriage bed, which is a symbol of safety and protection; now, she stands over another's bed which she is about to defile by murder.

A final contrast between the Pelidae and Medea is the notion of *pietas*. Although the Pelidae are about to commit a terrible deed, we are supposed to understand that they do it out of love. In line 336, Medea acknowledges this motivation – *si pietas ulla est* – thereby offering a sickening parody of her petitioners' own feelings. The poetic construction of Medea's exhortation, and the hesitation of the Pelidae implied by *si*, intimate both to the daughters and to Ovid's audience that Medea has far greater *pietas* than her fearful assistants, because she is ready for action. In view of the bloody outcome for Pelias, the reader perceives in Medea's words a love of *dolus* that stands in opposition to the misguided *pietas* of the Pelidae. Ovid's decision to present the daughters as an amorphous group supports the reading of the Pelidae as family- and duty-centred, in contrast to Medea. At no point does Ovid tell us how many daughters Pelias had, nor does he mention their names, ages or any other defining characteristics.¹⁰⁸ Instead, the poet describes the daughters only in relation to their father – they are called *natae* [*Met.* 7.300; 331], *virgines Pelia[e]* [*Met.* 7.304], and *satae Pelia[e]* [*Met.* 7.322] – as though they are the living illustration of a family unit, rather than characters in their own right. I suggest that this technique compounds the reader's sense that the identities of the Pelidae are inextricably

¹⁰⁵ The recurrence of *iubeo*, I propose, underlines for the reader how quickly the position of the Pelidae has changed. At *Met.* 7.306, they 'ordered' Medea to name her price – *pretiumque iubent sine fine pacisci* – yet within 20 lines the positions are entirely reversed.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Anderson (1972), p. 279.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Fratantuono (2011), p. 190.

¹⁰⁸ None of the mythographers seems much interested in this point. Neither Apollodorus [1.9.27] nor Hyginus [*Fab.* 24.1] make any comment even about the number of the daughters. I find this interesting partly because it contrasts with other structurally-similar myths featuring numerous offspring. Consider, for example, the case of Danaus, where it seems to be of vital importance that he had fifty daughters and no more – cf. Apollodorus 2.1.4; Hyginus, *Fab.* 168.

linked with their father's: Ovid does not describe the Pelidae at all *after* they begin the attack on their father. Pelias himself calls them *gnatae* when he awakes at line 346, but within the narrative frame it is as if the daughters cease to exist once they abandon their defining mantle of *natae piae*.

The close connection between the Pelidae and their father can only separate them still further from the figure of Medea, whose familial relations the heroine enumerates and then dismisses in two lines of her monologue [*Met.* 7.53-4]. Neither is Medea described as 'Aeëtes' daughter' after the sole occurrence at the start of Book 7 [*Met.* 7.9].¹⁰⁹ Each of these dissimilarities between Medea and the Pelidae reminds the reader of a more fundamental opposition between the heroine and her hosts – the Pelidae commit an awful act, but they do it inadvertently and for the right reasons; Medea appears to be a character who commits awful acts simply because she can. This more than any other feature of Book 7 returns us to the portrait of a heroine who is concerned chiefly with herself – her future, her skills, her influence – just as we observed in the Medea of *Heroides* 12.

¹⁰⁹ Ovid's decision not to characterise Medea in familial terms contrasts likewise with his treatment of Jason, who is described variously as *Aesone natus* [*Met.* 7.84; 110], *heros Aesonius* [*Met.* 7.156] and *Aesonides* [*Met.* 7.164].

3.4 Reading *Metamorphoses* 7 ‘psychopathically’

Having examined the catalogue of Medea’s epic activities, it is worth revisiting the question of the psychopathic personality, which we discussed in Chapter Two. In that chapter, I argued that Medea’s self-presentation in *Heroides* 12 reflects a number of the hallmarks of a psychopathic personality – including a lack of empathy, an unemotional response to violence and a love of control. I suggest that the same is true of the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, although the heroine’s psychopathic tendencies manifest slightly differently in the epic narrative. Reading Book 7 ‘psychopathically’, I propose that the most interesting element of Ovid’s text is the escalation of Medea’s behaviour: as scholars have noted, she becomes more ambitious and more transgressive as the narrative progresses.¹¹⁰ In my reading, this feature of Ovid’s text is akin to the so-called ‘psychopathic trajectory’, where the psychopath’s behaviour conforms to a uniform pattern of deterioration, his crimes becoming more extreme – and usually more violent – as he becomes more experienced.

Researchers agree that the trajectory of a psychopath’s criminal behaviour is one of very few predictable features of his life.¹¹¹ Generally speaking, a psychopath is predictable only in that he is *unpredictable* to the outside world, because it is difficult for the non-psychopath to understand how a psychopath thinks, and therefore to understand what motivates him. However, in the case of criminal psychopaths, clinicians have observed that the convict’s forensic record will conform for the most part to an exponential curve – that is, each crime will be worse by societal standards than the one that preceded it.¹¹² Typically, a psychopath will ‘upscale’ from minor crimes such as theft, vandalism and intimidation in adolescence to fraud, aggravated assault and murder in adulthood.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Cf. Kenney (2001), Newlands (1997) and Rosner-Siegel (1982): for all of these scholars, the escalation of Medea’s behaviour is crucial to their readings of the heroine. Also Williams (2012), who analyses ambition as a driving force in *Metamorphoses* 7.

¹¹¹ Cf. Cleckley (1941, rp 1988), pp. 433-46, in which he concludes that the psychopath cannot be adequately controlled either by the legal system or by clinicians. In the same vein, see Cooper and Yuille (2007), whose focus is on mapping the psychopath’s capacity for deception as a predictor of subsequent behaviour.

¹¹² For the non-specialist, this point is perhaps best illustrated by a perusal of Cleckley’s case studies (1941, rp 1988), pp. 29-187, wherein he discusses the trend of his patients’ criminal activities, and how those of the ‘true’ psychopaths tend almost uniformly upward. Cleckley approaches the topic from the point of view of motivation, theorising that the psychopath’s behaviour becomes more extreme as he first discovers and then becomes inured to the thrill of getting away with socially destructive acts.

¹¹³ The escalation of behaviour from childhood to adulthood is a central principle of the American Psychiatric Association’s *DSM-IV-TR* criteria for an Anti-Social Personality Disorder. As I

Although this trend can be said to resemble the development of a majority of 'career' criminals – the offences becoming more serious as the perpetrator becomes more practised – the psychopath is notable because his record rarely, if ever, shows a diminution of criminal activity.¹¹⁴

In the case of non-psychopathic criminals, a complex array of factors affects whether a former convict reoffends, and if so what type of crime he commits. For example, a convict released after serving a prison term for armed robbery may next enter the penal system charged with car theft or welfare fraud – crimes that society deems less serious than armed robbery. Some of the reasons for this might include: whether the convict is living in supported housing or on his own in the community; whether he has access to continuing education, employment or substance-abuse counselling such as he may have received in prison; whether he has involvement with his family, which can prevent social isolation and disaffection.¹¹⁵ The presence or absence of these and other factors account for the unpredictable pattern of a non-psychopath's criminal record. Research suggests that it is possible to chart the level of psychological and social stability in a convict's life according to the peaks and troughs of his criminal behaviour. This is a defining principle of rehabilitation: identifying reasons why convicts reoffend and helping them to avoid their triggers.¹¹⁶

The psychopath, however, defies all attempts at rehabilitation. Clinicians posit that the psychopath's criminal profile pursues an upward trajectory for three reasons. First, as we observed in the previous chapter, the psychopath does not conform to social 'norms',

discussed in Chapter Two, an ASPD by no means equates to psychopathy, but the *DSM*'s focus on the patient's childhood and adolescence is a crucial point of similarity between the ASPD and other clinical tools designed specifically to diagnose psychopathy, such as Hare's Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (PCL-R). Cf. *DSM-IV-TR*, pp. 701-6, and Hare (1991).

¹¹⁴ Cf. Patrick (2007), who argues for the need to extrapolate from current clinical data to attempt to quantify the proportion of psychopaths relative to the total forensic population. Patrick's work proceeds from the assumption that clinicians can examine the types and severity of the crimes committed as a way of working out where to look for undiagnosed psychopaths. Gurian (2011) provides an interesting counterpoint, whose subject is the multiple murderer more generally.

¹¹⁵ For some comprehensive discussions of the range of factors that affect a convict's rate of recidivism, see Allen (1987), Kendall (2005) and Messing and Heeren (2009), all of whom argue for more substantial research as a way of decreasing the rate of incarceration. These three studies are unusual in being focused on the experiences of female detainees, who represent a significantly smaller proportion of the prison population than their male counterparts, and who are commensurately under-studied.

¹¹⁶ Allen (1987) is once again relevant here; likewise, Wynn, Høiseth and Pettersen (2012) summarise some recent research regarding the diagnosis and management of female psychopaths specifically.

regulating his behaviour according to his own interests and inclinations, and not according to any external moral standard. Psychopaths differ in this respect from non-psychopathic convicts, who often subscribe to a hierarchy of crime, rationalising an assault against a drug dealer but maintaining that they would never harm a child. Second, the psychopath is unperturbed by the possibility of incarceration – he does not fear prison enough to stop committing crimes. Third, the psychopath is virtually immune to rehabilitation: no amount of effort on the part of prison authorities or social services can seem to prevent the psychopath returning voluntarily to a life of crime.¹¹⁷ Therefore, the point at which a psychopath stops offending is almost always determined by the occurrence of a situation in which the psychopath is challenged by an external force – for example, if he is imprisoned.

If we consider this information in light of what we have observed about Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7, we perceive that the heroine's behaviour conforms almost exactly to the 'psychopathic trajectory'. First, she betrays Aeëtes in favour of a future with Jason [*Met.* 7.1-158];¹¹⁸ next, she rejuvenates Aeson at Jason's request [*Met.* 7. 159-296]; third, she deceives her way into Pelias' house, manipulates his daughters and murders him [*Met.* 7.297-349]. Subsequently, she escapes to Corinth where she kills Creusa and her own two sons [*Met.* 7.391-401].¹¹⁹ Finally, she flees to Athens, where she attempts to poison Theseus and is thwarted by Aegeus [*Met.* 7.402-24] – as with Pelias, Ovid offers us no real motive for this last of Medea's epic crimes.

In Book 7, then, Medea appears to manifest an unbroken upward trend of psychopathic behaviour. If we categorise her actions using the language of 'crime', I suggest that they look something like this: Medea's betrayal of Aeëtes in favour of her own desires constitutes a crime against filial duty.¹²⁰ Her treatment of the Pelidae constitutes a crime

¹¹⁷ These three points are all raised by Cleckley (1941, rp 1988), pp. 337-64, when he offers a 'clinical profile' of the defining features of his psychopathic patients. However, Cleckley does state that psychopaths will generally not commit capital crimes – i.e. murder – because they dislike prison and prefer to avoid it if possible, pp. 265-6. This observation seems to be an artefact of Cleckley's upper middle-class patient list, and is not borne out by the experience of present-day clinicians. Consider, for example, the significant number of case studies presented by Kiehl (2014) in which the psychopath has committed one or more murders.

¹¹⁸ I note here that Ovid does not include the murder of Medea's brother Absyrtus in *Metamorphoses* 7. In Chapter Four, I return to this point, offering a possible rationale for Ovid's organisation of the Medea myth in Book 7, including the omission of Absyrtus' murder.

¹¹⁹ As with Absyrtus, the death of Creon is not mentioned in *Metamorphoses* 7.

¹²⁰ Medea's initial betrayal of Aeëtes is interesting, since the first victims of the vast majority of psychopaths are their families, usually whilst the psychopath is still a child or youth. Cleckley discusses the family histories of his patients at some length (1941, rp 1988), pp. 29-187. For a compelling example, see Kiehl's fascinating analysis (2014), pp. 50-77, of Charles Guiteau, who

against hospitality, since she presents herself as a false suppliant [*Met.* 7.297-99]; a crime against *fides*, since she breaks her promise to rejuvenate Pelias [*Met.* 7.309]; and a crime against moral law more generally, since she murders him [*Met.* 7.348-49]. In the case of Corinth, Medea goes straight to murder; in Athens, she again opts for murder, although Aegeus prevents it at the final moment [*Met.* 7.421-3].

The rejuvenation of Aeson is the only episode in *Metamorphoses* 7 which does not appear to represent a 'crime'. However, I propose that the rejuvenation can be loosely fitted into our scheme as an attack on the laws of nature. Although Medea denies that the rejuvenation is a violation of natural laws, presenting her actions as a solution to Jason's impious request to shift some of his own life span onto Aeson [*Met.* 7.174-77], we can nonetheless treat the rejuvenation as part of a pattern wherein Medea's behaviour is becoming progressively more *extreme*.¹²¹ The heroine begins by giving Jason some drugs [*Met.* 7.98-99] and using a spell against the dragon [*Met.* 7.137-38]; next, she progresses to turning back the clock of Aeson's life. With Pelias, she upscales to stopping the clock of life altogether, and then maintains the same murderous heading over the rest of Book 7. In other words, we track the extremity of Medea's actions from the initial ability to subdue supernatural beasts, through the ability to affect the manner of a person's living (young versus old), all the way up to the ability to control whether a person lives at all. In turn, this may explain why Ovid chooses to leave out of Book 7 the murder of Absyrtus, to which Medea refers in *Heroides* 12 [*Her.* 12.113-6]. A murder early in the narrative would disrupt the reader's perception of the escalation of Medea's behaviour, and thus the omission allows Ovid to depict his heroine's criminality as steadily increasing.¹²²

assassinated US president James Garfield in 1881. Guiteau's father wrote of his son: 'I am sometimes afraid that he would steal, rob, or do anything before his egotism and self conceit shall be knocked out of him, and perhaps, even all that will not do it. So you see, I regard his case as hopeless, or nearly so', p. 61. Kiehl concludes that Guiteau would meet all the modern criteria for a psychopath, scoring very strongly in a large number of areas. Like most psychopaths, Guiteau's criminal tendencies began in childhood.

¹²¹ Cf. Kenney (2001), who declares that almost everything about Ovid's epic Medea is more 'extreme' than in the case of her Apollonian predecessor. Kenney argues for the significance of Ovid having increased the catalogue of Medea's supernatural powers from those attributed to her by Argos in the *Argonautica* [*Arg.* 3.531-33]. For Kenney, the Ovidian Medea's control over nature itself [*Met.* 7.199-209] is an illustration of Medea's challenging Ovidian personality, pp. 281-2.

¹²² Approaching the problem from another point of view, Hunter (1993b), p. 61, observes that the murder of Absyrtus in Apollonius echoes other Greek mythological killings, such as the death of Agamemnon, who is also murdered by a relative and the relative's lover. [Cf. Aesch. *Ag.*]. Assuming that Hunter is correct that the Hellenistic audience would have viewed Absyrtus' death as part of a pattern throughout mythological history, then I suggest we find another reason why Ovid might have chosen to omit Absyrtus' death from the *Metamorphoses*. In leaving out Absyrtus'

Equally important is the observation that Medea's criminal behaviour shows no sign of dissipating until she is thwarted by Aegeus – like the psychopath whose calamitous path is only disrupted by contact with external forces such as law enforcement. At this point, Medea departs altogether from Ovid's narrative and he moves on to the story of Cephalus, which occupies the rest of the book [*Met.* 7.425-865]. This raises an interesting point, because we know that Medea – although foiled in her immediate aim of killing Theseus – is not 'stopped' in any meaningful way; she is neither caught nor punished for her crimes. As she has done before, she flees from Athens, and thereafter from Ovid's text. Williams (2012) advocates reading Medea's departure from Book 7 metapoetically. He suggests that we can interpret Medea's sudden exit from the poem as a representation of her figurative dominance over the Ovidian text, just as the chariot flight testifies to her physical control over the landscape of Greece.¹²³

In my view, Williams' reading draws another useful parallel with the personality of the psychopathic criminal, whose behaviour can only be controlled in the short term, since he cannot be rehabilitated. Within the context of Ovid's story world, Williams argues that Medea 'departs on a note of failure' – that is, she does not kill Theseus.¹²⁴ By contrast, I regard this as an important element of Ovid's creation of suspense in this final section of Medea's narrative: in my view, the real menace lies in not knowing what Medea does *after* she leaves the epic stage. We know that she has not managed to kill Theseus, but we also know that this is not likely to stop her from trying again somewhere else. The closing image of the failed poisoner serves only to highlight for the reader precisely how dangerous is the departing heroine – someone who repeatedly acts for the worst and then flees, apparently unaffected by the outcome of her actions, whether murder or attempted murder.

murder, Ovid mitigates the chance that his readers might interpret Medea's behaviour as part of a wider literary tradition of intrafamilial violence; in turn, this enables Ovid to focus his reader's attention on Medea as a unique Ovidian characterisation, rather than as one of a number of similarly transgressive mythological personalities.

¹²³ Cf. Williams (2012), pp. 64-6. Buxton's analysis (2010) complements the discussion here – he examines Medea's 'movement' through the mythological tradition, both between the landscapes of individual poetic narratives and metaphorically between texts.

¹²⁴ Williams (2012), p. 66. Pavlock (2009), p. 52, also notes that Medea departs when her magic 'fails', but for Pavlock the image of the exit is one of menace. She suggests that the figure of Medea 'symbolizes a narrative, motivated by an obsession with cunning and the arcane, that threatens to proliferate indefinitely'. I am more inclined towards Pavlock's view, since it captures the unease which I suggest must be generated in the reader by not knowing what Medea is going to do next.

The epic Medea's attitude to murder returns us for the last time to the story world of *Heroides* 12. We observed in Chapter Two that the epistolary heroine seems to regard the death of Absyrtus as a minor inconvenience, being more concerned with her own feelings in the situation than with the reality of her brother's gruesome end. For the Medea of *Heroides* 12, the act of killing seems to be dangerously close to a problem-solving tool – a way of circumventing difficulties that allows the heroine to focus on achieving her own ends. The persistence of Medea's murderous path throughout the Ovidian corpus – five deaths over two texts¹²⁵ – and the facility with which she moves from one scenario to another offers perhaps the most striking correlation with the manifestation of a psychopathic personality. Kiehl (2014) includes a case study of relevance here: 'Grant', one of Kiehl's earliest research subjects during his years working as a graduate student in a maximum-security prison in British Columbia. Grant, it transpired, had committed 10 murders – only two of which were in his file – but he rarely thought about them, and had never tallied them up until requested to do so by Kiehl in a clinical context.¹²⁶ Kiehl observed that Grant was unusual for a serial killer, in that he lacked the typical paraphiliae and their accompanying compulsion to kill. He simply murdered as it occurred to him.

I suggest that Grant offers an uncanny reflection of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7. Of the four successful homicides and one attempted murder which are covered in Book 7, Ovid chooses not to elaborate on Medea's motivations for committing them. As we have seen in the case of Pelias, only the phrase *neve doli cessant* [*Met.* 7.297] gives any indication of why Medea decides that Pelias ought to die – a statement that focuses the reader solely on Medea's penchant for treachery. In the Corinthian narrative, the situation is scarcely less impenetrable. Although Ovid knows that his reader will be familiar with Euripides's version of the myth, I nonetheless find it surprising that Ovid does not take a more definite

¹²⁵ Readers of Euripides will note that this should really be six deaths, not five. However, as stated above, Creon's death is not mentioned in *Metamorphoses* 7, and *Heroides* 12 concludes too early for the reader to be certain whether Ovid is completely rejecting the tradition of Creon's death, or simply leaving it out of the epic, as he does with Absyrtus' murder.

¹²⁶ Readers should be aware that – as is common for research programs operating in forensic settings – the inmates interviewed by Kiehl were granted immunity from having their information used against them. Kiehl notes (2014), pp. 23-5, that the legal protections offered to convicts are one of the main reasons that it is generally so easy for clinicians to procure voluntary research subjects in a forensic setting. The inmates are typically bored, and the interviews give them an opportunity to talk about themselves and their histories; moreover, anything they admit to cannot result in more jail time. Kiehl observes that, whilst this might seem unjust to the outsider, it is vital to gain the inmates' trust in order to produce useful and accurate research, which can then be turned into functional risk assessment matrices of the sort used to predict which convicts are likely to reoffend.

position on Medea's state of mind. Creusa's death is given no rationale at all: Ovid simply states that it happened – *Colchis arsit nova nupta venenis* [*Met.* 7.394] – and leaves the reader to infer the jealousy behind it. In line 397, regarding the murder of the children, Ovid describes Medea as having 'avenged herself' – *ultraque se* – but the reader is left to deduce against whom the vengeance is meant and how the deaths of the children will bring it about. Finally, in the Athenian episode, Theseus is called *proles ignara parenti* [*Met.* 7.404], offering the only indication of why Medea might want to kill him; the poet does not explicitly articulate the heroine's motivation.¹²⁷

In my reading of these epic murders, it does not matter whether we choose to regard Ovid as subscribing to the 'canonical' versions of Medea's motivations for these deaths. What is significant is that the poet chooses to disregard the question of motivation as much as possible within his own narrative. Within the story world of Book 7, I suggest that Ovid's presentation of the murders generates an impression that Medea simply passes from one place to another, killing as it suits her. By removing any in-depth evocation or discussion of her state of mind, the poet gives his reader little to focus on in the closing stages *except* the fact that murder has become the defining feature of our heroine. This aspect of Ovid's text provides perhaps the clearest contrast with the narratives of Apollonius and Euripides, where Medea's mental and emotional processes are treated in substantial detail. In my view, Ovid is deliberately slanting his narrative so as to depict his heroine as a character driven to get what she wants and to go where she wants, killing where necessary. Thus, for the reader, the link between *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 becomes indelible: the two narratives, and therefore the two heroines, are linked by the destruction that they wreak upon others.

¹²⁷ Cf. Anderson (1972), p. 287, who summarises the tradition in which Medea tries to kill Theseus so as to secure her own position in Athens: Medea wishes Aegeus to see her as his only chance to have a son.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Ovid depicts the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 as sharing a number of the characteristics which we have identified in the heroine of *Heroides* 12. Like her elegiac counterpart, the Medea of the epic appears to be driven by a desire to preserve her status as the most important and influential character in her story, and to demonstrate this to the other characters within Ovid's story world. As with the Medea of *Heroides* 12, the heroine of Book 7 seems to relish exercising control over other characters, and in particular determining whether other characters live or die.

We have examined three key episodes from Book 7. First, the epic monologue: I argue that Medea does not necessarily reflect the tortured and naïve heroine whom a number of scholars have alleged her to be. In my reading, we can interpret the Medea of the soliloquy as a heroine rationalising the pursuit of her own advancement at her family's expense; in this respect she resembles the Medea of *Heroides* 12, who downplays the hero's interests at every opportunity. In the Aeson narrative, I suggest that we see a progression of this same heroine, a Medea who acquiesces to Jason's request to rejuvenate his father largely so as to secure for herself an opportunity to exercise control over another character. Lastly, in the case of Pelias, I propose that we encounter Ovid's most compelling evidence that the Medea of the epic resembles her elegiac namesake. The Medea of the Pelias narrative proves herself to be ruthless, manipulative and violent, showing a brutality that mirrors the heroine of *Heroides* 12, who seems unable to engage with the reality of her brother's unjust murder.

In the fourth and final section of this chapter, I revisited the notion of the psychopathic personality, arguing that the increasing severity of Medea's behaviour in *Metamorphoses* 7 corresponds to the typical trajectory of a psychopath's forensic profile. Just so, in the case of *Heroides* 12, we noted that the elegiac heroine's apparent lack of empathy and persistent self-focus reflect important diagnostic criteria for a psychopathic personality. Over these three chapters, then, I hope to have demonstrated three things: first, that the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 can each be read as coherent and persuasive characters in their own right. Second, that the two heroines can be treated as one and the same personality-type, sharing many important characteristics across both texts, although these do not manifest identically in each poem. Third, I have argued that it is not necessary to read either heroine as scholarship has broadly characterised them – treating the elegiac

Medea as a confused caricature of mixed Apollonian and Euripidean descent, and her epic counterpart as a heroine undergoing a complete psychological metamorphosis over the duration of her narrative. In the following chapter, which will conclude the thesis, I outline some possible implications of my reading of Ovid's 'two Medeas', attempting to answer the question: 'of what value is this project's reading of Medea to the Ovidian scholar?'.

CHAPTER FOUR

'magna sequar':

What to do with the Ovidian Medea?

This fourth and final chapter takes a different approach to the preceding three discussions. Whereas the earlier chapters focus on developing a coherent reading of the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7, this chapter adopts a wider angle, exploring some possible interactions between my reading of Medea and scholarly approaches to the Ovidian corpus more generally. The chapter comprises three sections. To begin, I return to the Medea of *Heroides* 12, asking whether my reading of the elegiac heroine has any bearing on the dormant debate about the poem's Ovidian authenticity. I also discuss one possible reason why *Heroides* 12 remains one of the least-read poems in the collection.

The second section belongs to the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7. First, I examine the structure of the Medea myth, arguing that Ovid's presentation of the narrative works to highlight the heroine's dissimilarity to her canonical incarnations. Next, I consider the Ovidian Medea within the framework of the women-centric myths of Books 6 to 10, observing that Medea represents one of several heroines in the *Metamorphoses* whose narratives are directed by the women's desire for influence and control at any cost. Thirdly, I ask how we as critics are choosing to define 'metamorphosis' within the epic. If, as I suggest, Medea's Ovidian characterisation appears to remain stable across the diverse episodes of *Metamorphoses* 7, then the heroine's so-called metamorphosis may be said to derive from the reader's changing *perception* of Medea, rather than from any alteration in her character as depicted by the poet.

The final section of the chapter returns to the overarching theme of the thesis – the characterisation of Ovid's Medea, and the critical possibilities opened up by reading Classical texts with a focus on characterisation as a literary technique. Here, I place my reading in the context of some contemporary scholarship on characterisation, and observe that this project's reading of Medea can encourage us towards similarly atypical interpretations of other Ovidian characters.

4.1 The Medea of *Heroides* 12

Authenticity

Perhaps the most obvious advantage of reading Medea as a unified personality is that it compels me to take a clear position regarding the Ovidian authenticity of *Heroides* 12. If, as I advocate, we accept that the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 appear to be the same heroine developed at two different points of the poet's authorial life, then it becomes difficult – if not impossible – to dispute the Ovidian authorship of *Heroides* 12.¹ Fulkerson (2009) suggests that the debate about 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' *Heroides* has not so much reached a point of consensus as it has been quietly passed over by the majority of critics: contemporary scholarship generally assumes Ovidian authorship of all of the single epistles without explicitly arguing this position.² Many critics seem to view the question of authenticity as a moot point, given that we cannot resolve the situation definitively; moreover, the letters read well enough as a collection to render the authorship conundrum significantly less interesting than almost any other we could be investigating.³

Whilst several *Heroides* have come under fire as suspected 'interpolations' into Ovid's collection – most notably Sappho's *Heroides* 15⁴ – Knox (1986b) remains the first and only scholar to challenge the authenticity of Medea's *Heroides* 12. His objections to the letter are threefold. First, *Heroides* 12 is not mentioned unambiguously in *Amores* 2.18,

¹ I take it as read that critics accept the Ovidian authorship of the *Metamorphoses*, and thus of Medea's Book 7. This being so, if we can establish the likelihood that *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 have the same author, then that poet must be Ovid.

² Fulkerson (2009), p. 79. Farrell (1998) makes a similar observation, the lapse of time between Farrell's article and Fulkerson's chapter suggesting that the question remains of little interest to Ovidian scholars. Landolfi (2000) includes discussion of the authenticity of *Heroides* 12 in his monograph, but does not advance the debate beyond Hinds' (1993) earlier conclusions.

³ Whilst many recent studies of the *Heroides* agree that the poems work well as a collection, earlier scholars such as Palmer (1898, rp 2005), Otis (1966, rp 1970) and Jacobson (1974) do not concur. Both Palmer and Jacobson, for example, devote considerable space to enumerating the features of individual poems which seem to detract from the uniformity of the collection. Discussions to the contrary would include: Sabot (1981), Alden Smith (1994), Farrell (1998), Jolivet (2001), Lindheim (2003), Spentzou (2003) and Fulkerson (2005), who all argue for strong coherence between the letters, although approaching the topic through very different interpretive lenses.

⁴ Tarrant (1981) is probably the crucial article here; however, his position has since been substantially undercut by scholars such as Lindheim (2003), pp. 137-76, and Fulkerson (2005), pp. 152-8. Fulkerson's view is particularly interesting: although she seems to accept the poem's Ovidian authorship, Fulkerson reads Sappho as an 'impostor' within the collection, a lyric writer attempting to mould herself to an elegiac setting, p. 158. See also Knox's 1995 edition of the *Heroides*, pp. 12-14 and pp. 278-9, in which he includes the contentious *epistula Sapphus*, with useful discussion of the poem's provenance. Also Jacobson's chapter on *Heroides* 15 (1974), pp. 277-99, in which he summarises the authenticity debate preceding Tarrant.

where Ovid refers to some of his epistolary elegies.⁵ Second, Knox considers Medea's letter to be so dissimilar to those of the other heroines as to make it suspect. Third, the Medea of *Heroides* 12 appears to be 'copying' material from *Metamorphoses* 7 which is inappropriate to the mythological time-period in which the elegiac heroine is supposed to be writing; for Knox, this is evidence of poetic ineptitude, which is synonymous with non-Ovidian authorship. In particular, Knox takes issue with the epistolary Medea's failure to indicate that she wants Jason to return to her; likewise her tendency to talk to herself throughout the letter rather than to Jason.⁶ Knox asserts that Medea's third-person reference to the hero [*Her.* 12.66] constitutes the failure of the poem as a representation of a letter, rendering it a 'dramatic soliloquy' in the tragic mode.⁷ Knox concludes that Medea's lack of hero-centrism makes her an outlier amongst the women of the *Heroides*, damaging the potential coherence of Ovid's collection.

By contrast, the features of *Heroides* 12 which Knox denounces are precisely those which I argue we can also observe in the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, thereby establishing Medea as an authentically Ovidian character, albeit dissimilar to the other women of the *Heroides*.⁸ Medea's lack of emotional engagement with the hero, her self-focus, her apparent failure to consider Jason's probable reaction to her communications – in my reading, these become important links between the Medeas of the elegy and the epic, enabling the reader to develop an understanding of the heroine's uniquely Ovidian personality. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Knox's thesis is not his criticism of the

⁵ Jason and Hypsipyle are both mentioned at *Am.* 2.18.33, while Jason receives another mention on his own at *Am.* 2.18.23. Knox (1986b), p. 209, takes this to be evidence that only Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 is authentically Ovidian, with Medea's letter as a later addition. Knox is similarly skeptical of the fact that Jason is the only hero to receive two letters, and he treats Hypsipyle's as the more likely to be authentic. For a contrasting view on *Amores* 2.18, see McKeown (1998), pp. 397–8, who asserts that *male gratus Iason* [*Am.* 2.18.23] should be taken to refer to both *Heroides* 6 and *Heroides* 12. McKeown regards the critical suspicion of *Heroides* 12 as 'unwarranted', p. 397, observing the connection between *male gratus* in *Amores* 2.18 and Medea's use of *ingratus* in *Heroides* 12 [*Her.* 12.21; 12.124; 12.206]. As McKeown points out, no Heroidean heroine other than Medea uses the term *ingratus*, suggesting a possible connection between the poet of *Amores* 2.18 and the poet of *Heroides* 12.

⁶ Knox (1986b), pp. 209–10.

⁷ Knox (1986b), p. 210.

⁸ An important, though unstated, aspect of Knox's thesis seems to be that the women of the *Heroides* are all much the same, which is why he considers Medea to be an outlier. However, I consider it disputable that Medea is wholly dissimilar to all of the other *Heroides*. As we observed in Chapters One and Two, at least some of the other letters can be read as being similarly non-hero-centric, such as Oenone's *Heroides* 5. Although I agree with Knox that Medea is in many respects different to the majority of her sister-writers, I do not concur that her failure to place the hero centre-stage is one of them. For a contrasting view on Oenone, see Drinkwater (2015).

poem, but what he seeks to achieve by undermining the credibility of *Heroides* 12. In his penultimate paragraph, Knox declares that

the *Heroides* have often been criticised as tedious, and perhaps some of the poems in the collection are. If the group of *Her.* 1-14 contains some spurious epistles, there might be much less to object to in Ovid's original plan.⁹

We can hardly doubt that Knox regards *Heroides* 12 as one of the poems that can justly be labelled 'tedious'. In these final lines, however, he seems to be trying to improve the scholarly perception of the collection as a whole, by excising an epistle that fails to meet his exacting standards of Ovidian workmanship. I suggest that Knox's argument tells the reader a great deal more about Knox's expectations of the *Heroides* than it does about the 'Ovidian' or 'non-Ovidian' qualities of the poem under discussion.

Hinds (1993) effectively demolishes Knox's concerns about *Heroides* 12, and no scholar since has attacked the poem's Ovidian origin.¹⁰ In a probing analysis of the allusive and intertextual properties of *Heroides* 12, Hinds demonstrates that each of Knox's objections can be refashioned as evidence for Ovidian authorship rather than against. Hinds argues for treating the *Heroides* mentioned in *Amores* 2.18 as an 'Alexandrian catalogue' – indicative rather than exhaustive, offering little insight as to which letters should be treated as inauthentic.¹¹ Moreover, he suggests interpreting the recycled material from *Metamorphoses* 7 as an intimation that Ovid is constructing his heroine as an active reader of her own mythological tradition.¹² Whilst Hinds is chiefly concerned with the critical possibilities opened up by treating *Heroides* 12 from an intertextual perspective, his argument has been crucial to the development of this thesis, in that Hinds is the first scholar to argue for a concrete link between the depictions of Medea in *Heroides* 12 and in *Metamorphoses* 7.¹³ Most significantly for our purposes, Hinds observes that the critic's

⁹ Knox (1986b), p. 222.

¹⁰ Heinze (1993) also argues for the authenticity of *Heroides* 12, observing that we cannot be sure exactly what poetic tradition Ovid was working from when writing the poem, pp. 94-5. For Heinze, the geographical peculiarities of *Heroides* 12 which so preoccupy Knox might be the product of a minor tradition which is not available to the modern reader. Heinze also highlights Ovid's use of the elegiac tropes of the sea and sea monsters in Medea's letter, pp. 95-6, arguing that the letter is less dissimilar to those of the other heroines than Knox asserts.

¹¹ Hinds (1993), pp. 30-4.

¹² Cf. Hinds (1993), pp. 17-22.

¹³ My reading does, however, differ significantly from Hinds', in that he accepts Verducci's assertion (1985), pp. 62-6, that the most useful way to read *Heroides* 6 and 12 is to treat Hypsipyle as the 'true' Medea. Cf. Hinds (1993), p. 29. Hinds interprets the Medea of *Heroides* 12 as being suggestive of a number of 'different' Medeas at different stages and in different incarnations within the literary tradition – Apollonian, Euripidean, Ovidian and so on, p. 45. On the other hand, I argue

conviction as to which is the ‘right’ reading of a text most often comes down to a ‘withholding of faith on one side, and a leap of faith on the other’.¹⁴ Knox withholds his faith on the topic of *Heroides* 12, and Hinds does not; consequently, they reach opposing conclusions regarding the poem’s probable authenticity.

Examining Knox’s and Hinds’ arguments side by side, we perceive that Knox appears to be approaching *Heroides* 12 with a very specific idea of what sort of poem he expects to find; moreover, he uses the poem’s deviation from these parameters to draw unfavourable conclusions as to the authorship of the text. Knox deduces from his perception of the disunity between Medea and the other heroines that Medea’s poem is inauthentic, a conviction which Hinds confronts with typical perspicacity:

My greatest unease with standard philological methods for discussing questions of priority and authenticity is...that the vocabulary of differentiation which they use is almost invariably a vocabulary of disparagement.¹⁵

This, I propose, is the crucial point: from an examination of Knox’s negative reading of *Heroides* 12 and of Hinds’ positive interpretation of the same poem, we can infer that in attacking the authenticity of *Heroides* 12 Knox is looking for reasons to cull the Ovidian corpus of a poem that he personally dislikes. He is not alone in this view: Jacobson (1974) and Verducci (1985) are the two least cordial analyses of *Heroides* 12 after Knox’s; more recent scholarship such as Lindheim (2003) likewise finds Medea’s poem to be an inept and unsatisfying letter.¹⁶ We must bear in mind, then, that the perception of ‘authenticity’ can be shaped in large part by the critic’s individual response to the poem. And thus we find ourselves circling back to a question which has significantly affected the direction of this project: just what *is* so difficult or unappealing to the reader about Medea’s *Heroides* 12?

that we can read the Ovidian Medea as representing only one characterisation, rather than the possibility of many.

¹⁴ Hinds (1993), p. 15.

¹⁵ Hinds (1993), p. 44.

¹⁶ See, for example, Jacobson’s assertion (1974), p. 113, that Medea is a ‘dastardly villain’. Verducci considers *Heroides* 12 a ‘sympathetic portrait of human self-deception’ (1985), p. 73, yet she repeatedly compares Medea unfavourably with Euripides’ heroine. Lindheim (2003), pp. 114–33, finds Medea’s letter to be diminished by its determination to focus on Jason’s desires, and also by the similarity Lindheim perceives between Medea’s *Heroides* 12 and Hypsipyle’s *Heroides* 6 – the heroines repeating each other *ad absurdum*.

What is so difficult about *Heroides* 12?

In this section, I discuss one possible reason why Medea's *Heroides* 12 remains one of the least popular letters in Ovid's collection. In Chapters One and Two, we identified some features of Ovid's epistolary heroine that have a direct bearing on this question. In Chapter Two, for example, I argued that aspects of Medea's Ovidian personality could be labelled 'psychopathic': her persistent self-focus, her inability to empathise with other characters and her apparent lack of remorse for her brother's murder combining to depict her as an emotionally remote figure with whom it is very difficult for the reader to identify.

Furthermore, we observed that Ovid's spatial depiction of Medea's narrative is unusual amongst this collection – throughout the greatest part of *Heroides* 12, Medea seems to exist in a physically spaceless environment. The reader's inability to picture Medea in any particular setting highlights her literal and figurative separation from the other characters, offering a poetic reflection of the interpersonal inaccessibility that we noted in the analysis of the heroine's 'psychopathic personality'. I now take these observations a little further, suggesting that the challenging aspects of Medea's Ovidian characterisation are compounded for the reader by the revelation of Medea's supposed moment of composition – where Ovid is choosing to place his heroine within the pre-established mythological chronology.

Medea's moment of composition is revealed unusually late, compared to those of her sister-writers. Not until line 151 – three quarters of the way through Medea's poem – does Ovid establish definitively that the heroine is writing from her home in Corinth, and that Jason has already married Creusa.¹⁷ Conversely, the letters of Phyllis, Oenone, Hypsipyle, Dido, Ariadne, Canace, Laodamia and Hypermnestra all reveal the heroines' moments of composition within the first four couplets of the poem.¹⁸ On its own, the delayed revelation need not present a problem – in Deianira's *Heroides* 9, for example, the moment of composition comes almost at the end of the letter [*Her.* 9.143], enabling Ovid to emphasise

¹⁷ As stated in Chapter Two, I do not take Medea's description of the wedding procession to be unambiguous regarding the moment of composition [*Her.* 12.137-48]. We do not find out for certain that it is Jason's wedding until *Her.* 12.151, where Medea's son refers to Jason by name.

¹⁸ Cf. Phyllis [*Her.* 2.5-6], Oenone [*Her.* 5.1-2], Hypsipyle [*Her.* 6.1-2], Dido [*Her.* 7.7-8], Ariadne [*Her.* 10.2-6], Canace [*Her.* 11.3-4], Laodamia [*Her.* 13.3-4] and Hypermnestra [*Her.* 14.1-4]. In some cases, chronological specificity is vital to enable the reader to understand the poem's content – for example, Hypsipyle's statement that Jason has recently acquired the Golden Fleece and returned home to Thessaly [*Her.* 6.1-2]. In other poems, it is enough to know that the heroine's letter pre- or post-dates a particular significant event – such as Laodamia's admission that her last knowledge of Protesilaus had him detained at Aulis [*Her.* 13.3].

the pathos of Deianira's situation as we realise that she has unwittingly *already* killed Hercules, even as she continues to worry about how to manage his infidelities.¹⁹ Medea's poem is less straightforward, in that the revelation of her moment of composition creates a difficulty for the Ovidian reader. If Jason's wedding is already over, we surmise, then Medea must be soon to enter Euripides' tragic stage and to embark upon her murderous spree.

The difficulty lies in the reader's abrupt realisation that Ovid does not characterise his Medea in the way that we might expect, if she is indeed on the brink of moving into the tragic mode in the kind of towering rage with which we are familiar from Euripides.²⁰ If the Medea of *Heroides* 12 is chronologically so close to Euripides', then where in Ovid is the uncontrolled emotion of the tragic heroine? Where is the fear about her sons' future as foreign step-children to the crown, or about her own future as their stateless mother?²¹ The reader's unexpected immersion in Euripidean chronology compels us to take stock of the marked differences between Ovid's characterisation of Medea and Euripides': Ovid's heroine is calmly reasoned in her denigration of Jason, Euripides' is unpredictable and overwrought; the elegiac Medea is self-regarding and coolly analytical, where the tragic heroine is driven by fury. I suggest that Ovid's placement of his heroine so close to her tragic counterpart in the mythological chronology raises an unsettling possibility for the reader. What if Ovid is outlining an alternative interpretation of Euripides' material? What if Ovid's Medea is 'testing out' a depiction of Euripides' heroine as a character capable of

¹⁹ Medea's letter and Deianira's have in common that both have historically been suspected of inauthenticity. Bolton (1997) summarises the debate as to the authenticity of *Heroides* 9, which is treated by Courtney (1965), Vessey (1969) and Goold (1974). For some interesting analyses of Deianira's comparatively neglected poem, see Murgatroyd (2014b), Bolton (1997) and Casali (1995, 1995b). Murgatroyd (2014b), though brief, is particularly interesting on the dramatic ironies that shape the reader's view of *Heroides* 9.

²⁰ This is a key aspect of Davis' (2012) analysis of *Heroides* 12: he reads the Ovidian Medea as being positioned on the edge of a range of potential characterisations, including that of Euripides' heroine. For Davis, this explains why the Ovidian Medea does not appear more 'tragic', because she is yet to embrace that aspect of her literary identity. I, however, find the situation more interesting if we view Ovid as bringing his heroine into conflict with the Euripidean tradition.

²¹ Cf. the nurse's warning to the *paedagogus* about Medea's emotional state [*Med.* 90-5]; this is followed by Medea's opening lines, in which she declares that she wants to die [*Med.* 96-7]. See, too, *Med.* 255-8, where Medea laments that she is alone and stateless in Corinth; and Medea's speech to Jason [*Med.* 502-15] where she summarises her view of her own and her sons' position without Jason to protect them. Finally, at *Med.* 780-2, Medea states that she cannot bear to leave her sons behind to be abused by her enemies. Phillips (2010) offers an interesting interdisciplinary study of the Euripidean Medea, examining the connection between Medea's self-construction as an embattled outcast and the vulnerability of her legal position both as a foreigner and as a woman.

manipulating the audience, creating an *illusion* of on-stage suffering in order to establish mitigation for herself before the commission of her crimes?

My argument takes as its starting point the ‘complicity’ between reader and poet which Barchiesi (1993) contends forms one of the foundational elements of the *Heroides*.²² Barchiesi observes that Ovid and his reader occupy an inherently superior position on the narrative to that of the character: we feel ourselves to be seated on a level with the poet as he manipulates his characters through mythological scenarios, the outcomes of which we are convinced that we already know. By positioning his poems within existing literary worlds, Ovid creates the illusion that the reader is getting a glimpse into the mysteries of authorial creation. As readers, we think that we know where Ovid has to direct his narratives, because the boundaries of Ovid’s stories have already been fixed by earlier literary authorities.²³ Barchiesi’s analysis is compelling, and yet we must acknowledge that this complicity can only function if readers are confident that we understand how Ovid’s poem fits within the storehouse of material we are familiar with from other writers.²⁴ If we cannot identify the way in which Ovid’s narrative intersects with the versions we have in mind, then our ability to apply our superior knowledge is damaged, and our enjoyment of the poem along with it.²⁵

The key to Barchiesi’s notion of complicity, as Kennedy (1984) argues, lies in successfully identifying the moment of composition that Ovid has chosen for his heroine. Once we know exactly when and where within the mythological tradition Ovid has placed his writing character, then we perceive depths of dramatic irony that were impossible to identify before. In the case of Penelope’s *Heroides* 1, Kennedy demonstrates that Ovid is filling a gap in Penelope’s tradition, proffering an answer to a question that must plague

²² Barchiesi (1993), p. 334.

²³ Cf. Barchiesi (1993), p. 346, where he argues that the reader’s ‘ironical vantage point [upon the heroines] is built on the acceptance of a master fiction which controls us as we control intertextual ironies’.

²⁴ Kennedy (2008) is a valuable analysis here, approaching the question from a narratological viewpoint.

²⁵ Barchiesi’s view of the *Heroides* implies that the poems which are likely to be of greatest interest to the reader are those with a well-known literary tradition – a position discussed briefly in the Introduction to this thesis. Anderson (1973) is of a similar persuasion to Barchiesi, arguing that the Dido of *Heroides* 7 is interesting chiefly because of the prominence of Virgil’s earlier characterisation of the heroine. However, as we have noted, there are exceptions to Anderson’s and Barchiesi’s model, including Phyllis’ *Heroides* 2, which has achieved arguably greater critical status than has Dido’s *Heroides* 7, despite lacking a complete literary tradition. Fulkerson’s (2002b) analysis of *Heroides* 2 treats Phyllis as an active reader of the other heroines’ poems, an argument which largely circumvents Barchiesi’s dependence on the literary tradition.

any reader of the *Odyssey*: what is Penelope doing in her room apart from weaving? On the other hand, Medea's *Heroides* 12 does not appear to fit Kennedy's model, because the realisation of when and where Medea is supposed to be writing is likely to provoke the response that Ovid's heroine does not appear to harmonise with her literary tradition. As we have observed, Ovid's Medea and Euripides' seem to be a mass of contradictions: cold-versus hot-tempered; reasoned versus raging. Thus, in the case of *Heroides* 12, instead of appearing to probe a facet of personality left unexplored in Euripides' heroine – as *Heroides* 1 does with Homer's Penelope – Ovid's Medea seems to jar against the very tradition we were expecting her to illuminate or explain.²⁶

In short, I suggest that one reason why *Heroides* 12 frustrates its critics is that Barchiesi's conspiracy of reader and poet against the character does not appear to work: our impression is that nothing we thought we knew about the heroine seems to apply to Ovid's treatment of her. Barchiesi has further argued (2001) that the *Heroides* possess an enduring appeal because they extend to their readers the tantalising possibility of 'new window[s]' opened onto already-completed stories.²⁷ Once again, Penelope's poem seems the perfect example, yet Barchiesi's argument does not apply to Medea. In exposing an apparently irreconcilable divergence between Ovid's version of Medea and that of Euripides, Medea's moment of composition seems *not* to open a new window onto a familiar story, but rather to fashion a lookout onto a different heroine and a different story altogether. The reader is deprived of the confirmation of his own competence with the literary tradition, and left to wonder why the two heroines seem to synchronise so badly.

Liveley's (2008) analysis of the *Heroides* as 'paraquel' narratives offers a useful counterpoint to my reading of Medea's *Heroides* 12. Liveley suggests that one of the key successes of the collection is that the heroines' poems run in parallel with the dominant mythological narratives. In Liveley's view, these alternative stories ('paraquels') avoid forcing a confrontation with the literary tradition by operating in the narrative time-period before the story is 'finished', at a point when the heroines' fates are not yet determined,

²⁶ This observation, I suggest, forms the genesis of Verducci's view regarding the personality swapping between *Heroides* 6 and 12. For Verducci, the lack of apparent resemblance between *Heroides* 12 and Euripides means that Ovid's heroine cannot be a 'true' Medea. Cf. Verducci (1985), pp. 62-6.

²⁷ Barchiesi (2001), p. 31.

thus obviating the need for Ovid to actively revise the women's established histories.²⁸

Liveley suggests that the *Heroides* are not unbelievable or unrealistic precisely because they exist at moments within the mythological chronology where the heroines' imagined futures are still possible, not *yet* foreclosed, although the reader knows that they soon will be.

Liveley observes that one of the most interesting features of these paraquel narratives is that they extend to the reader the possibility that the heroine is going to change her own literary future, involving us in the illusion that we are experiencing a radical recalibration of familiar myths.²⁹ Yet here *Heroides* 12 parts company with Liveley's analysis, embodied in Ovid's selection of the heroine's moment of composition. In Medea's case, it does not appear that Ovid is attempting to redefine Medea's *myth* – opening up a new event or a new ending – but rather that he is redefining her *character*. As we observed in Chapter One, the closing of Medea's *Heroides* 12 seems to foreshadow only too well the events of Euripides' play, and thus we have no indication that Ovid's heroine wants to change her ending in the way that the Dido of *Heroides* 7 so obviously seeks to.³⁰ Instead, we appear to have a very different explanation of how the events of Euripides' play might have come about, of what *sort of heroine* decides to kill her children.

The unusually late revelation of Medea's moment of composition intimates that Ovid is deliberately bringing his heroine into conflict with her tragic counterpart. Throughout *Heroides* 12, as I have argued, we are aware that the Ovidian Medea appears to be very singular in how she thinks and feels, but it is not until we realise how close to Euripides' material Ovid is positioning his heroine that we are forced to ask ourselves how we see the

²⁸ In this respect, Liveley's analysis takes quite a different approach to scholars such as Spentzou (2003), who treats the women as presenting an ultimately fruitless challenge to the narratives of the literary authorities. Cf. Spentzou (2003), p. 3, where she labels the *Heroides* 'discourse[s] of subversion'. In my view, Liveley's multi-layered discussion goes a long way towards exposing the limitations of Spentzou's argument, which is conditioned almost entirely by her determination to judge the value or 'success' of the letters solely through comparison with the heroines' earlier literary incarnations.

²⁹ Cf. Liveley (2008), pp. 88-9. I should also note that some of the poems function in Liveley's terminology as 'interquels' – poems that fill an apparent hole in the existing myth, compensating for an absence of information and therefore not necessarily impacting on the reader's interpretation or understanding of the heroine's mythological future. In my view, Penelope's *Heroides* 1 would be such a poem, her letter eliding neatly with the resolution of her situation as explored by Homer. On the other hand, critics such as Jacobson (1974), pp. 243-76, would disagree that *Heroides* 1 harmonises with the Odyssean version of Penelope's history.

³⁰ See here Desmond (1993), who reads Ovid's Dido after Fetterley's (1978) model of the 'resisting reader'. For Desmond, the Dido of *Heroides* 7 aims to undercut Virgil's *Aeneid* by re-writing her history from her own point of view.

two versions working together. If Ovid had chosen to position *Heroides* 12 earlier in the mythological chronology – perhaps where the lovers' life in Corinth is just breaking down, before Jason's remarriage – then the reader could disregard the unsettling dissimilarity between Ovid's Medea and Euripides', because of the number of other events that might have influenced the depiction of the heroine in between the time-periods encompassed by the letter and by the play.

However, the temporal proximity of the two narratives deprives the reader of this possibility – we have no option but to take a definitive position on whether Ovid's Medea is a completely 'different' heroine to Euripides', or whether we should understand the two heroines as being the 'same' character. The latter prospect is deeply uncomfortable for the reader conditioned to the dominance of the literary canon, because the careful self-justification of *Heroides* 12 opens the door to a complementary portrait of Euripides' heroine as an equally manipulative figure: a character who is not necessarily experiencing torment on the stage, but who acts out a *pose* of torment to secure sympathy for herself. If we take the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and of Euripides to be the same character, then we encounter the possibility that the tragic heroine's apparent psychological breakdown is less genuine than it is calculated for a particular purpose, the same purpose that we have divined for *Heroides* 12 – implicating Jason in the bloodshed to come. As Liveley suggests, this kind of cross-contamination between myths is only possible because of Ovid's construction of his poems as paraquels, narratives positioned in the fluid space where the mythological future is still to be decided. *Heroides* 12 thus exposes some of the complex interpretive possibilities of a paraquel narrative, in that Medea appears on the one hand to be so different to Euripides' heroine and so uniquely Ovidian, while on the other her moment of composition suggests to the reader that she 'has been' Euripides' heroine all along.³¹

³¹ In this respect, I view Medea rather differently to critics such as Hinds (1993) and Davis (2012), for whom it is important that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 stands on the threshold of the tragic genre while still embodying the characteristics of the elegiac world of Ovid's narrative. For them, *Heroides* 12 depicts a narrative space where Medea is not *yet* Euripides' heroine just as she is *no longer* Apollonius'. This is partly a question of genre and partly of narrative chronology. Nonetheless, I suggest that Ovid seems to be encouraging his reader to perceive a cross-contamination between these different myths – in some ways, his Medea is not yet Euripides' heroine; in other ways, she is already. In turn, this fits with my argument that Ovid is concerned with portraying Medea as a stable character-type over time: from a certain point of view, her literary personality could be said to be more important than the genre that she is inhabiting at any particular point.

If we return briefly to Kennedy's (1984) argument, we notice that our reading of the Medea of *Heroides* 12 forms in one sense an inversion of his perspective on *Heroides* 1. Where Kennedy argues that the discovery of Penelope's moment of composition has a *positive* effect on the reader's experience of the epistolary narrative, I suggest that the same act of detection in another poem can produce an opposite effect. The moment of composition may create for the reader an *unfavourable* impression of the poem or of the writing heroine if – as in Medea's case – Ovid's presentation of his character does not appear to harmonise in any useful way with the situation designated by the mythological tradition at the poet's chosen point in the narrative timeline. Because Ovid's Medea appears not to conform to what we know of Euripides' heroine, we are deprived of the satisfaction that Kennedy finds in *Heroides* 1, that of perceiving correlations between the two narratives which must be invisible to the characters within the Ovidian story world. Instead, *Heroides* 12 subjects its reader to the uncomfortable realisation that the Medeas of Ovid and of Euripides appear to be incompatible, or to the still more uncomfortable possibility that if they *are* compatible, then we may have been reading Euripides' heroine 'wrongly' all along.

I argue that the revelation of Medea's moment of composition works to crystallise a number of the reader's observations about the characterisation of the writing heroine – her self-focus, her lack of emotion, her ruthless tendencies – and to make those observations seem even more significant by placing them in the context of the dominant myth to which they present such a challenge. Through his selection of the moment of composition, Ovid makes it very difficult for his reader to find a home for the elegiac Medea within her existing literary tradition. In this respect, I suggest that Ovid's construction of *Heroides* 12 offers a partial reflection of the characterisation of his writing heroine. Just as Medea is a difficult character – difficult to comprehend, to identify with, to like – so *Heroides* 12 is a difficult poem: difficult to understand whether it seeks to augment or to undermine the Apollonian and Euripidean traditions which precede it. The challenging aspects of Ovid's *Heroides* 12 may preclude it from being one of the most successful letters in the collection; they do not, however, prevent the critic from developing a coherent reading of the heroine depicted within it. *Heroides* 12 is a difficult poem, but not impossible.

4.2 The Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7

I turn now to the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, examining some possible implications of Ovid's treatment of the Medea myth within his epic. First, I look at the structure of Medea's myth in Book 7; next, at Medea in the context of some of the other women in Books 6 to 10 of the poem. Finally, I ask what influence Medea's narrative might have on the critic's understanding of the concept of 'metamorphosis' as it relates to Ovid's characters.

The structure of Medea's myth in Book 7

With the exception of Frantantuono's (2011) commentary on the *Metamorphoses*, very few scholars attempt to treat the whole of the Medea myth as it appears in Book 7.³²

Admittedly, Medea's 424 lines present a considerable task, yet critics tackle much more ambitious quantities of text when discussing Virgil, Statius or other epic poets. Critics of the Ovidian Medea have never concerned themselves with the structure or narrative organisation of the first half of Book 7; scholars usually restrict themselves to one particular section of the myth, such as the monologue or the murder of Pelias.³³ This may be the result of the apparently episodic nature of Medea's story, where the reader cannot easily divine a clear relationship between each section. On the contrary, I propose that an evaluation of Ovid's presentation of the myth provides indirect support for my interpretation of Medea's characterisation.³⁴

Medea's monologue is often described as the 'Apollonian' section of Book 7. This label is perhaps responsible for the tendency of critics to perceive an alteration in the characterisation of Medea between the earlier and later episodes of the Ovidian myth. If

³² The commentaries of Anderson (1972), Bömer (1976) and Kenney (2011) cover the whole of the Medea myth insofar as they provide a line-by-line evaluation. However, none of these commentators draws out Ovid's thematic concerns to the extent that Frantantuono does.

³³ A perusal of the available bibliography on the Medea of Book 7 makes this point clear at a glance: the titles of articles often demonstrate that they are focused on only one episode from Medea's epic history. Frécaut (1989) and Winter (2009) would be two examples. In my experience, discussions which do incorporate all the different sections of the Medea myth are chiefly interested in the question of Medea's 'metamorphosis', as are Newlands (1997) and Williams (2012).

³⁴ My argument here owes a debt to Tissol (1997), pp. 89-130, who argues that scholars need to evaluate Ovid's narrative style and structure more closely, in order to arrive at a useful interpretation of the epic. Wheeler (2000) makes a related case in his monograph on the *Metamorphoses*, asserting that Ovid's poem demands an examination of narrative dynamics rather than of thematic unity.

the heroine of the monologue resembles Apollonius', then it becomes necessary to argue that she 'changes' in order to rationalise the cruelty of the subsequent episode with Pelias.³⁵ In Chapter Three, where we examined Medea's monologue, I argued that Ovid depicts the heroine of *Metamorphoses* 7 as quite different to her Apollonian counterpart, determined to secure her own future whereas the Medea of the *Argonautica* is largely preoccupied with the hero's welfare. I also evaluated the correlations between Medea's monologue and Jason's speech to Medea in *Argonautica* 3, observing that the same material voiced by the Ovidian Medea rather than the Apollonian Jason produces a very different effect on the reader, serving to portray Ovid's heroine as a self-focused personality. The dissimilarity between the Greek and Roman epic heroines finds further reflection in a structural evaluation of the monologue in *Metamorphoses* 7: I suggest that there is surprisingly little evidence to support the notion that Medea's soliloquy is 'Apollonian'.

Observe, for example, that the only mythological material which overlaps between *Metamorphoses* 7 and Apollonius is found in Medea's monologue, and in the subsequent brief narration of Jason's labours – this represents some 37% of Ovid's epic myth. More significantly, this proportion of the Ovidian narrative deals principally with material deriving from the latter two-thirds of Apollonius' Book 3. In other words, *Metamorphoses* 7.9-148 corresponds to *Argonautica* 3.451-1407; Ovid spends 139 lines reprising some 956 lines of Apollonius. In percentage terms: Ovid spends 37% of his own narrative treating roughly 17% of Apollonius' epic; one third of Medea's Book 7 offers a version of less than one fifth of the same material in Apollonius. Only when we compare the two narratives from this numerical perspective do we notice that the dissimilarities we have observed between Medea's Ovidian and Apollonian characterisations appear to be mirrored in the textual distribution between the two poets. Just as we have observed that Ovid's heroine hardly seems to resemble her Apollonian counterpart, so Ovid incorporates a correspondingly small amount of Apollonius' narrative material into his own poem.

Another two statistics make the point still more forcefully. Ovid devotes only 9 lines to the events of the first 450 lines of *Argonautica* 3; to the escape with the Golden Fleece only 6

³⁵ See, for example, Rosner-Siegel (1982), Newlands (1997), Fantham (2004), Liveley (2011), Williams (2012). Interestingly, textual commentators tend to maintain a position on the fence on this issue: cf. Anderson (1972) and Fratantuono (2011) and Kenney (2011).

lines, where Apollonius spreads his narration over 211 lines.³⁶ Thus, we perceive that critics may have been hasty in asserting the presence of the Apollonian Medea in Ovid's myth. Rather, I suggest that we recognise certain of the narrative's significant events from the *Argonautica*, and are inclined on the strength of this to privilege a reading of the heroine whom we think we recognise from Apollonius, at the expense of the aspects of her Ovidian characterisation which do *not* harmonise with the Apollonian version of the myth.

Having established the relative scarcity of Apollonian material in *Metamorphoses* 7, we observe something unexpected. Where Ovid usually compresses Apollonius' content into fewer lines than his predecessor, Medea's monologue is the opposite. Ovid devotes 60 lines to the heroine's soliloquy [*Met.* 7.11-71], where the same deliberation in Apollonius occupies only 41 lines of speech spread over the whole middle third of *Argonautica* 3.³⁷ Medea's monologue comprises 15% of Ovid's Book 7; of Apollonius' Book 3 roughly 3%. These figures have a bearing on our earlier discussion in Chapter Three, where we noted that Ovid gives to his Medea material that is taken from the hero's speeches in Apollonius – the heroine playing Jason's role as well as her own in Ovid's interpretation of the myth. The comparison between Ovid's approach and Apollonius' is even more striking when we consider that Ovid does not engage with the tradition wherein Medea's resolution to help the hero is aided and abetted by Chalciope. If we discard the lines of Apollonius in which Medea is speaking to Chalciope, and contrast with Ovid only those in which the Apollonian heroine indulges her private thoughts, then we have 60 lines of Ovid against 16 lines of Apollonius, or 15% of the Ovidian myth against 1% of the Apollonian.

Medea's monologue is the only instance in Book 7 where Ovid treats an event in considerably *more* detail than does Apollonius. This highlights two points for the reader. First, how much narrower is Ovid's narrative focus than that of Apollonius: we may be dealing with two poems each in the epic tradition, but we observe two very different heroines insofar as what the poet appears to be interested in. In the case of the *Argonautica*, Medea's decision to help Jason represents only one element of the poem's narrative trajectory, since the successful execution of the hero's mission must remain the central

³⁶ Cf. *Met.* 7.1-9 and *Arg.* 3.1-450; *Met.* 7.149-55 and *Arg.* 4.1-211.

³⁷ See here Medea's words at: *Arg.* 3.464-70, responding to Aeëtes' challenge; *Arg.* 3.636-44, lamenting her desire for the hero; *Arg.* 3.688-92, testing Chalciope's reaction; *Arg.* 3.711-17, seeking Chalciope's advice; and *Arg.* 3.727-39, where Medea articulates the plan involving the drugs.

concern in a text centred around the heroes' quest.³⁸ The proportion of Apollonius' text devoted to Medea's decision-making is thus consistent with what we believe to be the concern of the epic as a whole. *Metamorphoses* 7 is less clear, since the substantial treatment of Medea's monologue suggests that the acting out or unfolding of Medea's resolution to help the hero may in fact be the primary focus of this part of Ovid's narrative. If we accept this premise, it would explain Ovid's very limited treatment of the events of the labours, and of Jason as a character in his own right.³⁹ The monologue of Book 7 makes explicit Ovid's very different poetic priorities to those of Apollonius: where Apollonius is interested in Jason's mission, and by extension in the interaction between Medea and Jason chiefly in the context of the mission, Ovid is more concerned with unravelling for his reader what the heroine is like as a character.

Secondly, the Ovidian monologue underlines for the reader how different is Ovid's characterisation of Medea from Apollonius'. I propose that there is just enough material in the Ovidian narrative that is familiar from Apollonius to facilitate the reader's identification of the dissimilarities between the two heroines. In Chapter Three, I argued that Ovid's recycling of some of Apollonius' material produces an opposite effect in the Ovidian text, such as the manipulation of the vision of Medea's future, which in Ovid is voiced by Medea rather than by Jason. If Ovid had not chosen to employ at least as much of Apollonius as we are able to identify in *Metamorphoses* 7, then it would be much more difficult for the reader to isolate any specific deviations between the Medeas of the *Argonautica* and of Ovid. It is not, I suggest, until we are discombobulated by encountering familiar material in an unfamiliar way that we realise that we are dealing in Book 7 with a uniquely Ovidian style of heroine.

Unlike Newlands (1997), then, I do not regard Medea's Ovidian monologue as an imitation of Apollonius' heroine.⁴⁰ Instead, I propose that the monologue serves as the groundwork

³⁸ Beye (1982) offers a contrasting view here. His influential study of the *Argonautica* suggests that Apollonius constructs Medea in such a way as to undermine Jason's status as the poem's central character. Clauss (1997) argues against Beye, taking a view of Apollonius' poetic concerns which is more similar to mine.

³⁹ Cf. Tissol's argument (1997), pp. 140-41, that the depiction of Jason and his labours in *Met.* 7 lacks narrative momentum, which reflects Ovid's preoccupation with Medea rather than Jason. In Tissol's view, Ovid is 'correcting' the preceding narrative of Apollonius, where the hero's experience is treated in greater depth, p. 141.

⁴⁰ Cf. Newlands (1997), pp. 181-86. For Newlands, Ovid's presentation of an 'Apollonian' Medea in the monologue is a crucial aspect of the way in which the poet is able to demonstrate his heroine's metamorphosis in the later stages of the text. Newlands suggests that Ovid reprises the

for the rest of Ovid's narrative. The poet establishes by careful selection from and recalibration of the literary tradition that the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* is a very different heroine to those that have gone before – setting himself apart from Apollonius, subtly but unambiguously. This same groundwork must inform our reading of Medea across the rest of Book 7, because the reader cannot enquire whether the heroine remains consistent throughout the myth until we have a yardstick against which to assess that consistency. This, in my view, is the central purpose of the monologue section of Book 7: Ovid is alerting his reader that we are *not* going to encounter the same sort of Medea that we have met with elsewhere, and he is arming us with a treasure map of his heroine's key qualities, which we can then overlay onto the episodes that follow.

The Aeson episode has received less critical attention than have either the monologue which precedes it or the Pelias episode which follows it; nonetheless, I consider the Aeson narrative to be the centre point of Medea's story in Book 7. By this I mean the episode which divides the myth into approximate halves, each subscribing to its own narrative logic.⁴¹ The literal centrality of the Aeson episode is mirrored in the poetic content of the incident: the narrative of the rejuvenation represents the point at which we readers have to confront our uncertainty about Medea and her motives. We have just digested the monologue, in which the heroine reveals herself to be self-focused and aiming to further her own ends; however, we remain unsure as to how and when the Ovidian narrative will begin turning towards the grim events which the literary tradition dictates must follow.

Ovid chooses to omit Absyrtus' death from *Metamorphoses* 7, and I argue that this contributes to the reader's sense of dramatic tension in the Aeson episode.⁴² Without the

Apollonian heroine in part to establish a 'gold standard' for the characterisation of Medea – a standard from which Ovid intends to deviate at the earliest opportunity. In my reading, Newlands' assumption that Ovid allows Apollonius' characterisation to take priority is flawed. On a similar point, see Kenney (2001).

⁴¹ The Aeson episode comprises *Met.* 7.159-296, so it does indeed occupy the middle part of the Medea myth. A starting-point for further enquiry would be the fact that the literal 'centre' of Medea's Book 7 is the heroine's ritualistic preparation for Aeson's rejuvenation: this section covers some 70 lines [*Met.* 7.179-250], roughly 35 lines each side of the 'middle' line at *Met.* 7.212. There are some particularly interesting images in this section – not least those of Medea's physical gestures, to which I referred in Chapter Three – which might shed light on the topics of direct speech or of magic in this narrative. Wise (1982) deals with some aspects of this episode, but not in the structural or stylistic terms which I am advocating.

⁴² Very few scholars are interested in why Ovid should have chosen to avoid dealing with Absyrtus' murder in *Metamorphoses* 7. I suggest that this is a product of the critic's tendency to assume that we are dealing with two different heroines in *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7, and therefore with two different myths. My reading of Book 7 offers one possible explanation for the decision to

murder of Medea's brother to establish beyond any doubt the heroine's capacity for violence, at this point in Ovid's poem the reader's only certainty is that Ovid is not following the route that we might expect towards his appointed destination – the murders of the children. Although Medea's monologue sets her up as an unsympathetic figure in interpersonal terms, she has not *yet* resorted to murder; this incongruity feeds directly into the Aeson episode, where the reader's impression is that Medea's extraordinary powers might be used either for good or for ill, depending on the heroine's choices. We think we know from the literary tradition that Aeson does not die, and yet Ovid has so far declined to adhere to the accepted death-toll of Medea's myth by allowing Absyrtus to live: we cannot help but wonder whether Aeson might be the next to suffer an unexpected reversal of fate. In my view, it is not significant whether the reader genuinely believes that Aeson might die. The significance lies in observing that Ovid has contrived to create doubt in the reader's mind about how the poet is choosing to manage the events of Medea's narrative. We know that the myth must end in carnage, but Ovid keeps his reader in suspense as to the exact moment when the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 will begin to *act* on her violent impulses, as the poet's depiction of her personality indicates that she is capable of doing. As we enter the Aeson narrative, the reader is alive to the apparent mismatch between the heroine's unemotional self-focus and her actions as documented by Ovid, which have so far been less shocking than we might have thought. It is this tension which Ovid explores through the episode of the rejuvenation.

The surprising length of the Aeson narrative – another full third of the Medea myth – seems entirely logical if we observe that Ovid seems to be concerned with demonstrating that his heroine can be read in more than one way. On the one hand, as the Ovidian narrator tells us, she appears as a dutiful wife who respects her husband's *pietas* – *mota est pietate rogantis* [*Met.* 7.169] – and on the other, she seems to be a self-serving witch who glories in her superior abilities, here taking the form of a *maius munus* for the hero and his father [*Met.* 7.175]. Ovid extends to his reader both viewpoints on Medea's personality,

let Absyrtus live; however, this remains a question that would repay further critical enquiry. I also consider it important to note that the reader does not experience the same sense of dramatic tension if Medea commits her first murder early in Book 7. If Ovid puts off dealing with Medea's capacity for physical cruelty, it gives him more time to build a portrayal of her literary personality without instances of violence to fragment the reader's attention away from the poet's focus on the heroine's processes of thinking and feeling. A complementary study here would be Brooks (1984), whose *Reading for the Plot* illustrates the way in which an author's plot can be shown to influence the reader's interpretation both of text and of character specifically. For some interesting discussion of the concomitant lack of critical interest in the Apollonian Medea's murder of Absyrtus, see Bremmer (1997).

one in the voice of his third-person narrator and one in the heroine's own voice through the direct speech. This technique serves to remind the reader of the multiplicitous potential of the myth, depending on which narrative perspective we choose to adopt. Choice is the crucial point here: Ovid presents two different versions of Medea's motivations, and the reader must choose which to be guided by, a tension made more complicated by the positive outcome of the rejuvenation. Aeson's return to youth and health raises an uncomfortable question for the reader: does the positive outcome of the event make Medea *herself* a positive force, or is the characterisation of the heroine separate from the outcome?

The Bacchus anecdote is once more relevant here [*Met.* 7.294-96]. In Chapter Three, we observed that Ovid's description of Bacchus' reaction to the rejuvenation of Aeson – seeking Medea's help for his own nurses – imbues the narrative with the threat of imminent violence. This follows the earlier characterisation of Procne as a raging bacchant [*Met.* 6.587-600]. However, we can now take this view one step further, noting that Bacchus functions as an emblem of the uncertain potential of Medea's narrative. On the one hand, Bacchus represents a figure of chaos and social disorder, as he is in the Procne story; on the other, in Book 7 the god is characterised as a pious individual looking to protect his family, an analogue of Jason.⁴³ I suggest that we can interpret Bacchus as embodying in some measure the confusion inherent in the Aeson narrative. Ovid seems to be encouraging his reader to question whether Medea is acting for good or ill in this episode: which of the twin faces of Bacchus is more applicable to the depiction of the heroine in this situation? Although only a few lines, I propose that the reference to Bacchus enables the poet to continue building dramatic tension within his myth. Ovid gives us evidence that Medea's power is growing to an alarming degree, and yet the reader remains uncertain as to when the heroine's dangerous potential will begin to be realised within the Ovidian story world.

Following on from the successful rejuvenation of Aeson, critics regard the Pelias episode as an illustration of Medea's rampant cruelty – a view typified by Frécaut (1989). Whilst I agree that the section has more than its fair share of shock value, I also consider it the dramatic climax of the Medea myth, in that it resolves the question that the reader has been pondering since the start of Book 7 – when exactly will Medea show signs of the murderous heroine of Euripides, towards whom she is moving within the mythological

⁴³ Cf. Fratantuono (2011), p. 189; Kenney (2011), p. 253.

chronology? I contend that the Pelias episode serves an important purpose in clarifying for the reader the ultimate trajectory of Ovid's myth: we can no longer doubt that his Medea is going to bring only destruction to those around her. Given that the Pelias material occupies only 12% of the narrative, its violence makes it a commanding read, especially when compared with the Aeson story, which shares some striking parallels in the repetition of Medea's magical ritual. In the Aeson episode, Ovid indicates that Medea's supernatural abilities are theoretically neutral, able to influence situations either for good or ill; in the Pelias narrative, the brutality of the king's murder removes any ambiguity regarding Ovid's portrait of the heroine. Such gratuitous violence admits of no justification, and the poet's pointed inclusion of the ritual which was earlier used to benefit Aeson highlights that the heroine's abilities have not changed, but rather the way in which Medea is choosing to wield them.

The apparent lack of motivation for the Pelias murder compounds the reader's sense that this episode must be the narrative's dramatic climax, because Ovid's chief focus is on the suffering of Pelias and his daughters, brought about by Medea.⁴⁴ I suggest that the moment of Pelias' demise is the point at which the reader feels that Ovid has finally declared his hand, solidifying his Medea as a figure of irretrievable amorality. This, too, provides a rationale for the brevity of the Pelias episode as a whole: Ovid delivers a short, sharp shock to his audience, and is rightly unwilling to labour the point. The reader's perception of Medea's cruelty is greatly enhanced by our experiencing it only in 'snapshot' form, rather than the poet risking our desensitisation through prolonged exposure to such gruesome material.

The Corinthian episode offers perhaps the most radical surprise of Book 7, in that the murders of Medea's children and of Creon and Creusa are passed over in only 11 lines, or 2.5% of the total narrative. Immediately following Pelias' memorable end, this may appear an astounding narrative decision on Ovid's part. However, I suggest that we can read the Pelian and Corinthian episodes as yet another indication that Ovid is differentiating himself from his predecessors: he chooses merely to sketch Euripides' material, as he does in *Heroides* 12, and instead places his narrative emphasis somewhere quite unexpected, on the death of Pelias. In skirting around Euripides' version of the myth, it seems to me that

⁴⁴ On the issue of motivation, see Winter (2009), who considers this such an insuperable problem that she comes up with an audacious – if, in my view, critically suspect – solution.

Ovid throws into greater relief his own treatment of the final outrage in Medea's history – the attempted murder of Theseus.

In my reading, the Athenian poisoning functions as a sort of epilogue to the Pelias myth. It lacks the drama and violence of the Pelias episode, yet it is chilling because it depicts Medea as blithely continuing on her murderous path. From Ovid's decision to terminate his treatment of Medea with the failed poisoning, the reader is left with the impression that Medea will simply go on being dangerous forever. As we discussed in Chapter Three, both Pavlock (2009) and Williams (2012) have argued for the significance of Medea's exit from the epic in the form of flight – they view the heroine's departure as an indication that she has broken the metaphorical bonds imposed by the text and will pursue her destructive trajectory outside of Ovid's poem.⁴⁵ My view of the Athenian episode works in tandem with Pavlock's and Williams' arguments: I suggest that the reader's sense of the perpetuity of Medea's capacity for destruction precedes her exit from the poem. The Pelias episode establishes categorically that Medea is an extremely dangerous individual; the Corinthian episode appends some little corroboration; and the Athenian episode proves that even being caught in the act cannot dissuade our heroine from her homicidal course. In other words, after the emotive gore of the Pelias narrative, Ovid seems to have 'normalised' Medea's penchant for killing, intimating that it has become a fundamental aspect of the heroine's mode of interaction within her story world. Structurally speaking, the epilogue idea seems to me to be typically Ovidian, because it shows the poet – yet again – resisting the temptation to put the narrative emphasis where the reader might expect. From start to finish, Medea's Book 7 is a mass of unexpected new angles on existing material, and the Athenian episode is no exception.

I perceive in the structure of the Medea myth in Book 7 a reflection of the poet's characterisation of his heroine. Like the heroine whose motives are unclear, the narrative begins somewhat ambiguously: Ovid demonstrates that he will not parrot Apollonius' account, but neither are we certain exactly where the myth *is* going. With Aeson, Ovid ramps up the dramatic tension, confirming the reader's sense that Medea's narrative is moving inexorably towards its resolution, although we are still not sure how Ovid intends to arrive where he is headed. The Pelias episode functions as the revelation of Ovid's overall plan for his character, the narrative's high-impact imagery emphasising by contrast

⁴⁵ Cf. Pavlock (2009), pp. 49-53 and Williams (2012), pp. 64-6.

Medea's unemotional approach to the situation. Finally, the Corinthian and Athenian attacks step back from the climactic edge, as though Medea has embarked on a long-term course of action, much as we observed in the cool calculation of the heroine of *Heroides* 12. In my view, the way in which Ovid chooses to present the Medea myth appears not only logical but indispensable, when we perceive the extent to which it facilitates our reading of Medea as a heroine driven by self-concern.

Situating Book 7 within the *Metamorphoses*

Just as scholars have been largely reluctant to examine the structure of Medea's *Metamorphoses* 7, so a relatively small amount of attention has been devoted to exploring how Medea harmonises with the surrounding books of the epic. In particular, I am interested in whether our reading of Medea can suggest a potentially unifying theme amongst the women of Books 6 to 10. A number of scholars, including Solodow (1988), Newlands (1997) and Fantham (2004), posit that the heroines of these books are linked by the pursuit of romantic relationships, having in common that their liaisons with their heroes turn out badly.⁴⁶

By contrast, I propose that we can read several of the heroines as being linked by the theme of desire: not principally by desire for love, but by the desire for recognition of their talents, for influence or for notoriety. Clearly, some of the women of Books 6 to 10 are also influenced by sexual desire – we think of Scylla, Byblis and Myrrha – but a number of the other myths resist such straightforward interpretation, and show the heroines seeking a larger canvas for their skills than the one they presently inhabit. Apart from Medea, I suggest that Arachne, Niobe, Procne and Atalanta would fit this profile, as does Scylla, whom we observed in Chapter Three to be at least partially influenced by a desire to be integral to the resolution of the war between Nisus and Minos, as well as by passion for her father's enemy.

A brief examination of these narratives reveals some similarities between Medea and the other women. Arachne's myth [*Met.* 6.1-145] is perhaps the easiest to interpret in terms of desire for notoriety. Ovid tells us that Arachne refused to acknowledge that her remarkable skills in weaving came from Minerva:

scires a Pallade doctam.
quod tamen ipsa negat tantaque offensa magistra
“certet” ait “mecum: nihil est, quod victa recusem!”

You would believe that she had been taught by Minerva. However, [Arachne] herself denied this, offended at the idea of having even so great a teacher. She said: “Let her compete against me. There is nothing I would refuse her, if I am beaten!”
[*Met.* 6.23-5]

⁴⁶ I mentioned in Chapter Three that Newlands (1997) treats Medea as part of a ‘marriage group’, which incorporates the stories of Procne, Procris, Medea, Scylla and Orithyia. Although I agree with Newlands regarding the clear connection between the heroine-centric myths, I think that we can find other links between them apart from the desire for married status.

The fulcrum of Arachne's tale is her love of being thought to be talented – even more talented than the goddess. For our purposes, the interest lies not in Arachne's enjoyment of her superior status, but in her determination to hold on to that position, whatever the cost. At line 51, the poet tells us that Arachne fell headlong into her own fate by inviting a confrontation with Minerva, so great was her confidence in her own abilities:

perstat in incepto stolidaeque cupidine palmae
in sua fata ruit; neque enim Iove nata recusat
nec monet ulterius nec iam certamina differt.

[Arachne] held firm to her course, and rushed headlong into her own fate out of a foolish desire for victory. Jupiter's daughter did not refuse any more; she neither gave any more warnings, nor put off the competition any longer.

[*Met.* 6.50-2]

The significant point is the heroine's *cupido*. Ovid does not say that Arachne wanted to shame the goddess; rather that she wanted to *win*, to have her skills acknowledged in the form of a *palma*. The reader knows that this cannot end well for Arachne, and Minerva's rage should perhaps have been foreseeable to our unfortunate heroine. Nonetheless, it is worth observing that Ovid does not characterise Arachne as a simplistically arrogant heroine. Her circumspection has been warped by her belief in her own excellence, but this is all the more pitiable to the reader because we know her expertise to be real – more real, in fact, than Minerva's.⁴⁷

In my reading, the most interesting aspect of Arachne is her attempted suicide. Where we could argue that Arachne's provocation of the contest with Minerva is the product of heedlessness, her near-death undermines this contention.

ter quater Idmoniae frontem percussit Arachnes.
non tulit infelix laqueoque animosa ligavit
guttura:

[Minerva] struck Arachne on the forehead three times and four. The unlucky girl could not put up with it, and in a fit of spirit she tied a noose about her neck.

[*Met.* 6.133-5]

These lines depict the heroine as unwilling to concede her position of excellence even under physical duress. Ovid tells us that she could not 'bear' Minerva's rage (*tulit*), the ambiguity of *animosa* conveying both that Arachne is preparing to die, and that she is

⁴⁷ I am indebted here to Brown's chapter (2005), pp. 105-21, which draws some interesting inferences based around the reader's perception of Arachne's technical superiority.

‘undaunted’ as she does so.⁴⁸ The adjective intimates that Ovid’s heroine considers her reputation to be such an integral part of her identity that she prefers to die with her status intact than to assuage the goddess’ rage by giving it up.⁴⁹ In other words, Arachne’s desire for the accurate recognition of her talent is so strong that it both exceeds common sense and overpowers the desire to live. In this respect, I suggest that Ovid has fashioned a myth wherein Minerva meets her true match, a heroine whose determination to have things her own way cannot be quashed.⁵⁰ From this angle, we perceive, too, the link between Medea and Arachne, women who need to be in control of their own lives.

Niobe’s myth [*Met.* 6.146-312] is similarly transparent in its exploration of the heroine’s desire for notoriety. However, Niobe generates less sympathy than does Arachne, because the source of Niobe’s status is the good fortune of having numerous offspring, rather than the dedicated pursuit of excellence which informs Arachne’s tale.⁵¹ Niobe delivers a 32-line speech [*Met.* 6.170-202] designed to promote her own cause as being superior to Latona’s, but her very grandiosity seems to invite catastrophe:

“sum felix (quis enim neget hoc?) felixque manebo
(hoc quoque quis dubitet?): tutam me copia fecit.
maior sum quam cui possit Fortuna nocere,
multaque ut eripiat, multo mihi plura relinquet.
excessere metum mea iam bona.”

“I am fortunate – indeed, who would deny this? – and I shall remain fortunate – who could doubt this either? Abundance makes me safe. I am too great for Fortune to be able to harm me, and even if a great deal were ripped away from me, a great deal more would remain to me. Already my good fortune has driven out my fear.”

[*Met.* 6.193-7]

These lines portray Niobe as a heroine whose primary concern – as with Medea and Arachne – is with maintaining her position of demonstrable superiority. Niobe’s words are surprising in that she expresses no contentment in the state of motherhood itself. There are no declarations about how much she loves her children, which might mitigate her unappealing boast that their number makes her more fortunate than Latona. Instead, in line

⁴⁸ Cf. Anderson (1972), p. 169, who notes the role of the alliterative *lacqueo* and *ligavit* in emphasising the crucial adjective *animosa*. Anderson uses the word ‘indignity’ to describe Arachne’s position, and this, I think, does justice to the heroine’s own approach to her situation.

⁴⁹ In this respect, I disagree with Anderson (1972), p. 169 and Liveley (2011), p. 70, who both appear to interpret Arachne’s attempted suicide as proceeding from the physical pain that Minerva causes her. In my view, it is not necessary to treat *tulit* [*Met.* 6.134] as being primarily about bodily suffering.

⁵⁰ Cf. Johnson (2008), pp. 83-8, who argues that Ovid presents Arachne as highly sophisticated in her approach to dealing with Minerva – highlighting the goddess’ ‘dissimulation’ and ‘hypersensitivity’ by way of shoring up her own position within the narrative.

⁵¹ Cf. Liveley (2011), p. 71.

196 Niobe declares that she could afford to lose a few children and still be better off than the goddess, an avowal which confirms that Niobe derives more pleasure from her status as mother-most-fortunate than she does from the family life that the children facilitate. I suggest that Niobe's approach is strikingly similar to Medea's Book 7, where the heroine characterises her birth family as a set of responsibilities to be bargained against her own personal desires [*Met.* 7.51-5]. Thus we begin to see a pattern of women in these middle books of the epic; women who relish their positions of influence.

Procne is arguably the most interesting of the women in Books 6 to 10 [*Met.* 6.412-674]. Her narrative is made more complex by the fact that her revenge against Tereus seems in some measure to be justified; the reader feels that Tereus should pay for his appalling abuse of his wife and sister-in-law. I propose, however, that Ovid depicts another sort of desire as running in parallel with Procne's longing for revenge: the desire to be *in control* of Tereus' punishment. I do not suggest that the act of revenge is unimportant to Procne; rather, that it is significant how detailed is Ovid's portrayal of the heroine's interrogation of her own wishes. The poet's focus on Procne's process of resolution – which is an expression of the heroine's level of influence within the story world – achieves a similar prominence in Ovid's text to the act of revenge itself. In turn, this intimates that an important aspect of Ovid's narrative is the heroine's desire for the revenge to play out according to her personal agenda.⁵² Three points are of interest here – first, the Bacchic rites in which Procne participates; second, the heroine's evaluation of the ways in which she might punish Tereus; third, her decision to disregard her maternal duty in favour of exercising the cruellest possible revenge upon her husband.

As soon as Procne receives the tapestry detailing Philomela's abuse and imprisonment, the heroine embarks upon a Bacchic ritual [*Met.* 6.587-600]. Instead of encouraging his reader to view this Bacchanalian frenzy as the source of Procne's subsequent behaviour, Ovid tells us that the heroine 'feigns' her *furor* [*Met.* 6.594-6].⁵³ I suggest that the poet's inclusion of *simulo* [*Met.* 6.596] to describe Procne's actions draws the reader's attention to the deliberately constructed nature of the heroine's behaviour; moreover, the active

⁵² Brown (2005), pp. 85-104, is of great interest here. Although her focus is on Philomela, Brown suggests that a useful way of reading the sisters' revenge is by observing the shadows of incest that lurk in the narrative. Brown views Tereus as having implicated Procne and Philomela in an incestuous liaison through his rape of his sister-in-law – a crime which might appear to be of similar weight to that of maternal filicide.

⁵³ *Met.* 6.594-6: *Concita per silvas turba comitante suarum / terribilis Procne furiisque agitata doloris, / Bacche, tuas simulat.*

voice of the verb shows Procne placing herself in the position of influence within the situation, imitating Bacchus' capacity for inflicting madness without actually being afflicted herself. As Fratantuono (2011) observes, Procne is 'playing Bacchus'.⁵⁴ Before the revenge against Tereus is even discussed, Ovid is already depicting Procne as a heroine who is comfortable choosing for herself a role of violent action. The lines in which Procne outlines the possibilities for Tereus' punishment contribute to the portrait of a controlling heroine:

"non est lacrimis hoc" inquit "agendum,
sed ferro, sed si quid habes, quod vincere ferrum
possit. in omne nefas ego me, germana, paravi:
aut ego, cum facibus regalia tecta cremabo,
artificem mediis inmittam Terea flammis,
aut linguam atque oculos et quae tibi membra pudorem
abstulerunt ferro rapiam, aut per vulnera mille
sontem animam expellam! magnum quodcumque paravi;
quid sit, adhuc dubito."

"This should not be dealt with by tears," she said, "but by the sword; or, if you have such a thing, by something that could conquer the sword. Sister, I am prepared for any sacrilege. Either I will burn this palace down with torches [and] I will throw Tereus the deceiver into the midst of the flames; or I will cut out his tongue and his eyes with the sword and [likewise] the limbs which stole away your modesty; or I will drive out his guilty heart through a thousand wounds! I am prepared for some great deed; what it shall be, I am still uncertain."

[*Met.* 6.611-19]

The vivid detail of Procne's speech suggests that the heroine is dwelling on the conception of herself as the bringer of vengeance. There are seven first-person verbs in these nine lines – an unusually dense distribution, which underlines Procne's role as the driving force of the narrative. Likewise, observe the clarity of the heroine's imagined revenge against Tereus: it is not enough to burn the palace down, Tereus must be [*in*] *mediis flammis* [*Met.* 6.615]; stabbing him to death is not sufficient, there must be *vulnera mille* [*Met.* 6.617]. I suggest that the escalation in the brutality of Procne's imagined punishments shows the heroine embracing her self-appointed Bacchic role. The deliberative aspect of the passage creates the impression that revenge alone is not enough for Procne – Ovid suggests that the heroine wants to choose the manner and severity of Tereus' atonement for his crime, highlighting once more the theme of control in this pentad of the epic.

Procne's decision to kill Itys amplifies the sense of build-up which we identified in the above passage; the murder of the child is the pinnacle of terrible deeds that Procne could

⁵⁴ Fratantuono (2011), p. 169. Cf. also Anderson (1972), p. 229, who describes Procne as being 'caught up in pretense'.

choose to carry out. Before Itys' death, Ovid tells us that Procne hesitates, her maternal instincts drawn out by the child's affection towards her [*Met.* 6.624-30]. In Ovid's version of the myth, Procne's anger is only rekindled when she looks at her sister:

inque vicem spectans ambos "cur admovet" inquit
"alter blanditias, rapta silet altera lingua?"

...and looking back and forth between them both, she said "Why does one tongue
speak sweet nothings, [while] the other tongue is silent, having been snatched
away?"

[*Met.* 6.631-2]

As Procne looks back and forth between her son and her sister, I propose that Ovid is conveying a tension between two competing aspects of Procne's identity, symbolised in the faces of Philomela and of Itys. On the one hand, Itys embodies Procne's maternal duty; on the other, Philomela represents Procne's self-appointed position as her sister's avenger. The heroine's articulation of the difference between her two family members – Itys' ability to speak and Philomela's inability to do so – depicts Procne as privileging her sister's case over her son's, choosing for herself the role of avenger over the role of mother. I argue that Procne's decision is consistent with Ovid's portrayal of his heroine as being concerned with her own control of the situation. Instead of sparing Itys and choosing a lesser revenge for Tereus, the heroine elects to sacrifice her son in the pursuit of the most atrocious revenge she can imagine.⁵⁵ Procne's subsequent delight at Tereus' discovery of his son's fate [*Met.* 6.659-60] suggests that the heroine feels no remorse for the murder of her child. In turn, Procne's *gaudia* [*Met.* 6.660] emphasises the extent to which the Ovidian heroine is preoccupied with the suffering that she has inflicted on Tereus: an illustration of the heroine's reclamation of control over her errant husband. The image of the maternal filicide draws an explicit link between the narratives of Procne and of Medea, yet I propose that we now perceive a second parallel between the heroines – the desire for influence over other characters in their myths.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The implication here is that Procne has become obsessed by a sort of binary interaction between herself and Tereus, in which the child is merely a weapon for the heroine to use against her husband. Similar thought-patterns inform some of the case studies discussed by Meyer and Oberman (2001), who examine a range of contemporary maternal filicide cases; however, the vast majority of maternal filicide scholars would concur that reasoning such as Procne's is so rare as to be virtually unheard of. Statistically speaking, women do not kill their children to punish a (male) spouse; by contrast, men more often kill their children to punish the child's mother than for any other reason. Cf. Wilczynski (1997), who includes a chapter on differentiating motivation for filicide according to the gender of the perpetrator, and sometimes of the child; likewise, Farooque and Ernst (2003).

⁵⁶ Cf. Fratantuono (2011), pp. 180-1. For a discussion of the connection between Medea and Procne in the *Metamorphoses*, see Larmour (1990).

I suggest that there are other heroines in *Metamorphoses* 6 to 10 who might benefit from a critical examination of their desire for recognition: Scylla, who seeks for herself a role as the crucial intermediary in the war with Minos [*Met.* 8.1-151]; and Atalanta, whose love of being undefeated comes into conflict with her incipient passion for Hippomenes [*Met.* 10.560-739]. Perhaps most intriguingly, although the women seem to be linked by the intensity of their desire for influence or for notoriety, their fates are by no means uniform. In some of the cases described above, the heroines themselves suffer most keenly from their determination to pursue their own desires – Arachne and Niobe – yet in others, the women wreak terrible havoc on those around them – Procne, Medea and Scylla.

We cannot say that Ovid presents a unified or unvarying treatment of female desire in these books; we can, however, argue that he sketches a more complex portrait of female desire than one which is solely predicated on male-female relationships. In certain narratives, such as those of Medea, Procne and Scylla, we can interpret the hero-heroine relationship as the context within which Ovid is exploring other sorts of female desire – we do not have to take the sexual relationship to be the chief constituent of the women's literary identities. A reading of Medea's Book 7 has thus opened the door to a wide range of potential interpretations of her sister-heroines as well as herself.

What is metamorphosis?

A final conundrum arising from our reading of *Metamorphoses* 7 is how we are choosing to evaluate the concept of ‘metamorphosis’ in Medea’s narrative. If, as I argue in Chapter Three, we do not need to interpret Ovid’s epic heroine as undergoing a fundamental change in personality over the course of Book 7 – a so-called metamorphosis of character – then we must ask ourselves how Medea can be said to fit with the overarching theme of the poem.⁵⁷ I suggest that one possible answer to this question can be found in Liveley’s (1999) discussion of the Propoetides and of Pygmalion. Liveley’s article aims to demonstrate the limitless potential of reading the *Metamorphoses* ‘resistantly’: that is, from an interpretive angle which privileges the female perspective upon the text.⁵⁸ In pursuing her thesis, Liveley examines two opposing ways of reading the Propoetides [*Met.* 10.238–42]. Either they are lascivious beings who represent the very worst of female vice, or they are figures of sympathy whose tendency towards obscenity has been visited upon them by an angry Venus.⁵⁹

Liveley takes a similar approach to the Pygmalion story, arguing that the central event of the statue’s metamorphosis into a human woman appears quite different depending on whether we approach the text from Pygmalion’s point of view or from the *puella*’s. From a Pygmalion-centric perspective, Liveley observes, the *puella*’s transformation into human form suggests that Pygmalion has crafted his sculpture so perfectly and loved her so well that he has ‘brought her to life’. The unhappy corollary is that Pygmalion thereby fixes the *puella*’s status as an object of the artist’s adoration and a passive representation of his skill, regardless of whether she is rendered in ivory or in living flesh.⁶⁰ If, however, we consider the scenario from the *puella*’s point of view, then we notice that the artist is as much controlled by his art-object as the *puella* is by her creator. In Liveley’s terminology, the *puella* actively ‘resists’ Pygmalion’s determination to secure her affection, which only fuels Pygmalion’s passion for her by confirming in the artist’s mind his *puella*’s

⁵⁷ Feldherr (2002) is a useful discussion here: he argues that ‘metamorphosis’ should be understood within Ovid’s epic to represent an inherently ambiguous phenomenon, lacking one fixed representation within Ovid’s text.

⁵⁸ Cf. Liveley (1999), pp. 197–201.

⁵⁹ Liveley (1999), p. 202.

⁶⁰ Sharrock (1991) has famously argued that the statue and the woman are virtually interchangeable – both are ‘created’ by the artist and are therefore prevented from acquiring any real agency or identity by the *puella*’s role as object of the artist’s contemplation. I am greatly indebted to Sharrock’s analysis, which has shaped much of my thinking about how to read female characters both in Ovid and in other poets. However, I consider Liveley’s particular angle on the debate to be more pertinent to my reading of Medea in *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7.

superiority to the Propoetides who have so horrified him.⁶¹ Added to this artistic confusion is the role of ivory in the narrative: as in other Classical texts, the *eburna* of the statue hints at the deceptive and illusory properties of the *puella* herself. She may seem to Pygmalion to become a real woman, but her ivory nature prevents her from truly attaining human status; she is thus fixed as an imitation of humanity rather than a 'real' woman, regardless of how she may appear to Pygmalion. Liveley offers a compelling argument that we can read the statue's transformation from sculpture into woman as running in parallel with Pygmalion's 'self-generated metamorphosis from artist into lover'.⁶² And here we find an intersection with my reading of Medea.

I suggest that Medea's myth can be read according to the pattern that Liveley establishes for Pygmalion: the reader of Book 7 occupies a position much like that of Pygmalion in Book 10, in that we are contemplating Medea as an object of art and in some measure shaping her by our very act of attempting to interpret her.⁶³ This, of course, is a fundamental principle of reader-response criticism, that the reader actively participates in the creation of meaning in a text, by bringing to the narrative a set of pre-formed views and assumptions.⁶⁴ If we readers in some respects resemble Pygmalion, is it not possible that there is more than one potential metamorphosis at work in Medea's Book 7, just as Liveley argues for in Book 10?

In the case of Pygmalion's relationship with the statue, Liveley concludes that 'Pygmalion remains externally the same, but is essentially changed, while his *puella* remains essentially the same, but is externally changed'.⁶⁵ This observation offers an analogue of what it seems to me is happening with the reader of Ovid's epic Medea. To put it another way: just as Pygmalion's perception of his statue changes, which is not necessarily mirrored by the statue's development, so the reader's perception of Medea's characterisation may alter over the course of *Metamorphoses* 7, without necessarily

⁶¹ Liveley (1999), p. 208.

⁶² Liveley (1999), p. 212.

⁶³ Hardie (2002), pp. 173-226, offers a helpful counterpoint here, discussing the implications of treating the sculptor figure in *Met.* 10 as an analogue for the external Ovidian reader. Hardie's chapter complements Liveley's (1999) article, although taking a different approach.

⁶⁴ Two key scholars here are Iser (1978) and Fish (1980). Of the two, my approach owes more to Fish, who argues for the reader as the chief creator of meaning in a text. Iser views the reader as one of two 'poles' in an interpretive negotiation between the reader and the text; I, however, disagree with Iser that it is always possible to posit the 'text itself' as a stable and quantifiable entity independent of the reader's viewpoint. Cf. Iser (1978), pp. 107-34, on the 'phenomenology of reading'.

⁶⁵ Liveley (1999), p. 213.

indicating any indisputable change in Ovid's portrayal of the heroine within the text. In my view, scholars such as Rosner-Siegel (1982), who argue that Medea's Book 7 only makes sense if the heroine undergoes a complete psychological metamorphosis, are largely conditioned by the *illusion* of a change in characterisation which is brought about by Ovid's overall presentation of the narrative.

If we examine the episodes of Medea's myth in *Metamorphoses* 7, we notice that Ovid seems to place his heroine in differing sets of circumstances – the monologue, the Aeson episode, the Pelias narrative – which facilitate between them the exposure of the heroine's literary personality, but only as the narrative progresses. As we saw in Chapter Three, the monologue can be said to reveal a heroine who is coolly self-focused, and yet the ramifications of this personality trait are partly obscured by Ovid's careful selection from the material of Apollonius' *Argonautica* – such as the contents of Jason's speech. The monologue furnishes evidence of Medea's self-serving tendencies, but in such a way as to make these difficult to identify unless the reader is already looking for them. The Aeson episode is similarly double-edged: Ovid illustrates Medea's love of control through her speech, but the dark connotations are overlaid and redirected by the happy ending for Jason's father. Nonetheless, the heroine's powers are becoming increasingly worrying, as noted by scholars who argue that Medea has begun to change.⁶⁶ With Pelias, Medea's 'true' personality seems to burst out into the open, as Ovid provides no mitigating context to detract from his heroine's brutality.

Thus, I propose that the reader's sense of Medea's 'metamorphosis' throughout Book 7 may instead be expressed as consisting in our gradual realisation that the heroine's self-focused world-view can no longer be overlooked, but must be confronted. Each section of Ovid's epic narrative functions like the gradual reduction in number of props and backdrops on a stage: we are being deprived of the trappings that distract the audience from an unvarnished examination of how the heroine appears to think and feel.⁶⁷ I argue

⁶⁶ See, for example, Anderson (1972), Rosner-Siegel (1982), Wise (1982), Newlands (1997) and Williams (2012).

⁶⁷ This observation provides some secondary support for a point I made in the earlier section on the structure of Medea's Book 7. There, I stated that Pelias functions as the short, sharp shock to the reader, and that the Corinthian and Athenian episodes function as an epilogue, devoid of the dramatic intensity of Pelias' death despite their equally murderous content. If, as I suggest, the Pelias episode is the point at which the reader becomes fully 'aware' of the ramifications of Ovid's characterisation of Medea, then the lesser intensity of the Corinthian and Athenian narratives also makes more sense. In reading these less dramatic, 'normalised' accounts of slaughter, the reader is encouraged to wonder how we failed to notice such tendencies in Medea before. It seems to me

that Ovid has manipulated his reader's *perception* of Medea's metamorphosing personality in Book 7, rather than manipulating the characterisation of the heroine herself. In these terms, we can posit that the Ovidian reader has as much undergone a 'metamorphosis' in reading Book 7 as Medea has in acting it out – a similar proposition to Liveley's analysis of Pygmalion's interaction with his troublesome statue. In short, a reading of the epic Medea can help to unravel one of the many ways in which the concept of 'metamorphosis' can be said to function within Ovid's epic poem. Medea's myth suggests that we need to be on the lookout for the poet's tendency to manipulate perceptions and expectations of his narrative as much as he does the physicality of his characters.

that the poet may be aiming to reflect back to his reader our own assumptions about Medea in the text so far.

4.3 Characters and Characterisation

In this final section of the chapter, I return to an issue raised at the very opening of the thesis. At the outset, I stated that the central concern of this project would be the character of Ovid's Medea. Having established a reading of the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and of *Metamorphoses* 7 in the preceding three chapters, I argue that we now begin to perceive the potential benefit to the critic of examining a text with a keen eye for the poet's characterisation. In so doing, we have arrived at a coherent interpretation of Medea's Ovidian thought-patterns and behaviours, which in turn equips us to negotiate the quagmire of comparison with Apollonius and Euripides – a subject which has dominated the greatest part of scholarship on the Ovidian Medea. Not until we have a clear reading of Medea's uniquely Ovidian incarnation can we begin to discuss how she resembles or differs from her canonical predecessors, and an examination of Ovid's characterisation has given us a way in to this discussion.

As a topic for critical enquiry, characterisation has long been out of fashion in Classics. In the case of the *Heroides*, and to a lesser extent the *Metamorphoses*, contemporary scholars have preferred to tackle any and every interpretive angle rather than consider the ways in which Ovid constructs characters within his narratives. This undoubtedly represents a move away from the tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which attempted to treat literary characters as 'real' people. Haley (1924) would be a useful example here: her analysis of the *Heroides* constitutes one of the earliest favourable treatments of the collection, from the point of view of Ovid's poetic skill. However, Haley – like Sellar (1897) before her – finds herself unable to forgive the lack of 'dignity' in Ovid's heroines, concluding that the poet has depicted the reality of the female psyche so accurately as to do a disservice to the whole gender, by documenting the very worst instances of female neurosis.⁶⁸

In current scholarship, Christopher Gill has done extensive and fascinating work on the concept of character in Greek and Roman thought, although a great deal of his material focuses on 'character' in a philosophical sense rather than within a purely narrative framework.⁶⁹ Subsequent to Gill, two very recent volumes have a bearing on this thesis, suggesting that the study of characterisation may be about to experience something of a

⁶⁸ Cf. Haley (1924), pp. 19-20 and Sellar (1897, rp 1924), pp. 335-6.

⁶⁹ Cf. especially Gill (1984) and (2006) – the latter a monograph tackling the concept of a constructed 'self' in the Hellenistic and Roman traditions.

revival: J. Mira Seo's *Exemplary Traits* (2013) and Koen de Temmerman's *Crafting Characters* (2014). Both monographs take as their premise that characterisation is a fundamental aspect of the success of a literary work; both aim, therefore, to treat an author's characters as 'functional elements of composition'.⁷⁰ My approach to Ovid's Medea owes one particular debt to de Temmerman.⁷¹ In framing his study, de Temmerman argues for rejecting 'syntactical' views of characterisation – which regard the character chiefly as a device enabling the author to advance his plot – and instead embraces a more complex model, in which the reader approaches a literary character as a compendium of traits that we as critics must continually evaluate as we progress through a narrative and deepen our understanding of the characters within it.⁷² De Temmerman's view depends on Chatman's ground-breaking work of the 1970s in the area of structuralism, where Chatman presents a paradigm in which the literary execution of character intersects with the events of the plot, but in which characters are not merely sub-devices of the plot as they were for the earlier formalists.⁷³

Like de Temmerman, I view characterisation as a kind of continuous negotiation between the reader and the text, a mechanism comprising a fluid revision of expectations and opinions as the reader becomes more familiar with a narrative.⁷⁴ This kind of approach seems particularly important when examining poems such as the *Heroides*, where our interpretations of the writing women are being constantly recalibrated according to the directions in which we know the heroines' myths are heading. Our evaluation of Ovid's characterisation within *Heroides* 12 has to be held in tension with the events of Euripides,

⁷⁰ Cf. Seo (2013), pp. 1-2, who critiques the tendency of Classical scholars to treat literary characters as 'simple object[s] of identification', rather than as representations of literary technique.

⁷¹ Generally speaking, Seo's (2013) work is the more relevant of the two to this project, in that her focus is on Roman poetry, where de Temmerman's (2014) is on the Greek novel. De Temmerman, however, has been instrumental in helping me to define how I understand characterisation to function within a narrative. As regards the resurgence of critical interest in characterisation, I look forward to the newly-released de Temmerman and Demoen (2016 eds.) volume on Greek and Roman biography, which incorporates a number of different approaches across different texts, thereby exposing the numerous critical possibilities of characterisation.

⁷² See, in particular, de Temmerman (2014), pp. 27-8.

⁷³ Cf. Chatman (1972) and (1978), the former being perhaps the more relevant to de Temmerman's thesis. For clarification on de Temmerman's own negotiation of the critical models, see (2014), pp. 26-45. For a discussion of the Formalism-Structuralism divide and its effects on literary studies – a topic which I personally find extremely complex – Eagleton (1983), pp. 91-126, remains one of the most lucid and concise. Although I agree with Eagleton about the tendency of structuralism to homogenise texts by divorcing them from their contexts, p. 109, Chatman's model makes the most of this potential deficiency, by showing that it can serve to force a change in the critic's perspective on subjects such as character and characterisation.

⁷⁴ On this point, de Temmerman (2014), p. 27, cites Iser (1978). However, as stated above, my own analysis would derive more from the school of Fish (1980).

towards which we understand the Ovidian Medea to be moving in parallel with the progress of her poem. Indeed, if we do *not* accept a view like Chatman's and de Temmerman's, where the character has some purpose within the text apart from advancing the plot, then poems such as *Heroides* 12 become much more difficult for the reader to appreciate.

Since Ovid's reader knows that Medea's myth will culminate in multiple homicide, Ovid must expect to forfeit some of the reader's interest in his poem if his narrative serves only to take the reader to this pre-appointed destination by a route slightly different to the one travelled by Apollonius or Euripides. In other words, with the outcome of Medea's myth already fixed, Ovid cannot depend solely on the dramatic tension created for the reader by the gradual unravelling of the plot. I suggest that the reader's curiosity about *Heroides* 12 lies not in finding out where we are going on this narrative journey, but in observing the kind of heroine whom Ovid contrives to take us there. If Ovid's Medea contains in the poet's execution of her characterisation nothing of significance for the reader's understanding of this particular text, then the poem becomes altogether less interesting and original. For this reason, I consider de Temmerman's analysis of characterisation as a dynamic process to be indispensable to any persuasive reading of Medea in her Ovidian incarnation.

Seo's (2013) monograph takes a distinctly different tack to de Temmerman's, in that Seo is chiefly interested in literary characterisation as it relates to the Roman tradition of exemplarity. In asking what Roman audiences might have expected from their literary characters, Seo's focus is very different to mine, yet our interests are aligned in that Seo, too, holds the construction of literary character to be a process worth investigating in its own right.⁷⁵ For my purposes, one of Seo's most interesting observations is that characters in Roman poetry – especially those of epic – have long been accused of being psychologically implausible, a conclusion which in Seo's view reveals less about the characters under discussion than it does about the assumptions of the critic regarding the aims and intentions of Roman poetic characterisation.⁷⁶ Although Seo makes this comment by way of contextualising her decision to focus on exemplarity, we see here an

⁷⁵ Seo (2013), pp. 16–18, does acknowledge that Ovid is a poet ripe for such analysis, and indeed she mentions the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 as an instructive example of Ovid's capacity for 'allusive characterization'.

⁷⁶ Cf. Seo (2013), pp. 2–8. Seo notes that the women of the *Heroides* suffer the same criticism as does the figure of Aeneas, that none of them 'sustain an impression of psychological realism', p. 7.

approximate reflection of my argument about the Ovidian Medea: critics have labelled her as everything from villainous to ineffectual, but if we can only find a suitable interpretive angle from which to study her, Ovid's construction of Medea appears to be both coherent and plausible.⁷⁷ Like Seo, then, I consider the perceived 'success' or 'failure' of characterisation to be at least in part a question of the reader's receptivity to having their expectations challenged or even frustrated by the poet.

In her introduction, Seo states that her analysis has the potential to challenge the notion that 'psychology [is] the exclusive aim of characterisation'.⁷⁸ Specifically, Seo does not agree that Roman audiences necessarily valued an illusion of psychological roundness in their literary characters. Here my analysis of Medea parts company with Seo, and yet there remains a significant commonality between our approaches. This project finds itself at a much earlier stage of the critical conversation than Seo's, in that I have been largely concerned with demonstrating that the Ovidian Medea can be said to 'make sense', from a certain point of view. However, I do not argue for the coherence of Ovid's construction of Medea because I assume this to be the only measure of 'good' or 'successful' characterisation, but because we can have no basis for a more detailed discussion about what effect the characterisation of Medea might be said to be having on Ovid's text – a central concern of Seo's own case studies – until we have a clear position on what kind of heroine Ovid is presenting us with.

Seo's highly structured approach to her textual analyses implicitly criticises the unspoken tendency of contemporary scholarship to draw conclusions about the role or purpose of a literary character within a text, and only *then* to trouble to build a reading of the character itself.⁷⁹ I propose that this kind of interpretive confusion remains evident in up-to-date Ovidian scholarship, and perhaps especially as regards the *Heroides*. Lindheim (2003) springs to mind as a study that has both reinvigorated discussion of the poems, but also prioritised the critic's view of the collection as a whole over a detailed consideration of

⁷⁷ On the various descriptions of the Ovidian Medea: Jacobson (1974), pp. 109-23, finds the Medea of *Heroides* 12 to be villainous; Frécaut (1989) the same as regards the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7. Verducci (1985), pp. 56-85, is the best-known reading of the elegiac Medea as ineffectual; on *Met.* 7 see Otis (1966), pp. 60-2, who treats Medea as a thematically-useful figure for the poet, rather than a successful characterisation in her own right.

⁷⁸ Cf. Seo (2013), p. 5. For a more general definition of Seo's position, see (2013), pp. 2-16.

⁷⁹ Cf. Seo (2013), pp. 32-65. I cite here the chapter on Aeneas, in which a number of Seo's most important observations seem to me to expose the extent to which existing scholarship on the character of Aeneas has been shaped by earlier critics' assumptions about the purpose of the epic as a whole. I suggest that Seo's approach to *fama* is particularly illuminating.

Ovid's individual characters. Lindheim's Lacanian framework demonstrates that psycho-analytical approaches to Classical literature can be useful; however, her model dictates a very narrow definition of the concept of female desire, effectively trapping all of Ovid's heroines into a pose of 'failure' because their heroes do not return to them, and because the Lacanian model admits of no non-hero-centric criteria for evaluating the women's epistolary personalities.⁸⁰ As with many theoretically-driven analyses, Lindheim's approach depicts the women of the *Heroides* as a more-or-less homogenous group: she is interested in what makes the heroines alike, and thus her treatment actively obscures the complexity and variety of Ovid's epistolary characters.

In comparison with Lindheim, this project's approach to the Ovidian Medea highlights the flexibility of interpretation which a focus on literary characterisation can provide. As I observed at the beginning of this thesis, intertextual and gendered approaches represent the greatest part of contemporary Ovidian scholarship, especially on the *Heroides*; however, both approaches tend to reduce Ovid's literary women to a set of perceived similarities, flattening the heroines out into 'types' rather than examining them as uniquely-constructed literary identities.⁸¹ By contrast, my concern with characterisation emphasises the range and individuality of Ovid's poetic figures, as does Seo's analysis of the characters of Virgil, Lucan, Seneca and Statius. As we have observed through our discussions of the Medeas of *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7, an evaluation of Ovid's characterisation effectively prevents the reader from treating the poet's characters as a homogenous group, by drawing our attention to the small-scale detail that separates one literary personality from another. In Chapters One and Two, I argued that the Medea of *Heroides* 12 is in several respects very different from her sister-writers. She appears, for example, to be the least emotionally-driven of Ovid's epistolary heroines. On the other hand, the elegiac Medea is

⁸⁰ The exception, of course, is Penelope, whose hero does eventually return. Lindheim's analysis of Penelope (2003), pp. 37-51, is instructive for our purposes: it demonstrates that the Lacanian framework can *only* result in an unfavourable assessment of the heroine's desire, even if the heroine's relationship is not lost. For Lindheim, the Penelope of *Heroides* 1 'fails' in comparison with her strong and resourceful Homeric predecessor. Put simply, in Lindheim's Lacanian terms, the failure of the majority of the women of the *Heroides* derives from the heroes' inability or unwillingness to return, while in Penelope's case the heroine's failure stems from the critic's pejorative comparison of her Ovidian incarnation with the characterisation of Homer. Lindheim's analysis suggests that it is the very form or act of female desire that causes the women to 'fail', not purely their epistolary situations. For this reason, I find Lindheim's framework to be limiting rather than expansive in the critical possibilities it represents.

⁸¹ Examples of intertextual studies conforming to this pattern would include Spoth (1992), Landolfi (2000) and Knox (2002); Lindheim (2003) and Spentzou (2003) represent feminist approaches in a similar mould.

not dissimilar to *all* of the other *Heroides*: like Oenone and Hypermnestra, Medea has a keen eye to her own future, and does not see herself as dependent on the hero to achieve her ends. At the same time, Medea, Oenone and Hypermnestra form a contrast with Hypsipyle, Canace and Laodamia, who wait upon the hero at every turn.

In focusing on Medea's elegiac characterisation, then, I have attempted to resist the tendency to view the women of the *Heroides* as being all much the same, establishing not only that Medea appears to be distinctly different from most of the other heroines, but also that the other heroines may not be nearly so much alike as earlier scholars have suggested.⁸² In other words, an evaluation of *one* of Ovid's women from the point of view of characterisation has encouraged us to reconsider how we view the rest of the heroines as well. The same is true, I contend, of the *Metamorphoses*. Our reading of Medea's Book 7 enables us to perceive that Ovid's heroine forms part of a complex pattern of female desire in Books 6 to 10, but also to observe that Medea remains very singular amongst the heroines of the *Metamorphoses*, lacking the uncontrolled passions that inform so many of the women-centric narratives, such as those of Procne and Scylla. Therefore, our reading of the characterisation of the Ovidian Medea serves more broadly to highlight the utility of characterisation as an interpretive tool, especially for the critic who is interested in the diversity of Ovid's literary figures, and not principally in their similarity.

⁸² The reader will observe that my analysis stands in opposition to treatments such as Arcellaschi's (1990), pp. 233-5, which suggests that the figure of Medea holds the key to the identification of thematic unity in Ovid's work. Rather, I propose that Medea is indicative of the diversity of Ovid's corpus.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have observed some of the potential benefits of the reading of Ovid's Medea for which I have argued in Chapters One, Two and Three. In the case of *Heroides* 12, I find that this project's approach to the elegiac Medea enables us to take an expressly affirmative position on the Ovidian authorship of the poem – something which most contemporary scholarship chooses not to do. Next, we can theorise about why the letter has historically provoked such varied responses from its critics. Following on from the analysis of Medea's 'psychopathic personality' in Chapter Two, I have suggested that one key difficulty with *Heroides* 12 lies in Ovid's selection of Medea's moment of composition. By placing Medea's letter so close to Euripides' play within the mythological chronology, Ovid seems to be forcing a confrontation with his predecessor, encouraging his reader to make some difficult interpretive choices about how we see the two narratives working together. In particular, how do we choose to answer the question 'is Ovid's Medea supposed to be the same character as Euripides'?' If so, then the unemotional Ovidian heroine allows for a very different reading of the tragic Medea to the one with which Ovid's readers are most familiar.

Reflecting on the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, I have argued for interpreting the structure of Ovid's myth as being in some measure reflective of his heroine's epic personality. Each episode of Book 7 contributes to a gradual escalation – and thereby an unravelling – of Medea's Ovidian characterisation, as the self-focused tendencies of the monologue are transposed first into the rejuvenation of Aeson and then into the brutal scenes of the deaths of Pelias, the children, Creon and Creusa, and the failed poisoning of Theseus. As the behaviour of Ovid's heroine becomes more extreme, which is emphasised by Ovid's poetic presentation of the mythological material, so the reader's sense of Medea's literary personality becomes clearer.

In the context of the women of Books 6 to 10 of the *Metamorphoses*, we discovered that we can read Medea as one of a number of women whose myths explore a model of female desire which is much less hero-centric than scholarship has hitherto acknowledged. The stories of Arachne, Niobe, Procne, Scylla and Atalanta are all reminiscent of Medea's, in that we perceive each heroine to be concerned with protecting her own superiority, influence or control within her narrative sphere. Finally, this reading of Medea's Book 7 allows us to redefine our understanding of 'metamorphosis' within Medea's narrative. By

taking Medea's epic characterisation to be consistent from end to end, we can argue that the reader's perception of Medea may be 'metamorphosed' across the narrative, but not necessarily Ovid's depiction of his heroine along with it.

The final section of the chapter highlighted some of the critical potential of analysing texts with a view to the poet's techniques of characterisation. Just as our reading of Ovid's Medea has opened up an unusual interpretation of a heroine who has most often been regarded as one of Ovid's least successful literary endeavours, so we can apply those same principles to other characters within the Ovidian corpus. Thus far, the brief comparisons this project has made between Medea and other Ovidian women – those of the *Heroides* and of the *Metamorphoses* – suggest that a focus on characterisation can reveal a great diversity of literary personality within Ovid's works: a diversity, perhaps, to rival the poet's own wide-ranging literary abilities.

CONCLUSION

Medea in Retrospect

In this thesis, we have seen that it is possible to develop a coherent reading of Medea's Ovidian characterisation across both the *Heroides* and the *Metamorphoses*. In contrast to the scholarly tradition, which suggests that the Ovidian Medea is an unhappy mélange of attributes drawn from her earlier Apollonian and Euripidean portraits, I have advocated reading Medea as a uniquely Ovidian creation: one consistent literary personality across her epic and elegiac incarnations, rather than two 'different' heroines inhabiting two different mythological environments. In my reading, the characterisation of the Ovidian Medea is largely unsympathetic. I argue that Ovid depicts his heroine as self-focused and unfeeling, preoccupied with protecting her own interests, if necessary at the expense of the other characters in her myth. These features divide the Ovidian Medea from her counterparts in the Greek tradition, since she lacks both the emotional vulnerability of Apollonius' young sorceress, and the moral torment of Euripides' wronged wife.

Key to my analysis has been the question of the reader's expectations, both of the poet and of his characters. I propose that if we read *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 expecting to find a heroine resembling those of Apollonius or Euripides, then we are likely to be confounded by the poet's unexpected construction of his character – as earlier critics have been, asserting that Ovid's poetic genius failed him in the case of his Medea. If, however, we approach the Ovidian Medea allowing that the interaction between Ovid's heroine and those of the Greek poets may *not* be the most important factor in Ovid's characterisation, then we discover that the Ovidian heroine is both plausible and consistent in her apparent modes of reasoning and feeling, despite her dissimilarity to the Medeas of Apollonius and Euripides.

I have suggested that the prevailing critical assumption that *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 depict two 'different' Medeas is the product of poetic sleight of hand on

Ovid's part. The two texts belong to different literary genres and to different periods of Medea's mythological life, as well as narrating the heroine's story in different voices – *Heroides* 12 from Medea's first-person point of view, *Metamorphoses* 7 from the perspective of Ovid's third-person narrator. In my view, the dissimilarities between Ovid's narratives have encouraged the critic to assume that the heroines portrayed therein are similarly divergent. On the contrary, I contend that we find a surprising degree of commonality between the 'two Medeas' if only we apply ourselves to identifying these similarities when we encounter the texts. Put simply, if we ask ourselves how the elegiac Medea of *Heroides* 12 appears to harmonise with the epic Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7, then we observe that the heroines appear to share a strikingly self-centred world-view and a love of exercising control over other characters.

In Chapter One, we evaluated Hypsipyle's *Heroides* 6 and Medea's *Heroides* 12 from a vantage point inside the Ovidian story world, asking how the poet represents his heroines representing themselves. I argued that Ovid portrays Hypsipyle and Medea as opposing personality-types: Hypsipyle is hero-focused whereas Medea is self-focused. We observed that Hypsipyle appears to regard Jason as the most important character in her poem, in contrast to Medea, who claims unambiguously her role as the protagonist of her own story. Examining the figure of Jason, I proposed that Hypsipyle's Jason is idealised, consistent with the hero's role at the centre of Hypsipyle's life, while Medea's Jason is a flawed hero in desperate need of Medea's help. Next, we evaluated the heroines' descriptions of their interpersonal relationships more broadly, noting that Hypsipyle is concerned with securing for herself the good opinion of others, and with maintaining her status as a dutiful and cooperative member of her family unit. Medea, meanwhile, seems unengaged with her family and presents them as a set of responsibilities to be subordinated to her own more important desires. Lastly, we considered the dichotomy in *Heroides* 6 and 12 between action and reaction: Hypsipyle is a reactive character, controlled by other figures in the myth and especially by Jason; Medea is an active heroine who acknowledges other characters only when attempting to divert blame away from herself. The chapter also contains two comparative analyses – Penelope's *Heroides* 1 and Phyllis' *Heroides* 2. Through these poems, we established that Medea is dissimilar not only to Hypsipyle, but to Penelope and Phyllis also, lacking Penelope's emotional investment in her family, and Phyllis' ability to critique her own behaviour following the hero's departure.

Chapter Two completed the discussion of *Heroides* 6 and 12, this time from the point of view of Ovid's poetic construction of his heroines' myths. By focusing on the question of epistolary purpose, I observed that Medea is unusual amongst the *Heroides* in that the reader cannot be certain *why* she chooses to write, given her physical proximity to Jason. In my reading, the deliberate, solitary and time-consuming nature of epistolary composition highlights the extent to which the self-possession of Ovid's heroine differs from the emotional volatility of Euripides', introducing into the narrative material of Euripides the possibility of premeditation on Medea's part. Next, we examined Ovid's use of physical space in *Heroides* 6 and 12, noting that Hypsipyle's circumscribed environment mirrors the heroine's disempowerment, whilst Medea's narrative space encourages a reading of the heroine as a controlling personality.

In section three, I took an interdisciplinary approach to Medea, arguing that Ovid's depiction of his heroine reveals some of the hallmarks of the psychopathic personality. Jason's speech paints Medea as a heroine who relishes the possession of power over others, while the account of Absyrtus' death suggests that Medea is unable to feel empathy for other characters' suffering, preferring to focus on her own feelings and interests. In the final section, I observed that Ovid's allusions to the heroines' fates in other texts strengthens the reading of Medea as powerful and of Hypsipyle as disempowered. In *Heroides* 6, Hypsipyle curses her rival, yet the reader knows that the Hypsipyle of Euripides will soon suffer torments equally bad; in the same way, the divine figures of *Heroides* 12 emphasise Medea's imminent translation into the tragic mode, where she will escape punishment for her crimes. Another two comparative treatments complete the chapter – Oenone's *Heroides* 5 and Hypermnestra's *Heroides* 14. We noted that Medea lacks Oenone's ability to acknowledge the end of a failed relationship, and Hypermnestra's capacity for moral debate.

In Chapter Three, we turned to the Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7. Through an analysis of three episodes from Book 7 – Medea's monologue, Aeson's rejuvenation and the murder of Pelias – we concluded that Ovid's epic heroine reveals the same self-focus as her elegiac counterpart. In the monologue, Medea voices material which in Apollonius belongs to Jason, depicting the Ovidian heroine as being preoccupied with securing her own future at her family's expense. Medea thus contrasts with Ovid's Scylla, who also rationalises her betrayal of her family, but who remains outwardly-focused and socially-aware as she does so. Aeson's rejuvenation affords Medea the opportunity to demonstrate her growing

powers and to remind the hero of his debt to her. Meanwhile, the murder of Pelias furnishes incontrovertible evidence of Medea's cruelty, since Ovid offers no motivation for the brutal treatment of the king and his daughters. In the final section, we returned to the analysis of the psychopathic personality, observing that Ovid's illustration of Medea's escalating savagery mirrors the criminal trajectory of a violent psychopath, in which there is rarely – if ever – a diminution of severity in the crimes committed.

Chapter Four reflected on some of the implications for the critic of my reading of Medea. First, I reviewed the Medea of *Heroides* 12, noting that treating Ovid's heroine as a consistent characterisation makes an implicit case for the Ovidian authenticity of *Heroides* 12. If *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7 depict the same character, then they are likely to have the same author. Next, I outlined one possible reason why a number of critics dislike *Heroides* 12. Medea's moment of composition, which places her very close to Euripides' heroine within the mythological chronology, raises the unsettling possibility for the reader that Ovid is offering an alternative exploration of Euripides' narrative material. If the Medea of *Heroides* 12 is so coolly rational in her thinking, then how are we as readers to harmonise her with the overwrought protagonist of Euripides?

Turning to the heroine of *Metamorphoses* 7, I argued that the unexpected structure of Ovid's myth reflects the poet's unusual characterisation of his heroine. Just as we are not accustomed from the literary tradition to Medea's controlling Ovidian personality, so Ovid's textual organisation frustrates readers' expectations of the poem more broadly. Likewise, I observed that the Medea of Book 7 forms part of a pattern of women in the central pentad whose narratives reveal a concern with maintaining influence, superiority or notoriety. Arachne, Niobe, Procne, Scylla and Atalanta all resemble Medea in seeking for themselves greater control within their mythological sphere. Moreover, Medea's myth encourages readers to ask how we are choosing to view the concept of 'metamorphosis' in Book 7. If we accept that Medea's characterisation remains stable throughout the epic, then is it not possible that it is the reader's *perception* of Medea which metamorphoses, rather than the poet's portrayal of his heroine?

In the final section of Chapter Four, I returned to the topic which has been most influential in shaping this project – characterisation. By putting my reading of Medea in the context of some recent scholarship on Classical characterisation, I argued that examining texts with a focus on the poet's construction of his literary personalities can suggest new ways of

reading, particularly in the case of texts which frustrate straightforward interpretation, as does Medea's *Heroides* 12. The study of characterisation is relatively unpopular in contemporary Classics, and yet by unravelling the various aspects of Medea's Ovidian characterisation we have been able to attempt a recalibration of the critical debate surrounding this heroine.

We have established that it is not necessary to regard Medea as an unsuccessful figure of confused Apollonian and Euripidean descent. We have shown that it is possible to treat Medea as a distinct and coherent personality-type of comparable depth and interest to those of the preceding Greek tradition. Finally, we have developed a reading of Medea as one consistent characterisation across at least two texts in the Ovidian corpus. All of these arguments have a bearing on the scholarly debate going forward, suggesting that other Ovidian figures apart from Medea may benefit from a rigorous examination of the construction of their literary identities. Perhaps most of all, this project's reading of Medea highlights the diversity of Ovid's female characters – even those of the *Heroides*, who have often been written off as repetitious variations on a narrow theme. I propose that if we embrace the range and dissimilarity of Ovid's literary figures, to which this thesis in part testifies, then we find that there are ever more readings of the Ovidian oeuvre yet to uncover.

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