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MEDEA: TRANSFORMATIONS OF A GREEK FIGURE IN LATIN LITERATURE*

Latin writers in the ancient world are well known to have been familiar with earlier Greek writings, as well as with the first commentaries on those, and to have taken over literary genres as well as topics and motifs from Greece for their own works. But, as has been recognized in modern scholarship, this engagement with Greek material does not mean that Roman writers typically produced Latin copies of pieces by their Greek predecessors. In the terms of contemporary literary terminology, the connection between Latin and Greek literature is rather to be described as an intertextual relationship, which became increasingly complex, since later Latin authors were also influenced by their Roman predecessors.¹

One of the figures from Greek myth popular with Roman writers throughout the classical period is Medea, the Colchian princess who fell in love with the Greek Jason, when he arrived in Colchis on the ship *Argo*, having been ordered by his uncle Pelias to capture the Golden Fleece from King Aeëtes, Medea's father. By means of her magic faculties, Medea helped Jason to gain the Golden Fleece, thus turning against her father, and then followed Jason back to Iolcos, his home in Greece, and later to Corinth. There he abandoned her for a new wife, which made her kill their children.²

* This paper was originally delivered as an inaugural lecture at University College London on 22 November 2011. English translations are the author's, unless otherwise indicated.

¹ On the issue of 'intertextuality' with reference to classical texts, see S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext. Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998). On the question of 'translation', see also n. 13 below. On the notion of intertextuality applied to Medea, see S. Hinds, 'Medea in Ovid: Scenes from the Life of an Intertextual Heroine', *MD* 30 (1993), 46: 'I close, then, by affirming a pleasure in the intertextual richness of Medea. . . . And her story is from the beginning a story of fragmentation: the innocent girl who is also the all-powerful witch; the defender of the integrity of the family who is also the killer of her own brother and children. Fragmented by her story, fragmented by her constant reinscription in new texts, in new genres, in new eras, Medea will always in the end elude her interpreters.'

² On the Medea story and its permutations in different artistic genres, see J. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (eds.), *Medea. Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (Princeton, NJ, 1997). On Medea in Roman literature, see now articles in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Medea*, *Ramus* 41 (2012). On Medea in Roman drama, see A. Arcellaschi, *Médée dans le théâtre latin d'Ennius à Sénèque* (Rome, 1990); L. Nosarti, 'Divagazioni sul mito di Medea nel teatro latino

In Greece this story was told memorably by Euripides in his tragedy *Medea* in the fifth century BCE (as well as in other poets' tragedies that do not survive) and in the Hellenistic epic *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius. Euripides focuses on the events in Corinth and Apollonius Rhodius on the earlier ones in Colchis and their immediate aftermath, the two sections of the myth that display intense psychological struggles. While the Romans seem to have been less ready to engage with stories such as those of Oedipus and Phaedra (which were popular in Greece, but of which only a few Roman versions are known), they seem not to have had problems with narratives involving cruel deeds, such as the killing of children in the stories of Medea or the conflict between the brothers Atreus and Thyestes.³

In Rome the Medea story was not only dealt with in tragedy, but was also presented in various other poetic genres and referred to in prose texts. Writing about Medea was even portrayed as one of the hackneyed mythical topics in the late first century CE, for instance by the epigrammatist Martial (5.53), who speaks of 'her of Colchis' (without further identification) as a traditional, but unsuitable, topic for his friend's poetry, for whose 'pages' he ironically recommends Deucalion or Phaethon as 'material'.⁴

Yet all the more extended versions of the Medea story in Latin literature seem to have focused on different stages of the myth or to have given it particular twists, so that there is little overlap apart from the key characters involved in the story. This consistency of *dramatis personae*, however, is useful, since variations and alternative versions can then build on familiarity with the main elements of the myth. Horace, in his *Art of Poetry*, demands that, if mythical figures are chosen for presentation in literature, they will have to display their traditional characteristics to ensure coherence (Hor. *Ars P.* 119–24).⁵ The fact

arcaico', in L. Nosarti, *Filologia in frammenti. Contributi esegetici e testuali ai frammenti dei poeti latini* (Bologna, 1999), 53–78.

³ However, the Augustan poet Horace demands that actions such as Medea killing her children should not happen onstage (Hor. *Ars P.* 185).

⁴ Mart. 5.53: *Colchida quid scribis, quid scribis, amice, Thyesten? / quo tibi vel Nioben, Basse, vel Andromachen? / materia est, mihi crede, tuis aptissima chartis / Deucalion vel, si non placet hic, Phaethon.* ('Why do you write about her of Colchis? Why, friend, do you write about Thyestes? What is Niobe or Andromache to you, Bassus? The most appropriate theme for your pages, believe me, is Deucalion or, if he is not to your liking, Phaethon.') Translation from D. R. Shackleton Bailey (ed. and trans.), *Martial. Epigrams. Vol. I* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

⁵ *aut famam sequere aut sibi convenientia finge, / scriptor, honoratum si forte reponis Achillem, / impiger, iracundus inexorabilis, acer / iura neget sibi nata, nihil non adroget armis. / sit Medea ferox invictaque, flebilis Ino, / perfidus Ixion, Io vaga, tristis Orestes.* ('Either follow tradition or invent what is consistent. If, when you write, you happen to take as your subject the admired Achilles, let him

that he mentions Medea among the examples shows that she was a household name by his time. Horace focuses on a single feature of Medea, whom he wants portrayed as ‘proud of spirit and indomitable’, presumably thinking of the defining scene of her defying Jason and killing their children. While this may be a quintessential element of the image of Medea, influenced significantly by Euripides’ extant *Medea* tragedy and the later Latin version by Seneca, Horace’s request does not fully match the actual evidence: there is a greater range of nuances to the Medea story in Latin literature.

In the light of this, the following discussion will present an overview of the ‘Medeas’ of Roman writers from the Republican and early imperial periods in chronological sequence. This survey of ‘Latin Medeas’ will show typical ways in which her portrait was modified and thus illustrate the versatility of this mythical figure and her story in the hands of Roman writers.⁶

Latin literature in the proper sense came into being in around 240 BCE, when Rome’s first poet, Livius Andronicus (c.280/270–200 BCE), transplanted the literary genres of epic and drama (tragedy and comedy) after the Greek model to Rome. It is not known whether either he or his immediate successor, Naevius (c.280/260–200 BCE), who made the fledgling literary genres more Roman, treated Medea in any of their works, although one can only state this with a certain

be energetic, moody, ruthless, fierce, let him say that laws are not for him and claim all things at the point of his sword. Let Medea be proud of spirit and indomitable, Ino tearful, Ixion treacherous, Io a wanderer, Orestes melancholic.’) Translation from J. Davie (trans.), *Horace. Satires and Epistles* (Oxford, 2011).

⁶ On the variety of versions that combine to create the portrait of a mythical figure, see also F. Graf, ‘Medea, the Enchantress from Afar: Remarks on a Well-known Myth’, in Clauss and Johnston (n. 2), 21: ‘To those of us who have grown up with it, Greek myth seems to consist of stories about individual, noninterchangeable figures – Odysseus, Orestes, or indeed Medea – each of whom seems to have been shaped by a single, authoritative literary work: Homer’s *Odyssey*, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Euripides’ *Medea*. We tend to forget that, in reality, each of these works is just a single link in a chain of narrative transmission: on either side of the version that is authoritative for us, there stands a long line of other versions. Moreover, many of these versions not only refer to the episode treated in the authoritative literary work but also include other details, which help to round out a mythic biography. The first phenomenon – the fact that there exist different versions of the same mythic episode – might be called the *vertical* tradition. The other phenomenon – the fact that the different versions yield a running biography of the mythic figure – might be called the *horizontal* tradition. (I am aware that the boundaries between the two phenomena are far from precise.) Tensions exist between individual narratives of the same episode, as well as between each of these existing narratives and what might be called the imaginary core narrative, although whether there really ever was such a thing is one question that must be considered. How severe the tensions and differences are between this “core” narrative and existing narrative is another important question: how great is the plasticity of myth?’

amount of caution since their works, like those of most Republican writers of epic and drama, only survive in fragments.

In any case, one first meets a ‘Roman Medea’ in the oeuvre of Ennius (239–169 BCE), who was later called ‘father Ennius’ by Horace (*Epist.* 1.19.7), as he was sometimes regarded as the real founder of Roman literature. Ennius’ writings were already more refined than those of the two pioneers (as he himself asserted) and closer to what became canonical later.⁷

For Ennius’ tragic presentation of Medea, the two titles *Medea* and *Medea exul* (*Medea in Exile*), along with a number of fragments, have been transmitted. It is a matter of debate whether these titles refer to one or two tragedies,⁸ but in any case there was one Medea play by Ennius, known (also) as *Medea*, that followed the plot of Euripides’ *Medea* in its main outline. Cicero (*Fin.* 1.4–5) implies a close correspondence between the *Medea* plays of Ennius and Euripides when he affirms that Latin plays such as Ennius’ *Medea* are as well worth reading as their Greek equivalents.⁹ Indeed, several of the surviving fragments

⁷ Fragments are quoted according to the numbering of lines in the editions of O. Ribbeck (*Scaenicae Romanorum poesis fragmenta. Vol. I. Tragicorum Romanorum fragmenta, secundis curis rec.* [Leipzig, 1871; repr. Hildesheim, 1962], *tertiis curis rec.* [Leipzig, 1897]) and of E. H. Warmington (*Remains of Old Latin. Newly Edited and Translated. Vol. I. Ennius and Caecilius* [London and Cambridge, MA, 1935]; *Vol. II. Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Pacuvius and Accius* [London and Cambridge, MA, 1936]), the latter providing the Latin text and an English translation of all dramatic fragments by the authors discussed. For an introduction to Roman tragedy, see A. J. Boyle, *An Introduction to Roman Tragedy* (London, 2006). For an overview of Roman drama, see G. Manuwald, *Roman Drama. A Reader* (London, 2010). For bibliography and overviews of lives and works of the early dramatists, see W. Suerbaum (ed.), *Handbuch der Lateinischen Literatur der Antike. Erster Band. Die Archaische Literatur. Von den Anfängen bis Sullas Tod. Die vorliterarische Periode und die Zeit von 240 bis 78 v. Chr. (HLL 1)* (Munich, 2002).

⁸ See Suerbaum (n. 7), 126–7. Two tragedies are assumed by H. D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius. The Fragments Edited with an Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge, 1967; repr. with corrections 1969), 342–6, with an overview of the evidence and the arguments, and by Boyle (n. 7), 71.

⁹ Cic. *Fin.* 1.4–5: *iis igitur est difficilium satisfacere qui se Latina scripta dicunt contemnere. in quibus hoc primum est in quo admirer, cur in gravissimis rebus non delectet eos sermo patrius, cum idem fabellas Latinas ad verbum e Graecis expressas non invitati legant. quis enim tam inimicus paene nomini Romano est qui Enni Medeam aut Antiopam Pacuvi spernat aut reiciat, quod se isdem Euripidis fabulis delectari dicat, Latinas litteras oderit? . . . mihi quidem nulli satis eruditi videntur quibus nostra ignota sunt.* (‘Therefore it is more difficult to satisfy those who say that they scorn Latin writings. As regards those people, the first thing I am amazed at is this: why does their native language not provide them with pleasure in most serious matters, while the same people read Latin plays, translated word for word from Greek ones, not unwillingly? For who is so inimical almost to the very name of “Roman” that he despises and rejects Ennius’ *Medea* or Pacuvius’ *Antiopa*, since he says that he finds pleasure in the corresponding plays of Euripides, but hates Latin literature? . . . To me at any rate no one to whom our writings are unknown seems sufficiently educated.’)

of Ennius' play are sufficiently close to Euripides to make the connection clear and allow for telling comparisons.¹⁰

As in Euripides (*Eur. Med.* 1–8),¹¹ Ennius' play opens with a speech by Medea's nurse, who reflects on the predicament of her mistress and the reasons for Medea's present situation (*Enn. Trag.* 205–13 R.^{2–3} = 253–61 W.):

If only the fir-wood timber had not fallen to the ground in the Pelian grove [i.e. in a forest on Pelion, a mountain in Thessaly], hewn by axes, and if only the ship had not taken the first steps to the beginning from there, the ship that is now known by the name of *Argo*, since selected Argive [i.e. Greek] men travelling in her sought the Golden Fleece of the ram from the Colchians, at the behest of King Pelias, by trickery. For never would my mistress, Medea, going astray, set her foot outside the house, sick in her mind, wounded by savage love.¹²

Earlier critics have already noted that these lines are similar to the beginning of the play in Euripides and have therefore concluded (almost echoing Cicero) that Ennius produced a 'translation'.¹³ Although in that period a poetic translation into Latin would have been a significant achievement, more recent scholars have pointed to a number of differences between the two versions, which suggest that Ennius produced an 'adaptation' rather than a straightforward 'translation'. Without going into a detailed comparison, one can observe, for instance, that Ennius' nurse narrates the events in a clear, chronological order, starting with the felling of the tree, moving on to the building of the ship, the introduction of the ship's name, and the

¹⁰ For Latin text and English translation of the fragments preserved for Ennius' *Medea* tragedies, in addition to Warmington (n. 7), see Boyle (n. 7), 71–8; Manuwald (n. 7), 104–7. For details of the interpretation of the fragments, see Jocelyn (n. 8).

¹¹ NURSE: 'Would that the *Argo* had never winged its way to the land of Colchis through the dark blue Symplegades! Would that pine trees had never been felled in the glens of Mount Pelion and furnished oars for the hands of the heroes who at Pelias' command set forth in quest of the Golden Fleece! For then my lady Medea would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus, her heart smitten with love for Jason...'. Translation from D. Kovacs (ed. and trans.), *Euripides. Cyclops, Alcestis, Medea* (Cambridge, MA, 1994).

¹² *utinam ne in nemore Pelio securibus / caesa accedisset abiegnata ad terram trabes, / neve inde navis incohandi exordium / coepisset, quae nunc nominatur nomine / Argo, quia Argivi in ea delecti viri / vecti petebant pellem inauratam arietis / Colchis, imperio regis Peliae, per dolun. / nam numquam era errans mea domo efferret pedem / Medea, animo aegra, amore saevo saucia.*

¹³ For this older view of Ennius (and other Republican dramatists), see e.g. W. Beare, *The Roman Stage. A Short History of Latin Drama in the Time of the Republic* (London, 1964), 74–8, esp. 75–6: 'In general, where we can set Ennius' Latin side by side with the Greek, we find that the version is reasonably close. He does not shrink from translating the boldest utterances of Euripides, such as Medea's famous assertion that she would rather fight three battles than bear one child.' For more detailed discussion of the issue of 'translation' (with further references), see G. Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre* (Cambridge, 2011), 282–92.

purpose of the voyage; Pelias is identified as the person who has triggered the enterprise, and the circumstances of winning the Golden Fleece are defined as 'by trickery'. By contrast, Euripides has the nurse start with the arrival of the ship in Colchis and later add the felling of the tree (to equip the ship), the reason for the voyage, and gaining the Golden Fleece on Pelias' orders. For his arrangement of the material, Ennius seems to have taken on board comments on Euripides' sequence (*hysteron proteron*) by early scholars and either because of these or despite them to have decided to present the story in linear, and thus more comprehensible, form.¹⁴

Like Euripides, Ennius has the nurse conclude the exposition with the consequences of the Argonautic voyage for her mistress Medea. The nurse in Euripides looks at these consequences from the perspective of Medea's travelling to Iolcos out of love for Jason. Ennius' nurse does not mention the names Jason or Iolcos; instead, she emphasizes that Medea left her home, wounded by love. By this change of perspective, Ennius' version highlights the close relationship with one's home and country and contrasts that with the passion of love, which thus appears as an all-powerful force influencing Medea. Whether this description of Medea is continued through the rest of the drama cannot be determined; at any rate, the motif of leaving one's home is taken up again.

As a letter by Cicero reveals (*Fam.* 7.6), at some point in the play there was a speech by Medea addressing the ladies of Corinth, who probably formed the chorus in Ennius' drama, as they do in Euripides' tragedy. The following fragments of Medea's speech can be reconstructed from Cicero's letter (*Enn. Trag.* 219–21 R.^{2–3} = 266–8 W.):

Rich and noble ladies, who possess the high citadel of Corinth... Many have managed their own business and that of their country well, while being far away from their fatherland; many who spent their lives at home have therefore been blamed.¹⁵

This description refers to the situation of Medea, who is far away from her own country; yet it is phrased as a general statement, with terminology that does not entirely apply to Medea's circumstances. In the

¹⁴ Moreover, in Ennius' version the Argo is made of fir-wood timber, while it is pinewood elsewhere (cf. Catull. 64.1 vs. 64.7). This may seem like an unimportant detail, but the wood chosen by Ennius agrees with the conventions of his time, when fir-wood was used for military ships and pinewood would have suggested commercial enterprise.

¹⁵ *quae Corinthum arcem altam habetis, matronae opulentae, optumates. . . / multi suam rem bene gesere et publicam patria procul; / multi qui domi aetatem agerent propterea sunt improbat.*

corresponding speech, Euripides' Medea explains to the ladies of Corinth that she has come out of the house to prevent a negative impression of her; she points out that people could be seen in a negative light both when remaining indoors and when appearing outside and that a quiet way of life might lead to a bad reputation (Eur. *Med.* 214–24).¹⁶ Ennius' Medea, however, addresses *matronae*, whom she characterizes as well respected, and refers to *suam rem* and *publicam rem bene gerere* ('to manage one's own business and that of one's country'), contrasting them with *domi aetatem agere* ('to spend one's life at home'). The dramatic character Medea thus uses terms that are relevant in Roman society, especially with respect to male citizens.

Jason's arguments in an exchange with Medea operate on the same level, when he is made to say (Enn. *Trag.* 233 R.²⁻³ = 286 W.): 'you have saved me for the sake of love rather than for the sake of honour'. This Jason expects *honor* ('honour') as a principle governing one's actions, while Euripides' Jason, though acknowledging that Love was the reason why Medea supported him (Eur. *Med.* 526–31),¹⁷ seems to be happy with the results, achieved for whatever reason. The ingratitude and the use of deceit on the part of Ennius' Jason showcase values important in Roman society.

Overall, the surviving fragments suggest that Ennius presented the story of Medea with particular nuances so that it could directly resonate with contemporary Roman audiences, even though further details about her characterization cannot be established owing to lack of evidence.¹⁸

After Ennius, the Medea story was taken up by Pacuvius (c. 220–130 BCE), Ennius' nephew and successor on the tragic stage. Pacuvius'

¹⁶ MEDEA: 'Women of Corinth, I have come out of the house lest you find fault with me. For I know that though many mortals are haughty both in private and in public, others get a *reputation* for indifference to their neighbors from their retiring manner of life. There is no justice in the eyes of mortals: before they get sure knowledge of a man's true character, they hate him on sight, although he has done them no harm. Now a foreigner must be quite compliant with the city, nor do I have any words of praise for the citizen who is self-willed and causes his fellow-citizens pain by his lack of breeding.' Translation from Kovacs (n. 11).

¹⁷ JASON: 'Since you so exaggerate your kindness to me, I for my part think that Aphrodite alone of gods and mortals was the savior of my expedition. As for you, I grant you have a clever mind – but to tell how Eros forced you with his ineluctable arrows to save me would expose me to ill will.' Translation from Kovacs (n. 11).

¹⁸ Additional lines that may provide further insight into Medea's character and that are often attributed to Ennius' *Medea* have been transmitted without an indication of their provenance (Enn. *Trag.* 226–7, 228–30 R.²⁻³ = 274–80 W.); it is therefore uncertain whether they actually belong to this play.

tragedy is entitled *Medus*, named after Medea's son.¹⁹ The different title indicates that the focus is on a different section of the story: as he frequently does, Pacuvius dramatizes a less well-known sequel to a famous story, showing familiar characters in novel situations.²⁰

According to what the later mythographer Hyginus says, which probably agrees with this tragedy, the plot ran as follows (Hyg. *Fab.* 27):

Perses, son of Sol, brother of Aeëtes [i.e. Medea's father], received an oracle that he should guard against death from Aeëtes' offspring. Medus, searching for his mother, was carried to him as a result of a tempest, and henchmen captured him and brought him to King Perses. When Medus, son of Aegeus and Medea, saw that he had come into the power of the enemy, he lied that he was Hippotes, Creon's son. The king questioned him in greater detail and ordered that he be taken into custody; then barrenness and scarcity of crops are said to have occurred. When Medea had come there in her snake-drawn chariot, she lied to the king that she was a priestess of Diana and said that she could end the barrenness by expiation; and when she had heard from the king that Hippotes, Creon's son, was held in custody, in the belief that he had come to take revenge for the injustice done to his father [since Medea was responsible for killing Creon, king of Corinth, and his daughter Creusa, Jason's new bride], she then, inadvertently, disclosed that he was her son. For she persuaded the king that he was not Hippotes, but Medus, Aegeus' son, sent by his mother to kill the king, and she entreated him that he was given over to her to be killed, in the belief that he was Hippotes. Therefore when Medus had been brought forward so that the lie would be punished by death, and she saw that things were different from what she believed, she said that she wished to have a conversation with him and gave him a sword and ordered him to take revenge for the injustice done to his grandfather. When Medus had heard the matter, he killed Perses and came into possession of the paternal kingdom; from his own name he called the country Media.²¹

¹⁹ For Latin text and English translation of the fragments transmitted for Pacuvius' *Medus*, in addition to Warmington (n. 7), see Manuwald (n. 7), 108–13. For details of the interpretation of the fragments see P. Schierl, *Die Tragödien des Pacuvius. Ein Kommentar zu den Fragmenten mit Einleitung, Text und Übersetzung* (Berlin, 2006), 342–85.

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of characteristics of Pacuvius' tragedies, see G. Manuwald, *Pacuvius – summus tragicus poeta. Zum dramatischen Profil seiner Tragödien* (Munich, 2003).

²¹ *Persi Solis filio, fratri Aetae, responsum fuit ab Aetae progenie mortem cavere: ad quem Medus dum matrem persequitur tempestate est delatus, quem satellites comprehensum ad regem Persen perduxerunt. Medus Aegei et Medae filius ut vidit se in inimici potestate venisse, Hippoten Creontis filium se esse mentitus est. rex diligentius quaerit et in custodia eum conici iussit; ubi sterilitas et penuria frugum dicitur fuisse. quo Medea in curru iunctis draconibus cum venisset, regi se sacerdotem Dianae ementita est dixitque sterilitatem se expiare posse; et cum a rege audisset Hippoten Creontis filium in custodia haberi, arbitrans eum patris iniuriam exsequi venisse, ibi imprudens filium prodidit. nam regi persuadet eum Hippoten non esse sed Medum Aegei filium a matre missum ut regem interficeret, petitque ab eo ut interficiendus sibi traderetur, aestimans Hippoten esse. itaque Medus cum productus esset ut mendacium morte puniret, et illa aliter esse vidit quam putavit, dixit se cum eo colloqui velle atque ense ei tradidit iussitque avi sui iniurias exsequi. Medus re audita Persen interfecit regnumque avitum possedit; ex suo nomine terram Mediam cognominavit.*

This somewhat complex story with several twists and turns – for instance, a parent almost killing their child, a dramatic recognition just in time, and a happy resolution with the culprit punished and the legitimate rule reinstated – displays elements that are frequent in Pacuvius’ tragedies. Their combination leads to a particular presentation of Medea: the sequence shows Medea as a mother who feels responsibility towards her family and might only have killed her child by accident. This Medea is aware that, in Corinth, she has committed deeds for which people might be inclined to take revenge; at the same time she is ready to take revenge herself for the injustice done to her own family so as to win back their honour and the rights due to them. This Medea is rather different from the woman who betrays and abandons her father out of love for Jason or who kills the children she has had with Jason. On the one hand, she is the traditional mythical figure, appearing as a woman with supernatural faculties and arriving on a snake-drawn chariot, and she is prepared to use trickery and deceit. On the other, she makes sure that her son can enjoy the rights to which he is entitled. Medea’s aim to take revenge for the injustice done to her family and to entrust power to her son as the legitimate heir would have agreed with Roman thinking.

The third major Republican tragic poet, Accius (170–c. 80 BCE), wrote a Medea tragedy entitled *Medea sive Argonautae* (*Medea or the Argonauts*). This title suggests that Accius looks at yet another different section of the myth, namely the period preceding the events in Corinth that are presented in Ennius’ tragedy, that is, the Argonautic journey and its immediate consequences: the plot of the tragedy seems to have dealt with the pursuit of Jason and Medea by her brother Apsyrtus and the Colchians, sent by her father Aeëtes, the challenges this poses to their loyalty for both of them in different ways, their decision to attack Apsyrtus, and Aeëtes’ lament over the loss of his children. Details of the plot and of Accius’ depiction of Medea must remain unclear owing to the fragmentary state of the text. Maybe the drama showed Medea’s tragic conflict when she had to confront her brother to save Jason and herself, which effectively had her lose her father a second time; this would be in line with the prominent role that issues of genealogy and family relationships seem to have played in Accius’ tragedies.

In Accius’ time, interest in scholarly investigations increased, shared by Accius himself, as his treatises on dramatic questions and festivals indicate, and poetry in other formats was also developing, as

demonstrated by the so-called pre-Neoteric poets. In the light of such movements it is not surprising that fragments surviving from Accius' *Medea* tragedy suggest that the progress made by mankind as the result of the establishment of sea-faring was discussed (Acc. *Trag.* 411, 412–13 R.²⁻³ = 400, 401–2 W.) and include a famous poetic description of the *Argo* by a shepherd, who has never seen a ship before, this passage presumably being an elaboration of a motif found in Apollonius Rhodius' epic (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.316–22).

Cicero (*Nat. D.* 2.89) reports the shepherd's reaction in Accius as follows (Acc. *Trag.* 391–402, 403–6 R.²⁻³ = 381–96 W.):

And this shepherd in Accius, who had never seen a ship before, when he noticed from a mountain-top the divine and novel vehicle of the Argonauts in the distance, speaks in this manner, at first astonished and thoroughly terrified: 'Such a huge mass glides along, roaring from the deep sea with immense noise and blast. It rolls billows in front of itself, it stirs up eddies by its force; it rushes on, gliding forward, it splashes and blows back the sea. So you might believe now that a broken-up thunder-cloud was moving, now that some rock thrust up on high was carried along by winds or storms, or that water whirling round was coming forth, beaten by waves clashing together: unless the sea stirs up some disaster for the land or perhaps Triton [Neptune's son], turning his cave deep below the roots upside down with his trident, raises a rocky mass in the bellowing sea from the deep to the sky.' At first he is in doubt what kind of thing this is that he sees, something unknown, and the same man says, after he has seen the young men and heard the sailors' song: 'Just as playful and lively dolphins snort with their mouths' – and many other things of this kind: 'it brings a song, similar to the tune of Silvanus [the Roman god of the fields and forests], to my ears and hearing.'²²

By the conceit of presenting a ship (which must have been a familiar item to the Romans) and a ship's journey (a standard element of this part of the myth) from an unexpected perspective, the poet manages to give the story a new and exciting appearance and to illustrate developments achieved by the introduction of sea travel. The combination of such a scene with the probable presentation of *Medea* in an emotionally

²² Cic. *Nat. D.* 2.89: *atque ille apud Accium pastor, qui navem numquam ante vidisset, ut procul divinum et novum vehiculum Argonautarum e monte conspexit, primo admirans et perterritus hoc modo loquitur: 'tanta moles labitur / fremibunda ex alto ingenti sonitu et spiritu. / prae se undas volvit, vertices vi suscitatur: / ruit prolapsa, pelagus respargit reflatur. / ita dum interruptum credas nimbum volvier, / dum quod sublime ventis expulsum rapi / saxum aut procellis, vel globosos turbines / existere ictos undis concursantibus: / nisi quas terrestres pontus strages conciet, / aut forte Triton fuscina evertens specus / supter radices penitus undante in freto / molem ex profundo saxeam ad caelum erigit.'* dubitat primo quae sit ea natura quam cernit ignotam, idemque iuvenibus visis auditoque nautico cantu: 'sicut lascivi atque alacres rostris perfremunt / delphini –' item alia multa: 'Silvani melo / consimilem ad auris cantum et auditum refert'. See also Boyle (n. 7), 115–17; Manuwald (n. 7), 114–15.

and ethically difficult situation places Medea's experiences in a particular historical context.

After Accius, the production of new tragedies for presentation on the Roman stage declined, and there are no extant Latin tragedies until those of Seneca in the middle of the first century CE. But the Medea story did not lie dormant in the interim; it just appeared in other shapes. The Neoteric poet Catullus, for example, starts his epyllion on the marriage of the human being Peleus with the sea-nymph Thetis (Catull. 64) with a reference to the Argonautic voyage, though without mentioning either Jason or Medea. His focus is on the first voyage over the open sea: provoked thereby, the sea-nymphs emerged from the sea in amazement, triggering Peleus' love for Thetis (Catull. 64.14–21).

Catullus' contemporary Cicero, who frequently refers to Greek myths, especially to Greek and Roman tragedies based on Greek myths and to characters from those plays, was apparently impressed by the figure of Medea. The lines that Medea addresses to the Corinthian women in Ennius' *Medea* survive because Cicero quoted them in a letter to C. Trebatius Testa, while the addressee was away from Rome on a military campaign (*Fam.* 7.6; 54 BCE):

Now what you have to do is to put aside this foolish hankering after Rome and city ways, and by dint of perseverance and energy achieve the purpose with which you set out. I and your other friends will excuse you, as the 'rich and noble ladies who possessed the high citadel of Corinth' excused Medea. She persuaded them hands thick in plaster not to censure her for living abroad: For 'many have managed their own business and that of their country well, while being far away from their fatherland; many who spent their lives at home have therefore been blamed'. This latter case would certainly have been yours, if I had not thrust you forth. But I shall be writing more anon. Now you, who have learned how to enter caveats for others, enter one for yourself against the tricks of those charioteers in Britain. And since I have started to play Medea, always remember what she says: 'a wise man, who is not able to help himself, is wise in vain'.²³

As he playfully says himself, Cicero adopts the role of Medea in the drama by using her words, which he inserts into his argument, giving

²³ *tu* [sc. Trebatius] *modo ineptias istas et desideria urbis et urbanitatis depone et, quo consilio profectus es, id adsiduitate et virtute consequere. hoc tibi tam ignoscemus nos amici quam ignoverunt Medeae 'quae Corinthum arcem altam habebant matronae opulentae optumates', quibus illa manibus gypsatisissimis persuasit ne sibi vitio illae verterent quod abesset a patria. nam 'multi suam rem bene gessere et publicam patria procul; / multi qui domi aetatem agerent propterea sunt improbat'. quo in numero tu certe fuisses nisi te extrusissemus. sed plura scribemus alias. tu, qui ceteris cavere didicisti, in Britannia ne ab essedariis decipiaris caveto et (quoniam Medeam coepi agere) illud semper memento: 'qui ipse sibi sapiens prodesse non quit, nequiquam sapit'*. Translation from D. R. Shackleton Bailey (ed. and trans.), *Cicero. Letters to Friends. Vol. I* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).

them a modified sense, when he admonishes the addressee to banish homesickness, to carry out his mission energetically and resourcefully, and to bear in mind that he will be honoured for his services to the fatherland rendered abroad. Cicero must have regarded familiarity with a particular version of the story as an element of an educated person's knowledge, since he does not explain the context or name the source of his quotations; he seems to assume that the addressee understands his references.

Here Cicero does not focus on Medea's career or character, but rather on individual lines spoken by her, removed from their original dramatic framework. As the statements put into Medea's mouth by Ennius have a sententious quality and are phrased in general terms with the help of Roman terminology, they lend themselves to being adapted to a historical situation. Cicero's use of Medea's words shows that Ennius has endowed his Medea with traits that continued to provide Romans with the opportunity for identification.

Negative characteristics, which are also traditionally linked with the figure of Medea, obviously did not prevent such transfers: Cicero had already mentioned Medea in his earliest political speech, *De imperio Gn. Pompei* (*On the Command of Gnaeus Pompeius*), in 66 BCE, where he uses her character to illustrate the behaviour of Mithridates, king of Pontus and an enemy of Rome (*Leg. Man.* 22):

At this point someone may perhaps ask how, if this is how things stand, there could be much of a war left still to fight. I will tell you, citizens, since it seems a reasonable question. In the first place, Mithridates fled from his kingdom in just the same way as the famous Medea is said to have once fled from that same kingdom of Pontus. As she was making her escape, the story goes, she scattered her brother's limbs along the route where her father would follow her, so that he would lose time as he stopped in his pursuit to collect the scattered remains and grieve over them. Similarly, Mithridates, making his escape, left behind in Pontus the whole of his vast store of gold, silver, and treasures of every description which he had either inherited from his forefathers or else plundered from all over Asia in the earlier war and amassed in his own kingdom. While our men were collecting all these rather too carefully, the king himself slipped through their hands. Medea's father was held up in his pursuit by grief; but our people were held up by joy.²⁴

²⁴ *requireretur fortasse nunc quem ad modum, cum haec ita sint, reliquum possit magnum esse bellum. cognoscite, Quirites; non enim hoc sine causa quaeri videtur. primum ex suo regno sic Mithridates profugit ut ex eodem Ponto Medea illa quondam profugisse dicitur, quam praedicant in fuga fratris sui membra in eis locis qua se parens persequeretur dissipavisse, ut eorum conlectio dispersa maerorque patrius celeritatem persequendi retardaret. sic Mithridates fugiens maximam vim auri atque argenti pulcherrimarumque rerum omnium quas et a maioribus acceperat et ipse bello superiore ex tota Asia direptas in suum regnum*

Here Cicero does not quote lines from earlier poetry or name a poet; therefore it is uncertain whether he has in mind the Medea myth as such or alludes to a particular literary treatment.²⁵ None of the preceding Roman versions about which details can still be established can be proved to have included the death of Medea's brother in the form that Cicero seems to presuppose. It is, however, attested in a Latin dramatic fragment quoted elsewhere by Cicero without being assigned to a particular tragedy, referring to Medea 'when fleeing father and fatherland' (Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.67: *Trag. inc.* 165–71 R.^{2–3} = 5–11 W.).²⁶

Cicero must have assumed that Medea was a well-known character among the general public when he believed that the reference to Medea as an ingenious trickster would emphasize his point about Mithridates; the particular version alluded to must have been known to audiences (also taken up by Ovid, *Tr.* 3.9). In this speech, Cicero again uses Medea to illustrate the behaviour of a male politician, and the nature of her deed does not deter him from using this example. An ancient commentator on Cicero's speech remarked that a comparison with a woman might seem incongruous, but was in fact extremely apt (Schol. Gron. D, pp. 318.27–19.6 Stangl).

Cicero quotes from existing works on Medea, though he is not known to have produced his own narrative. Shortly afterwards, in the work of the Augustan poet Ovid, further variants of the Medea story appear. Ovid produced no fewer than three different versions: a section of his *Metamorphoses*, an item in his collection of *Heroides*, and a tragedy. Unfortunately, nothing but two lines survives from the tragedy, highly regarded in the late first century CE (Tac. *Dial.* 12.6; Quint.

congesserat in Ponto omnem reliquit. haec dum nostri conligunt omnia diligentius, rex ipse e manibus effugit. ita illum in persequendi studio maeror, hos laetitia tardavit. Translation from D. H. Berry, *Cicero. Political Speeches. Translated with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford, 2006).

²⁵ Cicero's reference is connected with Accius' version by Arcellaschi (n. 2), 185–90; by P. Schierl, 'Die Rezeption des Medea-Mythos bei Pacuvius und Accius', in S. Faller and G. Manuwald (eds.), *Accius und seine Zeit* (Würzburg, 2002), 284–5; and, more cautiously, by T. Baier, 'Accius: *Medea sive Argonautae*', in Faller and Manuwald (this note), 60–1.

²⁶ *postquam pater / adpropinquat iamque paene ut comprehendatur parat, / puerum interea obruncat membraque articulatim dividit / perque agros passim dispergit corpus: id ea gratia, / ut, dum nati dissipatos artus captaret parens, / ipsa interea effugeret, illum ut maeror tardaret sequi, / sibi salutem ut familiari pareret parricidio.* ('After her father drew near and was nigh already preparing to have her seized, she meanwhile slaughtered his boy and carved his limbs joint by joint, and strewed the carcass far and wide over the fields: and this she did so that, while the child's father was grasping at his son's scattered limbs, she herself meanwhile might escape, and grief might delay him from pursuit, and she might conceive a plan to save herself by this vile manslaughter of her own kin.' Translation from Warmington (n. 7)).

Inst. 10.1.98), so that it is impossible to discover how it relates to the Republican plays.²⁷

In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the entire story of Medea from her first encounter with Jason in Colchis, through her falling in love, their return to Iolcos, and the events there and in Corinth up to Medea's relocation to Athens, from where she disappears by creating fog to escape punishment (*Ov. Met.* 7.1–424). Unsurprisingly, the emphasis in this narrative is on love and transformations: the sequence starts with a long monologue by Medea, which shows how she is torn between love for Jason and loyalty to her family and gives direct insight into the feelings attributed to her character in this situation. She is made to realize her predicament when she expresses the conflict between her passions and what rational thinking suggests, in the famous lines *video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor!* ('I see and approve what is better, but I follow what is worse!'; *Ov. Met.* 7.20–1).

While Medea still manages to dissuade herself from giving in to her love towards the end of this speech – in view of what is right, religious piety, and a sense of shame (*rectum pietasque pudorque*; *Ov. Met.* 7.72), a subsequent meeting with Jason marks the tipping point and has her actively support Jason by means of her magic faculties. These again become prominent in Iolcos when, upon Jason's request, she rejuvenates Jason's father, Aeson, and kills his uncle Pelias (by ostensibly applying the same process to him), when she flies across Greece afterwards by means of winged snakes, when she destroys Jason's new bride in Corinth, and when – after having flown again on her snake-drawn chariot – she almost poisons Theseus, the son of her new husband, Aegeus, in Athens. Ovid does not change the myth; instead he highlights particular items of the traditional story, enhancing the magic and fanciful aspects, while he summarizes other aspects, such as the events in Corinth that constitute the plot of Euripides' tragedy, in a few allusive lines, thus presenting readers familiar with the myth with his own playful version.

²⁷ For the fragments of the tragedy, see Ribbeck (1871, n. 7), 230 and Ribbeck (1897, n. 7), 267. For Latin text and English translation of *Metamorphoses*, see e.g. W. S. Anderson (ed.), *Ovidius. Metamorphoses. Editio stereotypa editionis secundae (MCMLXXXI)* (Stuttgart, 1998) and D. Raeburn (trans.), *Ovid. Metamorphoses. A New Verse Translation* (London, 2004); of *Heroides*, see e.g. G. Showerman, *Ovid in Six Volumes. I. Heroides and Amores* (2nd edition rev. G. P. Goold, Cambridge, MA, 1977). On connections between Ovid's different 'Medeas', see e.g. Hinds (1993, n. 1). On Medea in *Metamorphoses* in relation to other Ovidian figures, see C. E. Newlands, 'The *Metamorphoses* of Ovid's Medea', in Clauss and Johnston (n. 2), 178–208.

This creates a changing picture of Medea: she starts off as a young maiden, who is initially governed by values that played a major role in Roman life, and is then turned by love in a direction that has her appear as a tricky Colchian woman with magic faculties. While she first uses her magic out of love, when she supports Jason in Colchis and then rejuvenates his father, she later employs it for destructive purposes, to remove the enemy Pelias and to hurt Jason and her new husband, Aegeus. At this point, deceit and trickery are dominant; there is no mention of moral reservations, so that Medea appears as a terrible magician at the end. A continuation of the story, as in Pacuvius' version, would not agree with this portrait.

Quite a different Medea appears in Ovid's *Heroides*. This collection of letters from heroines is a novel literary venture that allows the poet to tell familiar mythical stories from the point of view of the individuals affected, providing an intimate insight into their feelings, an opportunity that Ovid exploits. In this set-up, Medea is envisaged writing to Jason, after he has left her for his new wife in Corinth (Ov. *Her.* 12). In looking back, Medea recounts her entire story from the point in time when she met Jason in Colchis, reflecting on her behaviour and her decisions, Jason's reactions to them, and the current situation, wishing that things had turned out differently.

Now that the man for whom Medea sacrificed family and country out of love has abandoned her, she feels powerless and completely lost (Ov. *Her.* 12.159–68):

Ah, injured father, rejoice! Rejoice, you Colchians whom I left! Shades of my brother, receive in my fate your sacrifice due; I am abandoned; I have lost my throne, my native soil, my home, my husband – who alone for me took the place of all! Dragons and maddened bulls, it seems, I could subdue; a man alone I could not; I, who could beat back fierce fire with wise drugs, have not the power to escape the flames of my own passion. My very incantations, herbs, and arts abandon me; in no way does my goddess aid me, in no way the sacrifice I make to potent Hecate.²⁸

Although, owing to the current situation, Medea regrets her help for Jason and the deeds done for him, such as abandoning her father, killing her brother, or abusing the affection of the daughters of Pelias, and even considers the protestations of his love in Colchis as deceit of an

²⁸ *laese pater, gaude! Colchi gaudete relicti! / inferias umbrae fratris habete mei; / deseror amissis regno patriaque domoque / coniuge, qui nobis omnia solus erat! / unum non potui perdomuisse virum, / quaeque feros pepuli doctis medicatibus ignes, / non valeo flammas effugere ipsa meas. / ipsi me cantus herbaeque artesque relinquunt; / nil dea, nil Hecates sacra potentis agunt.* Translation from Showerman (n. 27), slightly modified.

innocent girl, she tries to win him back on an argumentative and emotional level (Ov. *Her.* 12.183–200):

But if by any chance my entreaties touch a heart of iron, listen now to my words – words too humble for my proud soul! I am as much a suppliant to you as you have often been to me, and I hesitate not to cast myself at your feet. If I am cheap in your eyes, be kind to our common offspring; a hard stepmother will be cruel to offspring born by me. Their resemblance to you is all too great, and I am touched by the likeness; and as often as I see them, my eyes drop tears. By the gods above, by the light of my grandfather's flame, by my favours to you, and by the two children who are our mutual pledge – restore me to the bed for which I madly left so much behind; be faithful to your promises, and come to my aid as I came to yours! I do not implore you to go forth against bulls and men, nor ask your aid to quiet and overcome a dragon; it is you I ask for, – you, whom I have earned, whom you yourself gave to me, by whom I became a mother, as you by me a father. Where is my dowry, you ask? On the field I counted it out – that field which you had to plough before you could bear away the fleece.²⁹

On the one hand, this utterance shows the complete reversal of the situation, since Medea, who used to be the person assisting Jason, is now in need of help and makes a suppliant appeal, motivated by love for Jason and their children. On the other hand, she presents a kind of calculation, demonstrating that she has already done a great deal for Jason and only demands a small return when asking for him, which is essentially what he promised. Medea is introduced as an abandoned wife in love, who uses all levels of entreaty, including threats to Jason. Even prior to this plea, Medea states with respect to Jason's new wife that, as long as there are sword, flames, and poison available to her, no enemy of Medea will remain unpunished (Ov. *Her.* 181–2); at the end of the letter, in which she demonstrates to Jason, whom she calls 'wretch' (*improbe*; Ov. *Her.* 12.204), that he owes his entire existence to her, she admits that she is guided by her anger at the disloyal husband.

The deeds developing out of her anger seem horrible to her herself (Ov. *Her.* 12.208–12). Presumably the killing of the children is alluded to, since in this version they are still alive at this point; this brings a

²⁹ *quodsi forte preces praecordia ferrea tangunt, / nunc animis audi verba minora meis! / tam tibi sum supplex, quam tu mihi saepe fuisti, / nec moror ante tuos procubuisse pedes. / 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. / per superos oro, per avitae lumina flammae, / per meritum et natos, pignora nostra, duos – / redde torum, pro quo tot res insana reliqui; / adde fidem dictis auxiliūque refer! / non ego te inploro contra taurosque virosque, / utque tua serpens victa quiescat ope; / te peto, quem merui, quem nobis ipse dedisti, / cum quo sum pariter facta parente parens. / dos ubi sit, quaeris? campo numeravimus illo, / qui tibi laturo vellus arandus erat.* Translation from Showerman (n. 27), slightly modified.

further misdeed by Medea into focus. Yet, in contrast to *Metamorphoses*, the emphasis is not on the deeds themselves, but on the motives that trigger them. Since Medea presents herself as an innocent maiden who was overcome by the new feeling of love and was asked to help Jason by her sister, and since she was later abandoned by Jason, she is characterized both as a victim and as a perpetrator, who is ready for cruel deeds not only because of her magic faculties, but also because of an abandoned wife's desire for revenge.

Although only two of Ovid's versions of the Medea story are still extant, they show his interest in this mythical figure. In both instances, with the emphasis on magic faculties and the presentation of Medea's feelings, aspects of the story have been brought to the fore that have not played a major role in the earlier dramatic versions. Seneca's *Medea* tragedy in the mid-first century CE again comes closer to the traditional format in form and motifs.³⁰

Like Ennius' *Medea*, Seneca's tragedy, set in Corinth, basically follows the plot of the Euripidean tragedy.³¹ Yet again the story is given a distinctive shape. As elsewhere in Seneca, there is a strong emphasis on the depiction of passions that govern the actions of individuals: a Medea who destroys her family to carry out her desire for revenge is a good illustration of the Stoic tenet of controlling one's passions. Here Medea could actually be described as a *Medea ferox invictaque* – 'a Medea... proud of spirit and indomitable' (Hor. *Ars P.* 123).

In other respects, however, Seneca's treatment contradicts Horace's precepts, since at least one of the children is killed on what would be the open stage in a performance of the text. Such elements are based on a clear idea of what a Medea should be like: she is not only presented as an abandoned wife and a furious mother, but also as a powerful magician. That Seneca was active in a period that was aware of the literary heritage of the character becomes explicit when he has his Medea announce 'I will become Medea' early in the play (*Medea fiam*; Sen.

³⁰ According to the list of works in an ancient biography, Seneca's nephew Lucan composed a tragedy about Medea that remained unfinished and has not been preserved (Vacca, *Vita Lucani: tragoedia Medea imperfecta*; p. 185.64 in A. Rostagni, *Suetonio. De poetis e biografis minori. Restituzione e commento* [Turin, 1956]).

³¹ For Latin text and English translation of Seneca's *Medea*, see e.g. J. G. Fitch (ed. and trans.), *Seneca. Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician Women, Medea, Phaedra* (Cambridge, MA, 2002). On possible developments in Roman drama leading up to Seneca, see R. J. Tarrant, 'Senecan Drama and its Antecedents', *HSPH* 82 (1978), 213–63.

Med. 171) and later declare ‘Now I am Medea’ (*Medea nunc sum*; *Sen. Med.* 910).

The most extensive narrative of the events in Colchis is then found in Valerius Flaccus’ epic *Argonautica*, written towards the end of the first century CE under the Flavian emperors.³² The late Republican writer Varro Atacinus composed an Argonautic epic in Latin (*Argonautae*) before Valerius Flaccus.³³ However, the remains of his work are so meagre that it is difficult to establish any characteristic take on the subject; the poem is generally believed to have followed Apollonius Rhodius’ model rather closely. In its basic structure, Valerius Flaccus’ poem also follows the outline of Apollonius Rhodius’ epic, while being indebted to Virgil in terms of style; at the same time it was also inspired by many other Greek and Roman poets, including Ovid and Seneca.

In Valerius Flaccus, the issue of the relationship between Medea and Jason appears on and off throughout the second half of the poem (after the second proem at the beginning of the fifth book), spanning the events from their first encounter to their flight from Colchis in the *Argo*, where the extant text of the poem breaks off. Medea is characterized by the tension between being both an innocent young maiden, made to fall in love by divine influence, and a powerful magician whose actions can cause destruction. Uniquely in Valerius Flaccus’ version, upon arrival in Colchis, the Argonauts become involved in a civil war between King Aëtes and his half-brother Perses (this quarrel about power also underlies Pacuvius’ version of the story). The goddesses Juno and Pallas, who support the Argonautic enterprise, make the Argonauts join Aëtes; yet he is never going to give them the Golden Fleece, since he follows divine prophecies that seem to warn against it.

When Juno realizes that the Argonauts’ courageous fighting will never win them the Golden Fleece, she looks for other ways of achieving this aim and can only think of Medea as a means to realize it. After Medea has been mentioned a few times, she enters centre-stage, when Juno considers her as follows (6.439–54):

³² For Latin text and English translation of Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*, see J. H. Mozley (ed.), *Valerius Flaccus* (Cambridge, MA, 1934). For a brief introduction to Valerius Flaccus, see A. Zissos, ‘Valerius Flaccus’, in J. M. Foley (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient Epic* (Oxford, 2005), 503–13. On Medea in Valerius Flaccus, see e.g. K. W. D. Hull, ‘Medea in Valerius Flaccus’s *Argonautica*’, *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society (Literary and Historical Section)* 16 (1975), 1–25.

³³ For the Latin fragments, see J. Blänsdorf, *Fragmenta poetarum Latinorum epicorum et lyricorum praeter Enni Annales et Ciceronis Germanicique Aratea. Post W. Morel et K. Büchner editionem quartam auctam curavit* (Berlin, 2011), 231–7.

But Medea alone comes to her mind, all her thoughts are centred on the maiden only, than whom is none more potent at the nightly altars; for responsive to her cry and to the juices she scatters in desolate places the stars are halted trembling and the Sun her grandfather is aghast as he runs his course; she changes the aspect of the fields and the tracks of the rivers, all things are bound fast in their own deep slumber, old folk she seethes again to youth and lawlessly assigns them yet more spindles; at her did Circe, mightiest in the ways of terror, at her did the stranger Phrixus [i.e. when he arrived in Colchis from Greece] marvel, though he knew that Atracian poisons made the moon to foam and that spells of Haemonia were rousing up the ghosts. Her therefore, awe-inspiring with magic power and maidenhood, Juno seeks to join in alliance with the Achaean leader; for none other can she see to be a match for the bulls and for the up-springing warriors and for the flame that stands in her mid path, fearing nothing, shrinking from no sight of ill; what if blind passion would add its merciless flame?³⁴

In this passage, much room is given to the description of Medea's magical powers since these will be needed to gain the Golden Fleece for Jason, but the key phrase, which gives her character in a nutshell, is 'awe-inspiring with magic power and maidenhood': it encompasses Medea's dual nature and indicates how Juno might be able to make Medea's magic powers work for her and her protégé Jason. Since love is to be exploited for a particular purpose beyond the level of individuals, Medea becomes an object of divine will.

In Apollonius Rhodius, Hera and Athena visit Cypris (Aphrodite) to ask the aid of her son Eros, who is found playing with Ganymedes: Cypris beguiles Eros with the promise of a wonderful ball (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.6–166). Thus he is induced to pierce Medea with an arrow, which causes her to fall in love with Jason and sets the subsequent train of events in motion. In contrast to this rather light-hearted setting, a twofold intervention of the goddesses themselves is necessary in Valerius Flaccus, first of Juno and then of Venus (both disguised as humans close to Medea); they have to work hard to convince Medea, who is determined to observe what is required by feelings of loyalty and shame (*pietas* and *pudor*), recalling the initial considerations of the Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

³⁴ *sola animo Medea subit, mens omnis in una / virgine, nocturnis qua nulla potentior aris. / illius ad fremitus sparsosque per avia sucos / sidera fixa pavent et avi stupet orbita Solis. / mutat agros fluviumque vias, suos alligat ingens / cuncta sopor, recoquit fessos aetate parentes / datque alias sine lege colus. hanc maxima Circe / terrificis mirata modis, hanc advena Phrixus / quamvis Atracio lunam spumare veneno / sciret et Haemoniis agitari cantibus umbras. / ergo opibus magicis et virginitate tremendam / Iuno duci sociam coniungere quaerit Achivo. / non aliam tauris videt et nascentibus armis / quippe parem nec quae medio stet in agmine flammae, / nullum mente nefas, nullos horrescere visus: / quid si caecus amor saevusque accesserit ignis?* Translation from Mozley (n. 32), slightly modified.

Eventually, however, the pressure of the goddesses has an effect upon Medea (7.300–26):

The goddess [i.e. Venus] bids her follow and waits for her in the very gateway. Even as . . . , not otherwise fears the maiden when she is left alone and casts her eyes around and refuses to proceed further. Yet on the other hand cruel passion and Jason's danger urge her on, and the words she has heard [i.e. when Venus in disguise spoke to her] gain force within her breast. Alas, what is she to do? She knows full well that she is heartlessly betraying her father to a stranger, and now she foresees the fame of her own crimes, and wearies heaven above and Tartarus beneath with her complaints; she beats upon the ground, and murmuring into her clutching hands calls on the Queen of Night and Dis to bring her aid by granting death, and to send him who is the cause of all her madness down with her to destruction; and now she fiercely demands Pelias [the king who ordered Jason to travel to Colchis], who vented his wrath so murderously upon the young man; often again she is resolved to promise her skill to the unhappy man, then again refuses, and is determined rather to perish with him; and she cries that never will she yield to so base a passion nor proffer powerful aid to someone she does not know; and on her bed she stays outstretched, when once again she seemed to be summoned, and on their smitten hinges the doors clanged. When therefore she felt that she was being overcome by some strange power, and that all shame's former promptings were torn away, she sought her secret bower to find the mightiest aid she knew for the captain of the Haemonian ship [i.e. the Argo].³⁵

According to this passage, Medea only makes a move to support Jason after she has been 'overcome by some strange power' and the admonitions of her shame are scattered. This is Valerius Flaccus' epic way of describing Medea's conflict and indicating that she resists for a long time and can only be brought to do what goes against her own moral standards by a powerful force working upon her. This includes a statement on the issue of Medea's guilt, as the poet indicates that she has committed a deed because of which she could be regarded as guilty objectively, but for which she does not have full responsibility since she did not decide to go through with it voluntarily. This contrasts,

³⁵ *illa sequi iubet et portis expectat in ipsis. / . . . ceu . . . / . . . / . . . / . . . : / haud aliter deserta pavet perque omnia circum / fert oculos tectisque negat procedere virgo. / contra saevus amor, contra periturus Iason / urget et audita cresunt in pectore voces. / heu quid agat? videt externo se prodere patrem / dura viro, famam scelerum iamque ipsa suorum / prospicit et questu superos questuque fatigat / Tartara. pulsat humum manibusque immurmurat uncis / noctis eram Ditemque ciens, succurrere tandem / morte velint ipsunq; simul demittere leto / quem propter furit. absentem saevissima poscit / nunc Pelian, tanta iuvenem qui perderet ira: / saepe suas misero promittere destinat artes, / dein negat atque una potius decernit obire; / ac neque tam turpi cessuram semper amori / proclamat neque opem ignoto viresque daturam; / atque toro proiecta manet, cum visa vocari / rursus et impulso sonuerunt cardine postes. / ergo ubi nescioquo penitus se numine vinci / sentit et abscisum quicquid pudor ante monebat, / tum thalami penetrabile petit quae maxima norat / auxilia Haemoniae quaerens pro rege carinae.* Translation from Mozley (n. 32), slightly modified.

for instance, with Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, who clearly sees that she is about to choose to commit a 'crime' (Ov. *Met.* 7.69–71).

Valerius Flaccus thus uses the figure of Medea to discuss the question of the reasons and motivations behind developments and human actions, which can be hard to understand and come to terms with. As an omniscient narrator, he combines the insight into Medea's thoughts and emotions with the presentation of the course of events: despite her special characteristics, Medea paradigmatically appears as a human being who is governed by supernatural forces.

Shortly after Valerius Flaccus, the historian Tacitus introduces the poet Curiatius Maternus in his *Dialogus de oratoribus* (*Dialogue on Orators*), among whose dramatic works a tragedy *Medea* is mentioned (Tac. *Dial.* 3.4). Apart from the fact that this treatment of the myth is likely to have had a political dimension with a critical focus, like other dramas by Curiatius Maternus referred to in the same context, nothing is known about the portrayal of the eponymous protagonist and the choice of the section of the myth dramatized in this version.

This shows that, after Valerius Flaccus, the history of Medea in Latin literature does not come to an end, but his is the last extended depiction of the story in the classical period. Subsequent treatments in later eras, in Neo-Latin and then in the vernacular literatures, often base themselves on the spectrum of narrative versions and characterizations of the protagonist provided in classical Latin literature, with the influence of Seneca being most prominent. However, exploring the field of the reception of the Medea story after antiquity would require a study of its own.

This chronological overview of the various appearances within classical Latin literature of what is essentially the same mythical story has shown the sophistication and creativity of Roman writers: Medea, a figure from Greek myth, is transformed and integrated into Latin literature to such an extent that the story is affected by developments within literature in Rome and becomes an element in a web of intertextual relations. Although the basic elements of the myth had been established in Greece, and Roman writers were exposed to the influential versions of Euripides and Apollonius Rhodius, those writers developed further variants – generally also in relation to Roman predecessors – and continued to find additional aspects in the narrative about Medea: the character of the 'Roman' Medea, variously shaped, can be a paradigmatic model of different modes of behaviour, as she is presented as a

strong personality with, from a Roman perspective, almost male qualities, an innocent maiden, a lover, a caring mother, a disappointed and abandoned wife, a magician and trickster, or a fierce avenger. The poets obviously struck a chord with the interests of the Roman public by their different nuances; the reception and the long-lasting literary tradition indicate that the Medea story became an established part of Roman cultural memory.

While, owing to the lacunose transmission, one cannot always be entirely sure what is original to a Latin writer or which particular sources each of them may have used, it has become clear that Medea in Latin texts can be 'proud of spirit and indomitable' (*ferox invictaque*), but that there is much more to Medea in Roman literature than Horace's prescriptive remark may lead us to assume at first glance.

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