

Heroides 6

HYPsipYLE TO JASON

Jason was the son of Aeson (who was a king in Thessaly, in northern Greece), but Aeson's kingdom (Iolcus) was taken from him by his half-brother Pelias. When he grew to manhood, Jason came to ask for the kingdom back, and Pelias agreed to restore it, if Jason would get for him the Golden Fleece. This was the fleece of a mythical golden ram, which belonged to a fierce oriental king (Aeetes, who lived in remote Colchis, at the east end of the Black Sea), and which was guarded by a huge, unsleeping serpent. Jason sailed off on that very dangerous quest on the ship *Argo* with fifty heroes as companions (called the Argonauts). On the way they stopped off at the island of Lemnos. There the women had killed their husbands, who had rejected them (in one version because they neglected Aphrodite, who made their bodies smell by way of punishment) and had taken up with some female captives taken from nearby Thrace instead. The Lemnian women killed the captives and all the males on the island, except for the unmarried Hypsipyle, who secretly saved her father's life and smuggled him away to safety. He was king Thoas, and as his daughter she had been made queen. The women of Lemnos had been without men for a while now and needed to ensure their survival by means of children, so they gave the Argonauts a warm welcome. According to Ovid, Hypsipyle married Jason and became pregnant by him. After a lengthy stay he had to sail off on his quest, before she gave birth to twin boys. Once the Argonauts reached Colchis, Aeetes agreed to let Jason have the Fleece if he performed some tasks – yoking the bronze-footed, fire-breathing bulls of Mars, ploughing a field with them and sowing some dragon's teeth (from which ferocious armed men would grow). This too was meant to be the end of Jason, but Aeetes' daughter (the beautiful and powerful witch Medea) fell in love with him and was persuaded by him to help him, thereby betraying her father. Her help was vital. She gave him a magic drug (so the bulls' fiery breath could not harm him) and told him how to deal with the armed men (he threw a rock among them and they killed each other fighting over it). Even though Jason had performed

the tasks, Aeetes wouldn't give him the Fleece. So Medea used her magic to put the guardian snake to sleep and Jason grabbed the Fleece. He sailed back to Thessaly with it, taking Medea with him and marrying her on the way. She did him another important service on the journey back. She had her brother Apsyrtus with her, and when Aeetes pursued them, she killed the boy, hacked him to pieces and scattered them around, so Aeetes would stop to pick them up and they could escape. Jason and Medea got back to Thessaly safely (avoiding Lemnos), and it is when Hypsipyle hears news of all this that she writes this letter to Jason.

From the goddess Oenone we are now taken back to a human letter-writer. Although there are some similarities between this epistle and the last one, there are also distinct differences. With regard to situation, Hypsipyle has two children by her husband. Rather than returning with another wife before her eyes, her man has sailed off to another woman and gone out of her life totally, never to be seen by her again, and this time the rival is portrayed as much more sinister. There are differences in personality too. Hypsipyle is less intelligent and subtle than Oenone, and although she tries to stay in control and maintain her dignity at the start, that breaks down, and she humiliates herself, becomes increasingly angry and is especially venomous at the end.

I hear you've sailed back safely to Thessaly's shores,
a rich man, thanks to the Golden Fleece.
I congratulate you, not that you make it easy –
you should have written to me with news of that.
Maybe you wanted to stop off at my kingdom (which I
pledged to you), but didn't have the right winds;
but, however unfavourable the wind, people do write:
I'm Hypsipyle, I deserved to be sent a letter.
Why did I hear, before getting a letter from you, a rumour
that Mars' sacred bulls were yoked,
the dragon's teeth were sown and produced a crop of
warriors who didn't need you to slaughter them,
and the ram's Golden Fleece (which was guarded by a sleepless
serpent) was bravely seized by you?
Oh, if I could say to those who doubt this, 'He wrote me
this himself; I'd be really somebody!
Why complain of my dilatory husband's neglect of his duty?
If I'm still yours, then you're very kind to me.
I'm told that some barbaric witch came with you
and shares your bed (which was promised to me).
Lovers are credulous. I hope that people will say that
I was rash and wrongfully accused my husband.
A stranger from Thessaly came here recently. He'd
scarcely set foot in my palace when I asked him:
'How's my Jason?' He was embarrassed, at a loss,

his eyes fixed on the floor in front of him.
 At once I jumped up, tore the front of my dress in grief and shouted:
 'Is he alive, or must I now join him in death?'
 'He's alive,' he said. Lovers are fearful. I made him swear
 by the gods, and even then hardly believed you lived. 30
 I calmed down and began to ask about your exploits;
 he said Mars' bronze-footed bulls had ploughed,
 the dragon's teeth had been sown in the earth as seeds
 and suddenly armed warriors grew from them,
 earthborn men who died fighting each other 35
 and lived out their lives in a single day;
 and the snake had been conquered. I asked again
 if Jason was alive, hoping and fearing in turn.
 He told me all about you, eagerly running on, and
 in his naivety revealed something that wounded me. 40
 Ah, what about your promise of fidelity, the bonds of marriage
 and the wedding-torch (that should rather light my pyre)?
 We didn't have a furtive affair: the marriage-gods were there –
 Juno and Hymen with garlands on his head.
 No, it wasn't Juno or Hymen but a grim and bloody Fury 45
 that carried the ill-omened wedding-torch before me.
 What did the Argonauts and the Argo have to do with me?
 Why did your helmsman steer the ship here?
 The ram's spectacular Golden Fleece wasn't here,
 and Aeetes didn't have his capital on Lemnos. 50
 At first I was determined to drive off the armed strangers with
 my female fighters, but an evil fate drew me on.
 The women of Lemnos know all too well how to defeat men;
 I should have defended my land with such brave troops.
 You got help from my city, I took you into my home and heart, 55
 and you stayed while two summers and winters sped by.
 At harvest-time in the third year, pressured into sailing away,
 you said to me in a suitable flood of tears:
 'I'm being forced to go, Hypsipyle. Provided fate lets me return,
 I leave as your husband, and I'll always be your husband. 60
 But I pray that the child of mine in your womb
 survives and we both become parents.'
 After that, I remember, the tears ran down on to your
 lying lips and you couldn't speak any more.
 You were the last of the crew to board the sacred Argo, 65
 which flew off, with its sails billowing in the wind.
 The speeding keel churned the blue waves;
 you gazed at the land, I at the water.
 I rushed off to a tower with an all-round view of the sea.

My face and chest were drenched with tears. 70
 I looked out through my tears, and my eyes (obliging
 my loving heart) saw further than usual.
 Also bear in mind my faithful prayers and fearful vows,
 which (as you're safe) I must repay, despite everything.
 Should I repay my vows, for Medea to benefit by them? 75
 I'm sickened, filled with rage and love.
 Should I make offerings at temples for the survival of a man
 who's left me, and sacrifice in thanks for my loss?
 Certainly I never felt secure and was always afraid your father
 would choose a bride for you from some Greek city. 80
 I feared Greek women – the damage came from a barbarian slut;
 I was wounded by an unexpected enemy.
 You're not captivated by her beauty or her qualities: she knows
 spells and gathers dread herbs with an enchanted knife.
 She applies herself to bringing down the reluctant moon from its 85
 course and shrouding the sun's chariot in darkness;
 she halts winding rivers, stops the flow of the water,
 she makes woods and rocks come alive and move around;
 she wanders among tombs, with her hair and robe unbound,
 and gathers specific bones from still warm pyres; 90
 she curses people in their absence, pierces wax images of them,
 driving slender needles into their poor hearts,
 and does things I'd rather not know. Character and beauty
 should inspire love; it's wrong to use magic potions.
 Can you hug *her*, enjoy a quiet night's sleep and not be 95
 afraid when alone in the same bedroom with her?
 Clearly she has tamed you as she did Mars' bulls, and she
 charms you with the sorcery used on the savage serpent.
 What's more, she's keen to be attached to the exploits of you
 and your men, diminishing her husband's glory. 100
 And one of Pelias' supporters imputes your feats to her
 magic (and has followers to believe him),
 saying: 'It wasn't Jason, it was Medea from Colchis who
 took down the ram's Golden Fleece from the tree.'
 Your mother (ask her advice!) and your father don't approve 105
 of a daughter-in-law who comes from the frozen north.
 Medea should look for a husband in her own area – by the Tanais,
 in marshy Scythia or on the remote banks of the Phasis.
 Fickle Jason, more changeable than a breeze in spring,
 why does your pledge to me count for nothing? 110
 You left as my husband – why haven't you returned as that?
 Let me be your wife now you're back, as I was when you went.
 If you're impressed by high birth and royal names, note that I

am famed as the daughter of Thoas, descended from Minos;
 my grandmother was Ariadne, wife of Bacchus, who transformed 115
 her and her crown into one of the brightest constellations.
 My wedding-gift to you will be Lemnos, with its fertile soil,
 and slaves (you can have me among them).
 And now I've given birth too; congratulate us both!
 I loved being pregnant by *you*, Jason. 120
 I was also lucky in having twins, yes two
 babies, with the help of the goddess of childbirth.
 If you ask who they're like, they're the image of you,
 just like you, apart from not knowing how to lie.
 I very nearly had them carried to you as envoys for me, 125
 but the thought of their savage stepmother stopped me.
 Medea frightened me. Medea's worse than a stepmother.
 Medea can turn her hand to any crime.
 Would my boys be spared by the woman who could hack up her
 brother and scatter the bits all over the countryside? 130
 But they say you prefer *her* to your wife Hypsipyle.
 Oh, you're insane, unbalanced by Colchian witchcraft.
 That girl committing adultery with you was despicable:
 we were joined together, you and I, in a faithful marriage.
 She betrayed her father, I snatched mine from death; 135
 she abandoned Colchis, I'm still on my Lemnos.
 But so what, if a dutiful daughter's going to lose out to some criminal,
 who won herself a husband with a dowry of treachery?
 I condemn what the women did here, but I'm not surprised:
 such resentment turns even great cowards into warriors. 140
 Tell me, if you and your crew had been driven here by adverse
 winds and you'd entered my harbour (as you should have done),
 and I'd gone to meet you with the two babies (no doubt
 making you pray for the earth to open up and swallow you),
 how would you have faced me and the boys, you criminal? 145
 What sort of death would your perfidy have deserved?
 You would have been safe and sound – I'd have seen to that –
 not because you deserve it, but because I'm gentle.
 As for your mistress, I'd have personally splashed her blood all over
 my face and yours (which I no longer see thanks to her magic). 150
 I'd have been a Medea to Medea! But if just Jupiter
 on high looks at all favourably on my prayers,
 let that successor to my bed be made to feel the agony
 that I do by someone with a code of conduct like hers.
 I'm deserted, a wife and mother of two, so let her lose 155
 her husband after she's had two children,
 and not keep for long the man she's stolen, and leave him worse off,

and go into exile, searching everywhere for refuge!
 Let her be as cruel to her children and her husband
 as she was to her brother and her poor father! 160
 Unable to escape by land or sea, let her try the air, and
 wander helpless, hopeless, red with the blood she's shed!
 I was cheated out of my marriage, so that's my prayer.
 Live on, man and wife, in your doomed relationship!

This is real tragedy here. After helping Jason, marrying him and becoming pregnant by him, Hypsipyle has been forgotten by him, and supplanted by a rival, an inferior and ominous rival in her eyes. She has had no word from him, and will not hear from him or see him again ever. On top of that there is more misery ahead for her. The women of Lemnos eventually found out that she spared her father and wanted to kill her for her treachery. In one tradition they murdered him and sold her into slavery; in another she fled but was captured by pirates and sold. In either case she ended up as the slave of king Lycurgus in Sparta. In addition to her humiliating loss of status there was more danger for her there. She was ordered to look after the king's child, but at one point was distracted and the child was killed by a snake. She was very nearly put to death for that, until another king intervened, saving her life and winning for her a return to Lemnos with her two sons.

The bulk of this epistle consists of appeals to Jason. It is sad to see a queen reduced to this, and it is especially sad that these appeals never were likely to work, as the queen does not realize how despicable a person Jason is (he later goes on to drop Medea and his two children by her and marries a Greek princess, because that will bring him more power, influence and money). At 1–8 she begins with calm remonstrance, trying to make him feel embarrassed for not coming to Lemnos or writing. She combines that with disarming congratulations and an excuse for his non-appearance (5f.), so as not to be too heavy, but also a gentle reminder that she deserved better treatment, as Hypsipyle (his wife and benefactress), so that he will experience guilt and pity her. However, the fact that he has not even bothered to write makes it clear that he does not care for her at all; and someone as self-centred as Jason will not be touched by remorse or feel sympathy for her. At 9–16 between plaintive references to the absence of a letter she lists his exploits, dwelling on them in celebration and suggesting that she still relishes the news of her brave man's great personal achievements. But poignancy is wasted on him, and he will know how vital Medea was to his success; and Hypsipyle spoils all this flattery at 97f. by openly ascribing it to her. At 17–22 reminders that they are married and (in 19f.) an attempt to shame him and turn him off Medea (as a 'barbaric witch') are toned down by humility in 18 and an easy way out for Jason at 21f. However, apart from the fact that it would not be a good idea to show weakness like this, the polygamist is obviously not at all concerned about their marriage, and would not be embarrassed by his infidelity, and has actually found Medea and her magic very useful to him rather than repellent. As you can

discover for yourself, Hypsipyle continues like this for most of the rest of the letter, running on and on with such patent, humiliating and feeble appeals, vainly using the same ploys with the same aims.

Her emotional state adds to the futility, as it leads her to undermine her pleas thoughtlessly. At the start of the epistle she is trying to control herself, but the more she writes (and mulls over the situation) the more animated and angry she becomes. Her continuing love for Jason is clear throughout, but she is incensed about Medea, who intrudes as early as line 19. Strong emotions break out at 41ff. and there is an even more irascible outburst at 75ff. From line 75 on Medea and the queen's hatred and fear of her dominate the letter, and giving vent to her feelings makes Hypsipyle write things that would have alienated Jason (see 97f., 124, 132, 139f. and 149f.). Then in an emotional crescendo Hypsipyle loses control totally at 151ff., where she ends with savage curses (cursing Jason as well as Medea) that represent no sort of appeal to her husband but would completely subvert all her earlier entreaty and scare him off.

There is tragic irony too, in the whole letter (aimed at getting back as terrible a husband as Jason) and in Hypsipyle's great sadness at the departure of such a person (67ff.). It is also grimly ironical when she complains of his treachery and wishes exile on Medea, as she herself will soon suffer exile for betraying the cause of the Lemnian women. And by the end of the letter she has degenerated into something as bad as her hated rival: after calling Medea a barbarian and a murderess, who curses people and dooms them to death, at 149ff. Hypsipyle herself imagines splashing Medea's blood all over her face and Jason's, and she herself curses Medea and dooms her and Jason.

So far we have been concentrating on the emotional impact, but there is also an important intellectual element, as usual in Ovidian poetry, and the lines affect the head as well as the heart. Sophisticated readers who know the story in full and are acquainted with earlier treatment of it will find much more in *Heroides* 6 and will see beyond the obvious pathos to more subtle aspects. There is an admixture of cleverness, even some wit and humour, and much of literary interest as well.

There is ingenuity in the setting for this epistle: Ovid makes Hypsipyle complain about the disregard of her marriage and threaten her treacherous husband and his new woman on the island of Lemnos, where because of conjugal violations her subjects killed their unfaithful spouses and the female captives they took up with instead. Ovid has also been adroit in making Jason here abandon the queen and his two children for someone more helpful to him when he is married to Hypsipyle (which he is not in other accounts) because that makes him act in keeping here with what he will do with his later wife Medea and his two children by her, so that there is a sort of pre-echo of his coming maltreatment of his Colchian bride. As well as neat symmetry there is also contrast, as in *Her.* 6 we see not the standard picture of Medea as the wronged wife enraged with her rival, but Medea as the rival, and Hypsipyle as the wronged wife enraged with her rival. And Ovid has been clever in the curse on Medea that he ascribes to Hypsipyle at 151ff., as much of it comes true later on.

There are also some facetious touches for the detached reader to appreciate. When you read *Heroides* 12 and learn how exactly the story continues you will be

able to see more of this kind of thing in this poem, but some of it will be apparent to you now. For example, at 79f. actually Hypsipyle's fears about Jason having a Greek bride *are* justified, as Jason will take a Greek wife (after Medea). In connection with 107f. it really *would* be much better for Medea to look for a husband in her own area (rather than marrying Jason). At 115f. rather quaintly Hypsipyle brags that her granny is a star! In connection with 136–40 she prides herself on still being on Lemnos (but she won't be for long) and condemns the Lemnian women (when she will have more grounds for complaint against them soon). See if you can find more instances of this on your own (consider, for instance, the wit in 151 and the pictures conjured up of the great heroes at 51ff. and of Medea at 95f.). This humour is most often dark and grim, so as not to be too jarring amid all the tragedy.

From a literary point of view, Ovid here will naturally have been looking to an episode in a very famous and influential predecessor and will have expected his readers to have an eye to that too, so that they could spot the differences in the Ovidian account. In the third century BC a Greek called Apollonius of Rhodes wrote an epic on Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. In that the Lemnos encounter was essentially a brief, light-hearted fling enjoyed by both Hypsipyle and Jason, a matter of sexual attraction and pleasure rather than deep passion. Here is Jason's departure in Apollonius (1.886ff.):

... as Jason was leaving, Hypsipyle took hold of
his hands and prayed, in tears at losing him:
'Go. May the gods bring you and your comrades home
again unharmed with the Golden Fleece for the king,
granting your dearest wish. This island and my 890
father's sceptre will be waiting for you, if after you
return from Colchis you want to come back here.
You could easily collect a host of followers from
other cities. But you won't want to do that,
I don't foresee that happening myself. 895
But remember Hypsipyle when you're far away and after
you get home. And leave me your instructions (which I'll
gladly carry out) if heaven allows me to become a mother.'
Jason appreciated her words and said in reply:
'Hypsipyle, may the gods make all that turn out well. 900
But don't get your hopes up about me, because it's
enough for me to live in my own country, with Pelias'
permission, if only the gods set me free from my ordeals.
But if I'm not fated to return to the land of Greece
from my distant voyage, and you give birth to a boy, 905
send him when he grows up to Iolcus in Thessaly
to console my parents for their grief over me (if he
finds them still alive), and to care for them at their
own hearth and home well away from king Pelias.'

With that he boarded the ship first. The other heroes
 followed him on board, sat down at their benches and took
 hold of the oars. The helmsman released the mooring-cables,
 which were attached to a sea-beaten rock. Then they
 struck the water vigorously with their long oars.

Apollonius' queen there (as throughout the episode) is a gentle character: she is upset but resigned, tells Jason to go, wishes him well and accepts that he probably won't return to her. She is also only possibly pregnant by him, not married to him and not passionately in love with him (in fact he has only been with her for a couple of days, not for years). Ovid's Hypsipyle is very different from that in personality and circumstances, as our poet goes for a version that is sad and bitter, and turns the queen at the end into the single most vicious and violent heroine in the *Heroides*. If you compare the above lines with the description of the actual parting in Ovid (57ff.), you will find many significant discrepancies which highlight the pathos in the Latin poem. Also of interest is the fact that we get a new point of view for the episode, as here only in extant literature are we shown things from Hypsipyle's perspective; and nowhere else in what has survived does she learn about Medea or write to Jason.

Hypsipyle is queen of a society of women without men, and the male poet Apollonius represents them as vulnerable and in need of males. All of this recalls the Amazons, mythical female warriors who lived on the borders of the known world. They generally shunned and hated men, using them only for breeding purposes, then killing or mutilating any male babies that they produced, while raising female ones as fighters, and removing their right breasts, so they could better handle a bow and a spear unimpeded (hence supposedly the Greek name A-mazon = 'No-breast'). In literature they are presented as bizarre, inferior and barbaric, because they invert traditional Greek norms for women by having sex as they please, ruling themselves and going off hunting and fighting, rather than being chaste, submissive to men and staying at home and looking after their family. Many heroes fought them, and always beat them, showing the triumph of (male-centred) Greek civilization over barbarism.

One of the most memorable Amazons was another queen without a man – Penthesilea. Quintus Smyrnaeus in book 1 of his *Posthomerica* presents a stirring and moving picture of Penthesilea and her Amazons taking part late on in the Trojan War on the side of Priam. When she arrived at Troy, the Trojans flocked out to see her and were amazed at her beauty, which was both glorious and terrible, and at her entrancing smile. At dawn the next day she rode into battle with her Amazons, leading a great horde of Trojans. Lured on by Doom, she was relentless, driving the Greeks in terror before her, hurling spears and hacking down men with her huge battle-axe. But then Achilles confronted her. He disdainfully reminded her of his great prowess and told her that her final hour had come. Then (at 1.592ff.):

So saying, he charged, brandishing in his powerful hand
 the long, murderous spear made for him by Chiron,

and quickly wounded warlike Penthesilea above
her right breast. Her dark blood spurted out. 595
Immediately the strength left her body and she
dropped the great battle-axe from her hand. Black night
clouded her eyes, and she felt agony deep inside her.
But even so she was still breathing and saw her enemy
now about to drag her from her swift horse. 600

As she wondered whether to draw her sword and fight on or yield, Achilles
impaled her and her horse with his spear (at 1.619ff.):

... Achilles' eager spear went right through
Penthesilea and her magnificent horse. 620
She quickly fell to the ground and her death. But there was
nothing unbecoming as she tumbled in the dust, nothing shameful
to bring discredit to her fine body. She lay on her swift horse,
stretched out face-down, transfixed by the long spear, convulsing.

When the Trojans saw that she had been struck down they fled to Troy in terror,
weeping for her. Achilles stood over her and spoke exulting words. Then (1.654ff.):

So saying, Achilles wrenched his ashen spear out of
the swift horse and dread Penthesilea. They both 655
gasped their life away, killed by the same lance.
He pulled from her head the helmet that glittered
like the rays of the sun or Zeus' radiant lightning.
As she sprawled there in the dust and blood, the face
revealed beneath her lovely eyebrows was beautiful, 660
even though she was dead. The Greeks thronged around and
were amazed when they saw her, looking like a blessed god.
She lay in her armour on the ground like Zeus' daughter
Artemis sleeping, when that relentless huntress is tired
from shooting arrows at swift lions on long mountain-ridges. 665
Aphrodite crowned in splendour, mate of mighty Ares,
personally made her a wonder of beauty even in death,
so that the noble Achilles would feel some pain too.
Many of the Greeks prayed they might have a wife
like her to sleep with when they returned home. 670
Achilles was filled with endless grief because he had
killed her and not taken her as his glorious bride
back to Phthia, that land of fine horses (for in stature
and beauty she was flawless, like an immortal).

For more on Amazons see Lefkowitz 15ff. and Blok.

Heroides 7

DIDO TO AENEAS

Placed right after *Heroides 6*, this epistle forms a natural pair with it: in both poems we find a queen who gave hospitality and help to a voyaging hero and had an amatory relationship with him but subsequently left by her lover, who sailed off to success on his quest. But Ovid rings the changes and demonstrates his versatility by producing here a different tone in his treatment of the same basic situation (see further below on all the irreverent levity). Monotony is also avoided by means of divergence in points of detail (e.g. this time the hero is a moral man, who has not yet departed; there is no other woman involved; and the outcome is dissimilar, as this heroine goes on to commit suicide very soon). You should be able to spot further differences for yourself as you read *Heroides 7*.

Virgil had recently depicted the love affair between Dido and Aeneas in the opening books of his famous epic the *Aeneid*, where the Trojan meets her, tells her of his adventures so far and enters into a doomed relationship with her. Ovid here assumes readers' knowledge of that account. At the fall of Troy, when further resistance was futile, Aeneas (son of Venus) escaped from the burning city, accompanied by his wife and his young son (Ascanius), and carrying on his shoulders his aged father (Anchises), who held the statues of the gods of Troy. He had agreed to meet with their servants at a shrine outside Troy, but when he got there he found that in the haste and confusion his wife had disappeared. Distracted, he rushed back into Troy to try to find her, and a mysterious phantom of her appeared to him and informed him that it was the will of heaven that she remain there. When he rejoined his father and son outside Troy, he found many other Trojan survivors gathered there. He sailed off with them as their leader, seeking a new home, and for seven years they roamed the Mediterranean Sea in their search for it. During that time Anchises died, and it was revealed to them that the promised land for them lay in Italy, in Latium, the area around the river Tiber where Rome was eventually built.

Italy proved elusive, but the Trojan fleet was finally nearing Latium when their arch-enemy the goddess Juno caused a massive storm, which drove the ships all the way to north Africa. There they were given a warm welcome by Dido, queen of the rising city of Carthage. She had been very happily married to Sychaeus, but her evil brother Pygmalion had killed him in the hope of acquiring his wealth. Dido and her supporters had fled with the treasure and landed in Africa, where she founded her splendid city, surrounded by enemies. She had sworn to remain faithful to Sychaeus, but fell deeply in love with Aeneas, because (to ensure that the Trojan was safe at Carthage) Venus sent her other son (Cupid) to inspire an irresistible passion for Aeneas in the queen. Then Juno, hoping to capitalize on the situation and keep the hated hero from Latium, engineered the start of an affair. When the Trojans and Carthaginians were out hunting together, she caused a storm, and Aeneas and Dido fled for shelter to the same cave, and began their relationship there. Feeling guilty, the queen called it a marriage, although there was no formal wedding, and Aeneas did not view himself as her husband.

At first they were happy together, but a rejected suitor (the African chieftain Iarbas) complained to Jupiter about their liaison, and Jupiter sent down Mercury to remind the Trojan of his fated mission to found a new settlement in Latium and to order him to leave. Terrified by the god, Aeneas decided that he had to obey the divine command, but he was in agony over Dido. He got his men to prepare the fleet secretly, while he waited for the best moment to approach her. But she found out first, attacked him for treacherously abandoning his wife, angrily rejected his defence and stormed off. But then, as she watched the fleet's preparations, the love-sick queen felt that she had to try to win him over again. It is at this point that Ovid has her write this letter and send it to him (in Virgil she sends her sister Anna, who had encouraged her to begin the affair with the Trojan, to make a final, futile appeal). Aeneas was visited by Mercury again and ordered to leave once more. When he did obediently sail off, Dido committed suicide, mounting a funeral pyre and throwing herself on his sword (which he had given her as a gift). Aeneas did settle in Latium, and eventually from his line came Romulus and Remus, who founded Rome.

This is like the song of a dying white swan
that has collapsed in the moist grass by the river Meander.
I'm not writing to you in the hope that pleas of mine could
move you – a god's against this letter I've started.
But as I've wasted my kindness, reputation, fidelity and 5
chastity for nothing, wasting words doesn't matter.
Are you determined to go nonetheless and abandon miserable Dido?
Will your ship and your pledge to me both be whisked away by the wind?
Aeneas, are you determined to cast off your mooring-ropes and your wife
in search of a kingdom in Italy (you know not where)? 10
Doesn't new Carthage touch you or its rising ramparts
or the sceptre of sovereignty ceded to you?

You shun what you've done, look for things to do, leaving the land
 you've found and ranging the world to find another.
 Suppose you find it – who will hand it over to you as yours? 15
 Who will give their territory to strangers to occupy?
 No doubt there's another lover waiting for you, another Dido,
 and there's another pledge for you to make, and break.
 When are you likely to found a city as splendid as Carthage
 and survey your subjects from your citadel on high? 20
 Even if your prayers all come true and don't keep you waiting,
 where will you get a wife to love you like me?
 I burn for you, like candles of wax coated with sulphur,
 like incense devoutly placed on a smoking altar.
 Aeneas is before my eyes all the time I'm awake; 25
 at night in sleep my thoughts return to Aeneas.
 True, he's ungrateful and indifferent to my kindness;
 if I had any sense, I'd want to be rid of him.
 But I don't hate Aeneas, though what he plans is wrong;
 I resent his treachery, but resentfully love him more. 30
 Venus, spare your daughter-in-law; Cupid, embrace your
 brutal brother and make him a soldier of yours.
 I started it (I'm not ashamed), so let me do the loving,
 and let him be around for me to care about.
 I'm deluded, that's a delusive fantasy I'm conjuring up; 35
 he doesn't have Venus' temperament.
 No, you were born from rocks and mountains and oaks
 growing on lofty crags and from savage wild animals
 or a sea like the one you see here churned up by gales again –
 and yet you're ready to run away across these hostile waves. 40
 Where to? Through a storm. (I hope that ally can stop you for me.)
 See how the East Wind heaves up the seething water!
 Let me owe to the gales the favour I'd rather owe to you;
 the wind and the waves are more just than you.
 To be fair to you (*why* am I being fair?), I'm not worth dying for 45
 while you run far away from me across the sea.
 You're indulging a very, very costly hatred,
 if death means nothing, provided you're free from me.
 Soon the winds will fall, the waves will be flat and level
 and the god Triton will skim the sea on his blue-green horses. 50
 I wish that you too were changeable, like the winds!
 And you will be, unless you're harder than oak.
 As if you didn't know what the frenzied ocean can do!
 Why trust it, after all your bad experiences at sea?
 Even if the sea grows invitingly calm and you cast off, 55
 that immense expanse of water holds many terrors.

Those who've broken their word shouldn't brave the sea:
 that's a place where perjury gets punished,
 especially when a lover's been wronged, as Venus, the Cupids' mother,
 was born naked from the waves at Cythera, they say. 60
 I'm afraid to harm as you harm, or to destroy my destroyer;
 I'm frightened my enemy may be shipwrecked and drown.
 I pray you survive, as that will destroy you better than dying:
 instead of that you'll be well-known for causing my death.
 Come on, imagine you're caught in a violent tornado (don't 65
 let this be an omen!) – what will go through your mind?
 Your thoughts will turn at once to your perjured, lying tongue
 and Dido forced to die by Trojan treachery.
 Before your eyes will stand the spectre of the wife you deceived,
 miserable, bloodstained, her hair unbound in grief. 70
 What makes it worth having to say then, 'I deserve it, forgive me!'
 (thinking the falling thunderbolts are hurled at you)?
 Wait a little for the sea's savagery and yours to abate:
 a safe voyage will be a great reward for delaying.
 You may not care about that, but spare the boy Ascanius! 75
 It's enough for you to be famous for killing *me*.
 What have the boy and Troy's gods done to deserve such an end?
 Will the sea engulf the statues you saved from the flames?
 But you don't have them, you traitor. You didn't carry your father
 and their images from Troy, as you boast to me. 80
 You're all lies, and you didn't start the deceit with me.
 I'm not the first to be hurt by you.
 If anyone wonders where handsome Ascanius' mother is –
 she died, alone, abandoned by her brutal husband.
 You told me this, which should have warned me. I deserve the pain 85
 as punishment (which won't be as great as my mistake).
 I've no doubt in my mind that your gods condemn you:
 you've been tossed at sea and on land for seven winters.
 You were cast ashore, and I gave you a welcome and a safe anchorage;
 I'd hardly heard your name when I gave you my throne. 90
 But I wish I'd been content to be no more obliging than that
 and the rumour about our love making had been buried.
 The damage was done on the day when that dark rainstorm's sudden
 downpour drove us into a sloping cave.
 I heard a sound, and thought the nymphs had cried out, 95
 but it was the Furies signalling my doom.
 My lost virtue, punish me! Sychaeus' violated. . . .
 to which I'm going, ah, full of shame.
 In a marble shrine covered in front with foliage and white wool
 I have a statue of Sychaeus, which I regard as sacred. 100

I heard myself summoned from there by his well-known voice
 four times; he said himself faintly, 'Dido, come!'

I am coming, I'm coming right now (I'm bound to you in marriage),
 but slowly, because of shame at my offence.

Pardon my crime: I wasn't deceived by someone unworthy, 105
 thanks to him that lapse of mine is not something hateful.
 He has a divine mother and dutifully carried his aged father,
 so I hoped he'd do the right thing and stay on as my husband.

If I had to do wrong, the wrong I did was for a respectable reason:
 if only he was faithful, I'd have nothing to regret. 110

My destiny follows the same course right up to the end,
 still with me during the final hours of my life.
 My husband was cut down at the altar inside our home,
 and my brother enjoys the profits of that terrible crime.

Driven into exile, I left my homeland and my husband's ashes; 115
 I had a fraught journey, pursued by my enemy.
 I escaped the sea and my brother, landed on these shores
 and bought the coastal strip I gave you, you traitor.

I founded a city and set in place wide-reaching walls
 that arouse envy in neighbouring regions. 120

There was a swell of war, war to test the female foreigner;
 I only just provided myself with troops and crude city-gates.
 I attracted a thousand suitors, who have now merged their forces,
 complaining I married some nobody rather than them.

Why not hand me over in chains to African Iarbas? 125
 I'd hold out my arms and let you commit that crime.
 And there's my evil brother, who longs to spatter his hands
 with my blood, as he spattered them with my husband's.

Put down those sacred statues of the gods: your touch profanes them,
 it's wrong for a man with unholy hands to worship them. 130

Since you were destined to worship those gods if they escaped
 the flames, they're sorry they escaped the flames.
 You're abandoning me when I may be pregnant too, you criminal,
 with a part of you concealed inside my body.

The poor child will share in its mother's doom, 135
 and you'll be responsible for the death of your unborn son.
 Ascanius' brother will die along with his mother, and a
 single calamity will carry off the two of us together.

'But the god commands me to go.' I wish He'd ordered you not
 to come and Trojans had never set foot in Carthage. 140

This must be the god who guided you into wasting many
 years on wild seas, tossed by hostile winds.
 You'd hardly expend so much effort to return to Troy,
 if it still was as it was when Hector was alive.

You're headed for the Tiber, not your native Simois, and of
 course even if 145
 you reach the land you long for, you'll be a stranger there.
 Italy hides, conceals itself and avoids your ships:
 you'll grow old in your quest and be lucky to find it then.
 Stop your wandering and instead accept as your dowry my people
 and the treasure that Pygmalion wanted but I brought here. 150
 You'd be better off transferring Troy to Carthage
 and holding royal power and the sacred sceptre here.
 If your heart is hungry for war, if Ascanius wants somewhere
 to fight and win the right to a victory-parade,
 I'll provide an enemy for him to beat, so he lacks for nothing: 155
 there can be warfare here as well as terms of peace.
 I beg you, by your mother, by your brother Cupid's arrows,
 by Troy's sacred gods that are with you in exile
 (and I hope that those Trojans who were spared by savage Mars
 in the war live on and you lose no more of them, 160
 and Ascanius prospers for all the years allotted to him
 and the body of aged Anchises rests in peace),
 spare this house, which hands itself over to your control.
 What do you accuse me of, apart from loving?
 I'm not some Greek from Thessaly or mighty Mycenae; 165
 no husband or father of mine stood against you at Troy.
 Call me hostess, not wife, if you're ashamed of marriage to me;
 provided I'm yours, I'll put up with being anything.
 I know the seas that break on the shores of Africa:
 at fixed times of the year they permit and prevent sailing. 170
 When the breeze permits sailing, you'll spread your canvas before the wind;
 for now your ship stays beached behind the light seaweed.
 Let me watch for the right time; your departure will be safer,
 and I myself won't let you remain, even if you want to.
 Your men demand a rest as well, and your mangled fleet 175
 is half-repaired, necessitating a short delay.
 You've been kind to me, and may be generous again, and I'm
 pregnant (I hope), so I ask for a little time
 while the sea and my love calm down, and with time and practice
 I learn how to manage to bear my misery bravely. 180
 Otherwise I intend to pour out my life:
 you can't be cruel to me for long.
 I wish you could see what I look like as I write this!
 I'm writing with your Trojan sword here in my lap,
 and tears roll down my cheeks on to the drawn sword, 185
 which will soon be soaked with blood instead of tears.
 How well this gift of yours fits with my doom!

It's not costing you much to set up my funeral.
 This isn't the first time my heart's been pierced by a weapon:
 it already bears the wound of savage love. 190
 Anna my sister, my sister Anna, my guilty accomplice in sin,
 soon you will make the final offerings to my ashes.
 SYCHAEUS' DIDO won't be inscribed on my marble tomb,
 when I'm cremated; my epitaph will be merely this:
 AENEAS PROVIDED HER REASON FOR DYING AND THE SWORD; 195
 DIDO'S OWN HAND STRUCK THE FATAL BLOW.

A more detailed examination of Virgil's treatment of this tale will make clear the poignancy of his account (against which Ovid was reacting here). In the *Aeneid* the epic poet deliberately makes us feel for Dido from the start, so we will become involved and appreciate properly the tragedy of her death. We are given our first glimpse of her in book 1, when Aeneas is exploring the coast of Africa to which his ships have been blown by the storm caused by Juno. His mother Venus appears to him, disguised as a local huntress, directs him to Carthage for help and tells him the story so far of its queen. It is a very positive picture of Dido that she presents, one that suggests sympathy and admiration on the goddess' part, and thereby encourages the same reactions in readers. Virgil's narrative technique increases the force of a tale that is gripping and moving in itself. He induces us to pity his heroine from early on, and to respect her more and more as the passage progresses. He also gives us in her brother Pygmalion a real villain to hate, to engage us further, and includes various realistic and vivid details, to make the story come alive. He lingers on Dido's love for her husband, on his murder and the subsequent deception of the queen and on the appearance of her husband's ghost to her (so all of that has its full impact on us), and he then picks up the pace, in line with Dido's briskness and vigour as she sails off with followers to a new home. This is what Venus says to Aeneas at 1.338ff.:

'You see the kingdom of Carthage, Tyrians and Agenor's city.
 But the bordering land is the Libyans', that untameable warrior nation.
 Dido reigns as queen. She came from the city of Tyre, 340
 fleeing her brother. It's a long story of crime, a long
 complicated tale, but I'll tell you the main events in outline.
 Her husband was Sychaeus (the man with the most gold in Phoenicia),
 and he was loved by that poor woman deeply and passionately.
 Dido was a virgin when her father joined her in wedlock to him, 345
 and that was her first marriage. But the king of Tyre was her brother
 Pygmalion, a monster surpassing all other men in evil.
 Madness came between them, dividing them. Blinded by love
 of gold, the impious king caught Sychaeus off guard at his altar
 and killed him with his sword in secret, ignoring his sister's love. 350

He concealed his crime for a long time, made up many stories
 and with empty hope cruelly deluded the distraught loving
 wife. But in a dream the ghost of her unburied husband
 actually came to her, raising his face, which was strangely pale.
 He showed her the savage altar and the wound in his chest made 355
 by the sword, revealing all the house's hidden evil.
 Then he urged her to hurry away, to leave the land of her fathers;
 and to help her on her journey he unearthed an ancient treasure –
 a mass of gold and silver known to nobody else.
 That roused her to get herself and some followers ready to flee. 360
 They gathered, those who felt a savage hatred for greedy
 Pygmalion or feared him intensely; they seized some ships which happened
 to be ready for sea, loaded the gold and sailed,
 taking the tyrant's treasure with them. In command was a woman.
 They arrived at this place, where now you will see the mighty 365
 walls of new Carthage and its citadel rising high.'

The Trojans are given a warm welcome by Dido thanks to Jupiter, who instils in her friendly feelings for Aeneas and his men. But Venus is fearful because of Carthage's association with the Trojans' enemy Juno. To make sure that Aeneas is safe there, she sends Cupid to fire the queen to a frenzy of passion for the hero. When Dido puts on a banquet for her guests, Cupid is substituted for the boy Ascanius, carrying marvellous gifts from Aeneas. At 1.712ff. in a sinister, doom-laden scene the sympathetic poet lingers on the terrible moments of this disastrous infatuation. There is horror in the childishness and (perverted) affection of what is in fact a mighty and callous divinity, in the psychological attack on the heroine (playing on her frustrated maternal desires), in the mysterious vagueness over the actual process of possession, and in the insidious effacement of the memory of Sychaeus. Horrifying too is the response of the unwitting Dido, who is fascinated with Cupid and actually takes him on her lap, again and again.

Most of all ill-fated Dido, doomed to the
 imminent plague of love, can't get her fill and catches
 fire as she gazes, affected as much by the boy as the gifts.
 After hanging from Aeneas' neck, embracing him and sating 715
 the great love of the man who thinks he's his father, he goes
 for the queen. Her eyes and all her attention are fixed on the boy,
 and she fondles him on her lap, several times. Poor
 Dido's unaware that a powerful god's possessing her. Remembering
 his mother Venus' wishes, he begins to obliterate gradually 720
 the memory of Sychaeus and tries to preoccupy with a living love
 her long dormant affections, her heart that's unused to passion.

One of the really sad things about this whole Carthaginian episode in the *Aeneid* is the fact that Dido is a pawn, a victim of gods with conflicting interests. Her violent and ultimately fatal love for Aeneas was caused by an external supernatural force, which she was powerless to resist – Cupid, who was dispatched unnecessarily by the over-protective Venus. Next Juno, trying to hinder the Trojan from reaching Latium, contrived the intimate meeting in the cave – without which the affair might well never have started (otherwise why did Juno set it up?). Then Jupiter got involved (after Iarbas' complaint) and in concern over Aeneas' mission sent down Mercury to order him to leave.

In *Aeneid* 4, when Dido discovers, before Aeneas can break the news gently to her, that he is secretly preparing to sail away, she goes raving through the city and then attacks him in an extremely emotional speech. Initially her rage dominates, but she is soon making a futile attempt to get him to stay. The proud queen in her desperation is forced into using various appeals, showing humility, revealing her dependence on him and trying to arouse pity:

'Traitor! Did you actually hope you could keep your terrible crime secret, leave this land of mine without a word?	305
Can nothing keep you here? Not our love? Not the pledge you once made to me? Not the cruel death in store for Dido?	
And are you working hard to ready your fleet in winter weather, hurrying to sail across the sea in the midst of northern gales?	310
You're cruel. Tell me, if it wasn't some foreign land and unknown home that you're bound for, and ancient Troy was still standing, would you be sailing for Troy over this heaving sea?	
Is it <i>me</i> you're running from? By these tears and your pledge (I'm a poor fool who's left herself nothing else to appeal by),	315
by our wedding, by the marriage we entered on, I beg you, if I've shown you any kindness, or anything about me was pleasing to you, pity my falling house, and, if it's not too late for pleas, give up this plan of yours.	
Because of you the peoples of Libya and Numidian chieftains hate me, the Carthaginians are hostile; and because of you I've lost my honour and the good name that I had, my only hope of immortality. You're leaving me to be killed (by who?), my guest – I can only call you that, not 'husband' any more.	320
What am I waiting for? For my brother Pygmalion to destroy my city or for African Iarbas to take me away as his captive?	325
At least if before you ran off I'd had a child by you, if some little Aeneas was playing in my palace with a face to recall yours in spite of everything, I wouldn't feel completely deceived and deserted.'	330

Deeply upset, Aeneas defends himself on the grounds that they are not married and the gods are forcing him to go to Italy against his will. She rounds on him

furiously, accusing him of ingratitude and cruelty, telling him to go off to Italy, but expressing the hope that he will be punished by shipwreck on the way, and threatening to haunt him after her death. The anguished Aeneas returns to his fleet, obedient to heaven's command, and his men eagerly get ready to depart. At this point Virgil's queen is forced by her passionate love to initiate another approach to the hero. She is reduced to humility again, and is this time even more humble (but in vain). Sadly now Aeneas has degenerated further, from a guest to a seeming enemy, and Dido has given up on the idea of him staying on permanently and just wants him to delay his departure, so she can learn how to cope. She appeals to her sister Anna to help her in a speech for which Ovid substitutes his letter:

'Go, sister, and make this humble appeal to my arrogant enemy:
 I did not swear with the Greeks at Aulis to exterminate 425
 the Trojan race or send a squadron of ships to Troy,
 and I didn't tear up the ashes of his dead father Anchises from his grave;
 so why does he close his callous ears to my appeals?
 Where's he rushing? As a final gift for his poor lover
 let him wait for a favourable wind and smooth sailing. 430
 I'm not begging any more for the marriage we once had and he betrayed
 or for him to forgo glorious Latium and give up his kingdom there;
 I'm asking for nothing – just time, rest and respite for my passion,
 until my fortune teaches me how to lose and grieve.
 Pity your sister. Tell him I'm begging for this final 435
 favour, which I'll repay with interest when I die.'

Virgil was widely recognized as a master poet, and his *Aeneid* was the national poem (about the illustrious Trojan origins of the Roman race), said to rival the *Iliad* itself. Ovid did feel respect for his renowned predecessor; but Virgil did also represent a challenge (a great author to top) and provide a tempting target (the lofty and revered *Aeneid*). There is supreme cheek in our young poet taking on the sublime Virgil and a major and tragic episode in his epic, and being so flippant and subversive while doing so. Ovid intentionally draws attention to his source by means of lots of echoes, as he puts his own stamp on it. He gives it a new form (the letter) and a new narrator (Dido), and he makes numerous variations, twists and additions to Virgilian words and details. All of this tinkering with a sacred text baffles and outrages some readers, while others find it stimulating and amusing. There is pathos in *Heroides* 7, but Ovid was too intelligent to try to compete with Virgil in that area. Instead he caps him in other ways and works in lots of irreverent levity, making for a piquant mixture. So, for example, at *Aeneid* 4.9 Virgil made Dido address Anna as *Anna soror* 'Anna my sister', so Ovid improves on that in 191 by making the queen write to her *Anna soror, soror Anna* 'Anna my sister, my sister Anna', producing a doublet that is wittily apt, as this is the second time that Dido so addresses her. He deflates the divine guidance for Aeneas in Virgil's epic by means of the sarcasm at 141f., and he mocks the *Aeneid*'s idea of Rome being Troy reborn with the notion of Rome's great enemy Carthage as

Troy reborn in 151. He even works in some obscene verbal play in 134, where in the context of pregnancy the wording easily conjures up (as well as a baby) penetration by a penis. But Ovid has most fun with Dido and Aeneas.

He creates his own Dido, building on his predecessor's version. He tops Virgil by giving the new, improved heroine all the arguments that she used on Aeneas at *Aeneid* 4.305ff and 424ff. and extra ones. So at 9ff. and 145ff. she points out to him that he already has a kingdom and a loving wife (so why go off to somewhere unknown, where he won't found as splendid a city as Carthage or get a wife as loving as Dido?); she warns him that perjurers are often punished by storms at sea (57ff.); and at 75f. and 153ff. she claims that she has Ascanius' welfare and happiness at heart. The Ovidian Dido is also an elegiac figure rather than a majestic queen of epic, employing much of the vocabulary and imagery of elegy (for instance, with a metaphor common in love poetry, she pictures the warrior Aeneas as a soldier in Cupid's camp in line 32). She is also a stylish writer, as is highlighted at the start of the letter with some neat turns at 5–6, 8, 9 and especially the couplet at 13–14 (with its repetition of words and sounds, beginning in the Latin with *facta fugis, facienda petis*). Such stylistic elegance for a distraught lover has its droll side, and there is also sly humour in some rather undignified aspects to Ovid's Dido. She shows a comical ignorance in 31 and 36, as she does not know that Venus is largely responsible for her problems and has a callous attitude to her. And, getting carried away, she is inconsistent (contradicting 79f. at 107, 131f. and 158) and seems to exaggerate and tell fibs at 115f. (according to Virgil she was not driven off, but left of her own accord, and she was not pursued by her brother), at 121f. (there was no actual war in the *Aeneid*), in 123 (in the epic she did not have anything like as many as a thousand suitors) and at 175f. (in Virgil at this stage Aeneas' ships were already repaired and his men were keen to leave Carthage rather than stay on and have a rest there).

There is also playfulness in connection with Aeneas, the venerable ancestor of the Roman race (and of the emperor Augustus himself), as Ovid gleefully seizes on his rather questionable action of parting from Dido and aggravates the problem. Virgil tried to exonerate somewhat the proto-Roman and hero of his poem, while bringing out the tragedy of the situation and showing the hard choices necessary and the pain involved in starting a new life for one's people. He made it clear that there was no marriage, that Aeneas still loved the queen deeply, and that he was agonized at leaving her and did so against his will (a devout man intimidated by the gods and mindful of his destiny and his son's future). But he did still leave her, turning away from and causing the death of a woman who was passionately in love with him and had done so much for him and his men; and a hero with a mission should not have allowed himself to enter into an affair in the first place. Ovid provides a much less sympathetic picture of the Trojan. His Dido writes to him at far greater length than she spoke in the *Aeneid*, and this facilitates increase of her criticism of him. As in Virgil, she attacks his ingratitude, treachery and cruelty, but does so more extensively, and she also posits other faults, calling him unjust, a liar and (the dutiful Aeneas!) someone who does not care for his father and the gods. And this time Aeneas does not get to defend himself and the poet does not attempt

to excuse him. So there is a much more negative presentation of him here, as Ovid employs Dido to really snipe at and undermine the great hero. In particular our poet makes Aeneas look even worse for quitting Carthage. This Dido is even more pitiful and pleading than Virgil's, underlining her love and kindness at many more points than in the epic; but he still goes. In place of a vague hint that she might possibly commit suicide in Virgil (*Aen.* 4.308, 323) here she openly announces, more than once, that she definitely will kill herself, and dwells on her upcoming suicide at the end; but Aeneas still departs. And whereas Virgil's heroine had wished that she had a child by him, the Ovidian queen represents herself as quite possibly pregnant (at 133ff. and 177f.), so that his departure may well cause the death of their son as well; but without waiting to establish if she is with child, Aeneas sails away.

Virgil didn't finish with Dido and her story in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. Surprisingly she (or rather her ghost) reappears in book 6, when Aeneas goes down to the Underworld to meet the spirit of his father and receive important instructions from him. As he makes his way through the land of the dead he comes to the Mourning Plains, a region for the souls of those who have died of love. There is a forest there, where they hide away, among them Dido. We really feel for the queen, just a faint phantom now, wandering disconsolately, and suggestively enclosed by gloom and dwarfed by the huge wood. As Aeneas speaks to her, she starts to move off, but halts when he asks her to, and finally has to wrench herself away. This suggests that amidst all her anger, hatred and hurt she still has not totally escaped her profound love for him, although she does now manage to control that passion; and she will not look at the hero, probably in part because she does not trust herself to do that. At least she is reunited with her beloved Sychaeus there, although her wandering and stopping to listen to Aeneas leave one wondering if her love for her old husband is entirely unadulterated and unclouded.

Virgil also wants us to feel sympathy for Aeneas. He shows us how much his hero still loves Dido and how distraught he is over having left her and caused her death. Aeneas is desperate to explain his actions to her and to exonerate himself, but fails. On top of the upset of seeing her in that terrible place, she is bitterly hostile to him and will not talk to him or even look at him. And in a final rejection of him she runs away and rejoins Sychaeus in what has to be a close relationship, whereas the Trojan now has no lover.

At line 450 he catches sight of her among other heroines who were destroyed by love:

Among them Phoenician Dido wandered in that vast wood,	450
her wound still fresh. The Trojan hero stopped beside	
her and just recognized that dim figure amid the gloom,	
as a man sees or thinks he has seen the moon	
rising amid the clouds at the start of the month.	
Immediately he spoke words of sweet love to her, in tears:	455
'Poor Dido! So it was true, the news I heard, that you were	

dead, that you'd put an end to your life with a sword?
 Ah no, was I responsible for your *death*? I swear by the stars,
 by the powers above, by anything sacred in the world below,
 I did not leave your shores of my own free will, my queen. 460
 No, it was the stern commands of the gods that drove me,
 as they force me now to pass through the gloom, this jagged
 wasteland, this abyss of night; and I just couldn't believe
 that by going away I would cause you such terrible agony.
 Stop! Let me look at you a little longer. Who are you running 465
 from? Fate won't let me talk to you ever again.'
 With these words Aeneas, in tears, tried
 to soothe her burning, glaring rage. She
 kept her eyes fixed on the ground, turned away from him,
 and when he began to speak her face remained unmoved, 470
 like solid, hard flint or a crag on Mount Marpeus.
 Finally she wrenched herself away and ran, still hostile, back
 into the shadowy wood, where her husband of former days,
 Sychaeus, responded to her anguish and returned her love.
 Despite that Aeneas, horrified at her unjust fate, gazed 475
 after her from afar, weeping and pitying her as she went.

On Dido in subsequent literature and in music and art see Grafton & Most & Settis 268f.

Heroides 12

MEDEA TO JASON

In contrast to *Heroides* 11 this much longer letter is not a meek suicide note, and is not purely tragic (but has much dark humour as well as pathos). The situations are dissimilar too (Medea is far from her family, and is not in an incestuous relationship, but has been jilted by her husband), and so are the natures of the writers (Medea is hard, pro-active and powerful).

For the earlier part of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece see the introduction to *Heroides* 6. Because she had fallen in love with Jason, Medea agreed to the request to help the Argonauts made by her sister Chalciope (whose sons had been rescued by the Greek heroes and had joined them), and she enabled Jason to perform the tasks set by her father Aeetes and to seize the Fleece, and then she sailed off with him back to Greece, getting married to him on the way. However, when Jason presented the Golden Fleece to Pelias in Thessaly, the king went back on his word and refused to give up his kingdom. Medea then pretended to quarrel with her husband, took refuge with Pelias' daughters and got friendly with them. She offered to use her magic to make Pelias young again if his daughters killed him, but when they did that, she did not rejuvenate him. She and Jason fled and ended up in the wealthy city of Corinth in central Greece. They settled there and had two sons, but after all Medea's help Jason suddenly left her to marry Creusa, daughter of Creon (the king of Corinth). Medea was enraged and began to make threats, so was sentenced to exile by Creon along with her children. She pretended to accept banishment for herself, but begged Jason to see if he could persuade the royal family to let the boys escape exile. She persuaded him to go with them to Creusa with gifts from her – a fine robe and crown, ostensibly to win her over. In fact the robe and crown were impregnated with a napalm-like magic substance, and when she put them on they stuck to her and burned her to death. Creon turned up and in his grief embraced his dead daughter, only to be burned to death too by the same substance. Medea set the palace on fire, and then, to hurt Jason further, she killed their two sons, and

denied him access to the bodies, flying off to her refuge in Athens on a chariot drawn by dragons, which her grandfather (the sun-god) had given her.

Heroides 12 is written just as Medea is starting to utter the threats that lead to the decree of banishment from Corinth and before she has finalized her plans for revenge.

But (I remember) though a princess of Colchis, I found time
 for you when you asked me to help with my magic.
 The Fates, who spin the thread of a mortal's life,
 should have ended mine and killed me then.
 I could have died well then. All my life 5
 since that time has been punishing.
 Oh, why did the Argo ever go in quest of the
 Golden Fleece, rowed by its young crew?
 Why did we Colchians ever set eyes on that ship
 and you Greeks drink from our river Phasis? 10
 Why did I find your blond hair and good looks
 and your charming, lying tongue all too attractive?
 But I did. Otherwise when that unfamiliar ship
 with its bold heroes had reached our shores,
 thoughtless Jason would have gone against the bulls' flaming 15
 breath and scorched mouths without magic protection
 and would have sown the dragon's teeth (every one an
 enemy) only to be cut down by his own crop.
 So much treachery would have died with you, you criminal,
 and I'd have been spared so much suffering! 20
 I'll take what pleasure there is in attacking the ingratitude of
 someone who's been helped – the only joy I'll get from you.
 You were told to sail your untried ship to Colchis
 and landed in our prosperous kingdom.
 I was there what your new bride is here; 25
 my father was as rich as hers is.
 Hers rules Corinth with its two seas, mine everything as far
 as snowy Scythia at the far end of the Black Sea.
 Aeetes welcomed you young Greeks hospitably,
 and you reclined on his embroidered couches. 30
 It was then that I saw you and found out what you were;
 that was the start of my mental collapse.
 I saw you and died, I burned with a fire new to me,
 like a pine-torch burning on an altar to mighty gods.
 You were handsome, I couldn't resist what was fated 35
 for me, and my eyes were ravished by yours.
 You realized, you traitor. Who succeeds in hiding love?
 It flares up clearly, giving itself away.
 You were told you had to put a yoke on the hard necks of

the fierce bulls, which weren't used to ploughing. 40
 They were Mars' bulls, with cruel horns and muzzles;
 they breathed forth terrifying fire;
 they had feet of solid bronze and nostrils sheathed in bronze,
 which was also blackened by the blasts of their breath.
 You were also ordered to scatter all over the field with your 45
 doomed hand seeds that would produce a horde of men
 meant to attack you with weapons born along with themselves –
 a harvest hostile to the one who sowed it.
 Last of all you had to elude by some ruse or other the
 sleepless eyes of the snake guarding the Fleece. 50
 When Aeetes had finished, you all got up sadly from the
 purple couches, and the whole company retired.
 What help to you then was mighty Creon, his daughter
 Creusa and her dowry – the kingdom of Corinth?
 You went off, despondent. I watched you go with tears in my 55
 eyes, and with a faint murmur I wished you well.
 I went to bed in my room, badly wounded by love,
 and spent the whole night long crying.
 I saw before my eyes the bulls and the evil harvest;
 I also saw the serpent that never sleeps. 60
 I felt both love and fear, and the fear increased the love.
 Next morning my dear sister came in
 and found me lying face-down, with dishevelled
 hair, and everything wet with my tears.
 She asked me to help the Argonauts; I granted Jason her 65
 request, and gave him what she begged.
 There's a dark grove of pines and leafy oaks,
 which the sun's rays can scarcely penetrate;
 in it there is – or was – a shrine to Diana, with a golden
 statue of her sculpted by foreign hand. 70
 Do you recognize the place, or have you forgotten it as well as me?
 We met there, and you spoke first, treacherously:
 'Fortune has given you complete control over my wellbeing;
 and my life and death are in your hands.
 To be able to kill is enough, if you take pleasure in power itself; 75
 but you will win greater glory by saving me.
 I beg you, by my troubles (which you can end), by your noble
 lineage and your divine grandfather (the all-seeing Sun),
 by the triple face and secret rites of Diana,
 and by any other gods you Colchians may have, 80
 young lady, have pity on me, have pity on my men;
 help me, and make me yours forever.
 If by some chance you don't spurn a Greek for a husband

(but how could the gods be so very kind to me?),
 I'll die, and my spirit will vanish into thin air, 85
 before I take to my bed any bride but you.
 Let Juno the goddess of marriage be my witness
 and Diana whose marble shrine this is.'
 Your speech (and this is just a small part of it) and the clasp-
 ing of my hand touched my naive, girlish heart. 90
 I also saw tears (they played their part in your deception);
 and I was just a girl, quickly taken in by your words.
 You yoked the bronze-footed bulls without being burned,
 and ploughed the hard earth, as ordered,
 and sowed in the furrows not seeds but envenomed teeth 95
 which produced warriors with swords and shields.
 Even I, who'd given you the magic salve, sat there
 pale at the sight of the sudden armed men,
 until (a miracle!) those earthborn brothers drew
 their weapons and fought each other. 100
 Suddenly the sleepless sentinel, bristling with rustling
 scales, swept across the ground, coiling and hissing.
 Where was your rich dowry and royal bride then
 and the Isthmus of Corinth that separates two seas?
 I am now a barbarian in your eyes, after everything, 105
 I now seem to you a pauper, and malignant;
 but I was the one who closed its fiery eyes in a magic sleep
 and gave you the Fleece to safely steal away.
 I betrayed my father, gave up my throne and my country;
 my reward is being able to live here in exile. 110
 A pirate from overseas plundered my virginity; I left
 behind a wonderful sister and a mother I loved.
 But I didn't leave you behind, my brother, when I fled
 (this is the only place where my pen falters).
 What I dared to do I don't dare to write down; 115
 I should have been hacked apart too, along with you.
 With nothing to fear after that, I wasn't afraid to trust
 myself to the sea, though only a woman, and now a criminal.
 Where is heaven's power? We deserve to be punished at sea –
 you for being deceitful, I for being gullible. 120
 The Clashing Rocks should have crushed and smashed us,
 clamping us together in a bony embrace!
 Or ravening Scylla should have drowned us as food for her dogs
 (Scylla should have harmed ungrateful men)!
 Charybdis, who sucks in and spews out sea three times a day, 125
 should have drawn us under the waves off Sicily.
 But you returned victorious and unscathed to Thessaly's cities

and laid the Golden Fleece before your country's gods.
 Need I mention Pelias' daughters, who harmed their father out of
 devotion, their girlish hands hacking his body? 130
 Though others criticize me, you must praise me:
 I've been forced to do wrong so often because of you.
 You dared – I'm so angry (rightly angry) that the proper words
 fail me – you dared to say: 'Leave my royal home!' 135
 I left your home, as ordered, taking along our two sons
 and my love for you (which is always with me).
 Suddenly I heard the words of a wedding-song
 and saw brightly gleaming torches,
 and a flute played the wedding-march for you two,
 a sound more mournful than a funeral dirge for me. 140
 I was terrified. I didn't yet believe such wickedness existed,
 but still my heart was all cold with fear.
 A crowd rushed up, shouting the wedding-chant repeatedly:
 the nearer the cry, the worse it was for me.
 My slaves turned away, weeping, and hiding their tears: 145
 who'd want to pass on such terrible news?
 It was better too for me not to know, whatever it was;
 but my heart was sad, as if I did know.
 My youngest boy, either just by chance or because
 he was keen to see, stood at the front door. 150
 He said: 'Mother, just come here! Father's leading a
 procession, dressed in gold and driving a chariot.'
 Immediately I ripped my clothes and beat my breasts
 and scratched my face in grief.
 I felt an urge to plunge into the crowd and tear 155
 the garlands from their neatly combed hair.
 I scarcely restrained myself from tearing my hair, shouting
 'He's mine!' and grabbing hold of you.
 I hope this delights the father I wronged, the Colchians I abandoned;
 let my brother's ghost accept this offering to him – 160
 me deserted and deprived of my throne, country, home
 and husband, who was on his own everything to me.
 So, I managed to subjugate serpents and mad bulls,
 but I could not subjugate this single man.
 I repulsed fierce flames with my magic expertise, 165
 but I can't escape the fire of love myself.
 My very skills and spells and herbs are deserting me;
 my powerful Hecate and her rites are quite useless.
 I loathe the daytime, my nights are wakeful and hateful,
 soft sleep abandons me in my misery. 170
 I can put to sleep a serpent, but not myself;

everyone profits from my industriousness more than me.
 My rival is caressing the body I saved from death;
she is enjoying the reward for my hard work.
 Perhaps too, when you're trying to show off to your stupid 175
 wife and say things my enemy would like to hear,
 you come up with new criticisms of my looks and my foreign ways.
 Let her laugh and take pleasure in my faults!
 Let her laugh, lying on her purple couch, exalted –
 she will weep, burnt even worse than me. 180
 So long as I have a sword and fire and magic potions,
 no enemy of Medea will escape vengeance!
 But if by any chance pleas touch your heart of steel,
 hear what I have to say now, curbing my pride.
 I'm begging you, as you often begged me; 185
 I'm kneeling at your feet without hesitation.
 If you despise me, show some thought for our boys:
 a stepmother will be cruel, a terror to sons of mine.
 They really look like you, I'm touched by the resemblance,
 and whenever I see them, my eyes fill with tears. 190
 I beg you, by the gods, by my grandfather the Sun,
 by the boys (our mutual pledges) and all I've done for you:
 be my husband again (I gave up so much for that, madly),
 be true to your word and repay my help to you.
 I'm not asking you to face bulls and warriors or to use 195
 your powers to conquer and quiet a serpent;
 I want *you* – I've earned you, you gave yourself to me
 and I became a parent along with you.
 Do you ask where's my dowry? I paid it out on the
 field that you had to plough to win the Fleece; 200
 and the spectacular, thick Golden Fleece is my dowry
 (if I asked for that back, you'd refuse);
 and the survival of you and your crew is my dowry.
 Go on, compare the wealth of Corinth with that, you bastard!
 It's thanks to me that you're alive and actually able to be 205
 ungrateful and have a powerful wife and father-in-law.
 Soon you'll all be – but why tell you your punishment in
 advance? My rage will give birth to massive menace.
 I'll go where rage takes me. I may regret what I do,
 but I also regret looking out for my unfaithful husband. 210
 I'll leave that to the god who now has my thoughts in a turmoil.
 My mind is definitely devising something drastic.

Sadly, if understandably, love is not much in evidence in this letter. Medea does mention her love for Jason, but usually sets it in the past, and only twice and briefly

does she say that she still feels that way about him (at 136 and 166, and in the latter case she wants to escape her passion). Love is overshadowed by other powerful emotions, like injured pride, jealousy, indignation, suspicion and bitterness. So most of the epistle is taken up with complaints and criticisms of Jason, and she does not get around to asking for a reconciliation until late in the letter. She has reached the point where love is nearly dead, hatred and desire for vengeance have nearly taken over and entirely justified anger is getting the better of her (this happens firstly at 175ff., and then more strongly at 207ff., so that the poem closes aptly and ominously with rage and revenge).

Medea's motivation for writing *Heroides* 12 is rather complex. As she herself states at 21–2, she wants to let off steam and get some satisfaction from giving Jason a piece of her mind. It would appear that she also wants to make him feel bad and hurt him, and worry him with her threats. She seems conflicted as well. She says that she still loves him, and she does ask him to get back together with her (at 183–206), but consciously or unconsciously she makes it very probable that he will refuse her request. She undermines it in advance with all the alienating censure and abuse. She surrounds it with threats, at 180–2 and 207–12, and Jason would come away from the letter with that latter passage (at the very end) uppermost in his thoughts. And as well as leaving it late she words her appeal in a way unlikely to win him back: she does not try to convince him that she will give up her resentment (in fact she makes digs during the appeal itself) or that she really loves him or that they will be happy together again, but unflatteringly demands him back as someone she has earned, and for the sake of the children. It looks as if this is his last slim chance for reconciliation and an escape from vengeance, and in her heart of hearts she would really rather he did not take it. He would then realize subsequently that he brought retribution on himself by his ingratitude and could actually have avoided it by accepting the offer in this letter, so that he might feel some personal responsibility.

That is all very sad and grim. Jacobson 109ff. sees only that in the poem, and as a result criticizes it for sameness and simplicity and calls it 'unfortunately dull'. But, as so often with Ovid, there are layers and nuances that make for interest and bite. This is in fact a typically dexterous and ingenious performance by the poet, and in addition to the emotional impact there are also important intellectual aspects. If *Heroides* 6 was a tragicomedy with the stress on the tragic, *Heroides* 12 is a tragicomedy with an emphasis on the comic (the darkly comic). His Medea is serious, but Ovid himself is having fun.

One of the interesting things that Ovid is doing here is giving us a new perspective. In *Heroides* 6 we had Hypsipyle's point of view, and she (naturally enough) gave us an entirely negative picture of Medea as a barbarian slut, a repellent witch, a treacherous, dangerous and murderous woman. What we get now is a much more positive version, as Medea tells her own story with her own colouring. She foregrounds her royalty and kindness, her misery and her regret at helping Jason, putting them at the start of her letter to give them prominence. She plays up all she has done for him and how badly he has treated her by going on at length about all that and returning to it repeatedly. She plays down the questionable and bad things she

has done (the betrayal of her father and the murders of Apsyrtus and Pelias), passing over them quickly, and also intimating that her love for Jason was to blame in each case. She presents herself as a naive and vulnerable young girl who was taken in by his seductive words, and who has subsequently been caused great pain by being abandoned by him for a new wife.

This is all rather involving and provocative. Two (male) critics are not convinced by Medea's words here. Isbell 104f. describes her as 'a perfect model of depravity' and claims that she is not rehabilitated in the eyes of the reader and her argument is so flawed that she cannot be pitied. Jacobson 113 and 118–20 calls her a 'dastardly villain' and says that there is little good to be said for her and her personality is contemptible. What do you think? Is there truth in what Medea says here? Do you feel sorry for her at this point in her story to a greater or lesser extent? Is she the only (or the real) criminal in all of this? Use the text of *Heroides* 12 to support your case.

There are further connections between *Heroides* 12 and 6. For a start, there are obvious similarities. Both are letters to Jason written by heroines upset that they have been abandoned by him, along with their children, despite being married to him; and in *Heroides* 12 we find yet another woman who has fallen for his charm, tears and lying assurances. Readers may find these correspondences saddening and/or amusing (these princesses never learn!). Certainly there is diverting irony in these links: for instance, Hypsipyle thinks herself so superior to the barbarian, but in fact she is much closer to her than she realizes; and Medea is enraged at being supplanted by a royal successor, but (as these parallels bring out) she herself is a royal successor who supplanted and enraged another. There are clever and entertaining twists too: for example, at 6.83ff. Hypsipyle complains that Medea enthralled Jason by means of magic, but at 12.163f. Medea complains that she could not do just that; and at 6.149f. the Greek wishes that she had committed murder, killing her rival, while in 12 we are reminded that the barbarian has already committed murder, and she will before long go on to kill her rival, exactly as she threatens in her letter. There are many other ties between 6 and 12, which you can find and explore for yourself. For some more of them, and for different ways of looking at them, see Lindheim 125ff. and Fulkerson 43ff.

There are funnier aspects, for those who have a nasty sense of humour. There are so many clear hints of what Medea is going to do that we are invited to feel a gleeful anticipation, reflecting on what a crazy fool Jason is to mess with a woman like this and how he is going to get his richly deserved come-uppance very soon. In particular the frequent references to fire, heat and burning are witty, in a way that makes you both cringe and smile, as they foreshadow the incineration of Creusa, Creon and their palace. The black comedy is in evidence from the very beginning of the poem in all the point and play and spin there. Look back at the first twenty verses and note the following. Lines 1–2 lead us to reflect that Medea will find time for Jason again soon, and will use her magic to hurt him rather than help him. At 3f. a murderess wishes that she had been killed herself! In connection with 5, if she didn't die well then, she can at least kill well (efficiently). In 6 she is talking of her life being punishing for her, but there will be more punishment, for Creusa, Creon

and Jason. Along with Medea at 7–10, many others will wish that the Argo had never sailed to Colchis. In line 12 she criticizes Jason's charming, lying tongue not long before she charms him with her lies about the robe and crown being gifts to win over Creusa. At 15–18 there is the irony of Medea saving Jason's life only for him to ruin hers. In 18 the killer makes a joke about killing, with grim play on the crop cutting down rather than being cut down. In 19 she accuses another of being treacherous and a criminal! And 20 prompts the thought that many others would have escaped suffering too (at her hands).

The rest of the poem also contains the same kind of bleak humour and wit, often centring around her treachery, deceitfulness and ruthless murders. Examine, for example, Jason's speech at 73–88 for irony in him saying all that to Medea in the light of what he went on to do and what ensued from that (her attitude, actions and mastery of the situation in Corinth). And look at the words put into her mouth at 129–42, prefiguring the daring crimes that she will shortly commit.

There are variant versions of the rest of Medea's story. According to Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, while taking refuge in Athens with king Aegeus, she married him. But when his illegitimate son Theseus turned up, she tried to poison Theseus unsuccessfully, and had to use her magic to summon up clouds or a mist so that she could escape death (it is not clear exactly how). Ovid leaves her disappearing mysteriously like that and says no more about her subsequent career. Other authors tell us that she went to the east, where Medus (her son by Aegeus or by an oriental king) became the founder of the powerful people called the Medes, and that she returned to Colchis, where her father had been dethroned, and returned him to royal power. At the end of her life she went to the paradise called Elysium and there married and lived with the great Greek hero Achilles.

It is interesting and instructive to consider the ethical aspects of the Medea myth and to ask ourselves if women should view Medea as an empowering role model. She does rise above gender stereotypes, asserting herself and exacting a well-deserved vengeance. But many would view her actual methods of avenging herself and the extent of her revenge as problematical. These are complicated issues.

Is Medea a feminist in *Heroides* 12? You can't get any more provocative than that when talking about the protagonist of this letter. On the one hand, Medea comes off as a woman demanding to be on an equal footing with Jason (at times seeing herself as a hero, e.g. at 181f.), but, on the other hand, she wishes to be restored as the hero's wife (so re-establishing her subordinate status). Some feminist readings unconvincingly see the duplicate nature of Medea's characterization as a means on the part of the heroine to re-attract Jason: Medea portrays herself at one moment as innocent like Jason's current love interest (Creusa), and in the next as a strong, independent woman like Jason's previous wife Hypsipyle (see further Lindheim 125ff. and Fulkerson 49). But Medea insults Creusa whenever she does mention her, so any parallel of naivety is lost (and is slim at best with only two references to Medea's innocence (99ff. and 111), which are placed in the past); and Jason abandoned Hypsipyle, so why would Medea compare herself to a loser? What's more, these readings do not take into account Medea's attacks

on Jason – is Medea really trying to win the hero back, when she frequently hurls vitriolic remarks in his direction?

Clearly there is a two-sided depiction of Medea and, to a lesser extent, of Jason in *Heroides* 12, whereby each undergoes a reversal of gender roles. A long-standing tradition of gender-switching can be found in the Greek tragedies of Euripides and Aeschylus to reinforce the importance of the realities of people's roles in society, as Foley 148ff. has noted. But what about Ovid? This poet likes to push the envelope and, occasionally, poke fun at the idiosyncrasies of his characters. Here in Medea's appeal to Jason the reversal of the protagonist's role appears to be on steroids! It may well be that Ovid is ridiculing the tradition itself. In hyperbolic fashion, then, Ovid appears to be exploring the limits to which his character is both masculine and feminine.

The feminine persona of Medea unmistakably comes across in the varied and extreme emotions that she experiences and expresses in her letter. Complaints mixed with grief, fear and threats suggest that this heroine may not be entirely stable (an understatement!) now that Jason has rejected her. She even mentions the fact that upon meeting Jason her mental collapse started (at 32). She begins by complaining about how punishing life has been since she met and fell in love with Jason (5ff.). Medea recalls the inner turmoil she endured imagining Jason's defeat at the hands of her father (57ff.), her naive willingness to help him win the Fleece (89ff.) and her jealousy over Jason's repudiation of her and subsequent marriage to Creusa (133ff.). Fear for her children's future results in Medea's pleas to him to take her back (183ff.), but these pleas are quickly replaced by vindictiveness – she calls Jason a bastard who would be nothing without her (204). Finally, her vindictiveness culminates in a warning that her rage is uncontrollable, and is rather in the hands of the gods (211f.). Throughout, Medea oscillates between sorrow, panic and rage, with the rage taking over by the end of the letter.

Ovid further defines Medea as feminine by her role as 'other'. The poet plays up her aspect as a sorceress and her foreign background, traits that portray the heroine as strange or different, qualities which ultimately cast Medea in a negative light and, as a result, in a feminine one. So, repeated reference is made to Medea's use of magic, and her ability or inability to wield it. The letter opens with her aiding Jason by using her magic (2). She refers to her help as 'magic protection' (16) and a 'magic salve' (97), and tells how she defeated the obstacles placed before Jason with 'magic sleep' used against the serpent at 107 and 'magic expertise' used against the flames at 165. Mention of Diana/Hecate, the goddess of magic (at 69, 79 and 88) and reference (at 167f.) to how ineffective her magic powers are now at keeping Jason with her similarly point to Medea's strangeness and thus her otherness.

With almost equal frequency Ovid draws attention to Medea's otherness by allusions to her foreign background. In the opening line of the letter Medea calls herself a princess of Colchis, pointing to her status as a foreigner head on and suggesting that, even as this second-rate outsider, she still felt obliged to help Jason. She goes on to mention Colchians/Colchis four other times (9, 23, 80 and 159), really driving home the point that she is not Greek, unlike Jason's current squeeze. In

comparison to Creusa, Medea charges that she herself is a barbarian in Jason's eyes (105) and imagines how he and his new wife mock her ways as foreign at 177. What sets her further apart is the label 'exile' (110) which Medea applies to herself. True, she is an exile from her homeland – that comes with the territory of betraying her father and killing her brother – but now she is an exile from her home and Jason, so she is 'other' even more than she thought she ever would be.

If Ovid portrays his Medea as feminine by means of her riotous emotions and otherness, then he wittily turns everything on its head when at the same time he also depicts her as masculine with aggressive and heroic qualities. She is a powerful figure – she repeatedly reminds Jason that it was her magic that enabled him to succeed. But Medea is powerful in other ways too. Despite her current regret, she writes how she was responsible for her brother's brutal murder (13ff.), she does not hesitate to mention how she opposed her father (109 and 159) and she warmly (pun intended!) refers to Creusa's upcoming demise at her hands (180).

Nowhere does Medea appear more masculine than when she seemingly presents herself as the hero. Three times the sorceress refers to Jason's tasks (15ff., 39ff. and 93ff.), each time with greater description and growing horror, and with each mention of them Medea points out either Jason's hopelessness or just how she enabled his success. Medea's masculine side comes across even more when she muses on how both she and Jason should have died a heroic death at sea – killed by the Clashing Rocks or Scylla or Charybdis (121ff.). Finally, Medea exclaims at 181f. that no enemy will escape her vengeance while she carries, of all things, a sword, and later at 197 she claims that she earned Jason; the sword, the word 'enemy' and the prize in the form of a person all belong to the very masculine heroic world in which apparently Medea sees herself.

Jason, on the other hand, comes across as a rather feminine character and, as a foil, contributes to our viewing the protagonist Medea in a masculine light. For instance, Jason is passive, even humble, at times. When Jason learns of the tasks, he is saddened (51) and despondent (55), and when he asks Medea for her help, Jason begs her (77ff.) and is described as having tears in his eyes (91). Moreover, any heroic qualities are absent from Jason. For instance, Jason's accomplishment of the tasks set by Aeetes is based on Medea's aid, and, when the tasks are described, the hero's contributions are minimal (e.g. the epic encounter between Jason and the earthborn men at 99f. is reduced to the earthly creatures *only* attacking each other; contrast Apollonius of Rhodes 3.1340ff.). Lastly, rather than giving a description in glowing terms, Medea refers to Jason as a criminal (19), a traitor (37), a treacherous speaker (72), deceptive (91 and 120), ungrateful (206) and unfaithful (210) – all negative terms more suited to the standard characterization of a feminine figure.

Finally, special attention ought to be given to the close of the letter, wherein Ovid manages an amusing coup de grâce regarding his characterization of Medea. The poet has spent a great deal of time craftily portraying the sorceress as a figure whose feminine traits are often overshadowed by masculine behaviour. Actually, up to this point Medea has been significantly masculinized, primarily by her own actions, not to mention the lacklustre description of Jason. But at 204ff. the

heroine is shown at her worst/best, and, make no mistake about it, the illusion of a hermaphroditic Medea is shattered by the very feminine creature depicted there. Medea is irrational, mentioning her rage twice and claiming that her thoughts are in a turmoil. In her eyes, Jason is not only a bastard but also ungrateful and unfaithful. Lastly, she is menacing, threatening that what she is preparing is going to be horrific (in her words, massive and drastic). Ovid has built Medea up as heroic, more so than even Jason, so we may have anticipated a close with a masculinized Medea, but the poet quickly dispels this notion, playfully offering up an extremely off-putting, negative and, accordingly, incredibly feminine portrayal of Medea.

Do we have here an instance of feminism gone awry?

What do you think about Medea's killing of her children? We tend to gloss over the fact that Creusa is going to be murdered, and many readers might applaud Medea for the bad-ass she is for giving what for to Creusa, but what about her kids? Ovid doesn't describe the impending murder but rather alludes to it instead, allowing the reader to imagine the upcoming horrific fate of the hero's children. For all that Medea is a pathetic creature, treated poorly by her husband, abandoned after everything that she has given up and done for him, do you sympathize with her knowing that what she is about to do is so awful? Do you suppose that killing one's children was as horrible a crime in ancient times as it is today? And what do you think specifically of a mother being the culprit?

Here are a few things to consider as you develop your own thoughts about the crime. As Patterson 104f. astutely notes, while it is true that infanticide was practiced among the Greeks without penalty, the killing of a child already recognized as a member of the *oikos* (house) was subject to the laws of homicide. Sealey 278 takes great pains to point out that a homicide warranted different punishments depending on whether it was intentional or unintentional. In Classical Athens, the perpetrator of an intentional homicide was subject to death by the state, whereas a person guilty of involuntary murder was exiled, though a pardon could be sought afterwards.

In the western world today, the murder of a child, infant or otherwise, is considered a homicide, and the punishment varies depending on extenuating circumstances. But the mother as murderer adds a different dimension to the discussion. When we hear on the news that a mother has murdered her child, our first reaction tends to be one of stunned disbelief, followed by the question 'How could she do that to her own child?' We are outraged and find the act morally repugnant. The media tend to stay with the story for a few days, perhaps because of the incomprehensibility of the act, and further investigation often uncovers issues of mental illness. This revelation, of course, is followed by judicial procedures and some sort of penalty. In the case of Medea, however, it is worth noting that she is never punished for her children's murder by a court or by the gods. Actually, as the myth goes, she flees to Athens and devises other schemes of self-interest, and when she does die she marries Achilles and remains with him in the Elysian Fields (Apollonius of Rhodes 4.811–15).

It may come as a shock to learn that Medea is not punished, but she is, in fact, no longer a part of the society in which such punishment would take place. In

ancient Greece, whether she was a daughter, sister or wife, the place of a woman was in her *oikos* (house). Women did not vote, nor did they have many duties or responsibilities outside of the home (aside from religious activities), especially if they were of the upper crust. So, a look at Medea through this sociological lens would reveal a woman who has long removed herself from her *oikos* and, accordingly, the constraints of society (see Foley 148ff. for more on the female/house vs. male/city in drama). Despite her present remorse, as indicated in the letter at 113ff., Medea willingly abandoned her role as daughter by betraying her father in order to help Jason – she deserted her *oikos* and, as a result, her place in society. So, when she murders her brother, it should come as no surprise.

While it is true that she does become Jason's wife, and so re-establishes herself within the *oikos*, it seems that once you abandon the *oikos* and society's norms, there is no return. Medea laments angrily the fact that Jason has ordered her and their children out of the *oikos* (133ff.), and it is now at this critical state of flux that we see the sorceress plotting. There is no going back to being a daughter, and though she begs to be a wife again to the hero, the insults that Medea spews at Jason (knowingly) undermine her efforts. What's left to her is her role as a mother, but because she is out of the *oikos* (as are her children) she appears not to be bound by her maternal role nor by society's laws which govern mothers. And so, by the end of *Heroides* 12 our last glimpse of Medea as she alludes to the imminent murder of her children is of her in her role as 'other'.

Medea was a very popular subject for ancient poetry, and interesting accounts of different parts of the myth were produced by famous authors like Pindar, Euripides, Apollonius of Rhodes, Seneca and Valerius Flaccus (on these see further Griffiths 14ff. and Clauss & Johnston). Ovid in particular was clearly fascinated by her. In addition to *Heroides* 6 and 12, he wrote a tragedy called *Medea* (of which sadly only two lines survive). He also devoted a whole poem (*Tristia* 3.9) to her murder of her brother. In it he describes how, after eloping with Jason and the Fleece, she slowed down her father's pursuit of them by killing and dismembering Apsyrtus, strewing his limbs far and wide, so they would take a long time to collect, and setting up his pale hands and bloody head on a high rock, so that her father would see them and stop to recover the body. Ovid also told her story from Jason's arrival to her disappearance after the attempt on Theseus' life at *Metamorphoses* 7.1–424, showing us in more detail the naive and vulnerable young girl who got entangled with a smooth operator and because of him and her experiences with him went to the bad herself (although here she already possessed in herself the seeds that led to her degeneration, like passion, pride and problems over self-control).

We will go into *Metamorphoses* 7 in more detail, to give you a fuller picture of Ovid's Medea and of some of the incidents only briefly mentioned or alluded to in the letter. In that long narrative the epic hero Jason is debunked from the start. His exploits on the way out to Colchis are minimized in the opening lines. So too, when it comes to the trials performed by him for Aeetes, his actions are played down, while the vital importance of Medea's aid is played up. Something similar happens when it comes to the seizing of the Fleece (which was hung up

in a tree) prior to the return to Iolcus (the port in Thessaly from which Jason set out) at 7.149ff.:

The remaining task was to drug with magic herbs the sleepless snake,
a striking sight with its crest and three-forked tongue and 150
hooked fangs, the dread guardian of the Golden Fleece's tree.
After she had sprinkled on it a herb's soporific juice
and recited three times words which bring peaceful slumber,
which check heaving seas and rapid rivers, sleep came to
those eyes which had never known it. The heroic son of Aeson 155
seized the Fleece and, proud of this spoil, and taking with him
as additional spoil the woman who gave it to him,
he returned in triumph to the port of Iolcus with his wife.

Here the female is the real achiever, while Jason is undercut. Ovid begins by stressing how formidable the snake is, and then has *Medea* dispatch it (*she* is the one acting, and *her* even more formidable powers predominate). She takes them there and deals with the guardian, while Jason just nips in at the end to profit by all that. In view of that the designation of him in 155 seems decidedly mock-solemn. In the final few lines he starts to assert himself, but again he is undermined: he is absurdly proud of another's achievement; he regards her as a prize (a mere thing, on a par with the Fleece); he apparently does not thank her; and their marriage is minimized and passed over very quickly, suggesting something hurried and perfunctory.

When they are back in Greece, Ovid begins to stress still more the powerful sorceress side of Medea. When Jason begs her to extend the life of his aged father, she uses her magic to perform the miracle of rejuvenation, seeming more and more awesome, and a little frightening too. Then her evil aspects come to the fore, and she is depicted as chillingly manipulative, calculating, sadistic and ruthless, as she murders Pelias (for no stated reason) and employs his daughters (who have done her no harm at all) in the killing. There is real horror here, but also black humour. She pretends that she has broken up with Jason, takes refuge with Pelias' (comically gullible) daughters, wins their hearts with a show of friendship and is careful to mention the rejuvenation of Aeson. As their own father is old, they ask her to do that for him too (in fact begging her to slaughter their father, if they only knew it). She agrees, and then carefully sets up a trial run, killing a ram by cutting its throat, plunging it into a cauldron containing a magic mixture and swiftly and painlessly transforming it into a very young and healthy lamb. This performance is intended to impress and reassure the girls and to get them to countenance the murder of their father. It succeeds, and they beg her again to give him back his youth. Now we see how (deliciously) cunning and callous Medea is. She keeps the daughters in suspense for three days before proceeding with the operation (to make them keener to act). She puts Pelias to sleep, so they will find it easier to stab him. She comes out with a strong speech, urging them to action and playing on their devotion to their father. She allows Pelias at the end to awake from his magic sleep, so that he will

see that he is being stabbed to death by his own daughters. And there is a final bit of cruelty, when she plunges Pelias into the cauldron, so that the girls will expect his rejuvenation, in vain.

And now the king (and with him his guards) lay relaxed
 in a sleep like death, which had been produced by
 incantations and the power of Medea's magical tongue. 330
 His daughters, as ordered, entered the room with her and stood
 around his bed. She said: 'Cowards! Why hesitate now?
 Draw your swords and drain his old veins,
 so I can refill them with young blood!
 Your father's life and age are in your hands. 335
 If you have any love for him, and your hopes for him are real,
 do your duty by your father, use your weapons to free
 him from old age, stab him and make his blood flow!
 That made those who loved him most the first to harm him,
 thinking it a crime not to commit this crime. But none could 340
 bear to watch herself wounding him. They averted their eyes,
 turned away and struck at him fiercely and blindly.
 Though streaming with blood and half-butchered, he raised
 himself on his elbow and tried to get out of bed. Encircled by
 so many swords, he stretched out his pale arms and said: 345
 'Daughters, what are you doing? Who gave you weapons to kill
 your father?' Their courage and their hands faltered.
 Medea cut short his words by cutting his throat
 and plunged his mangled body into the hot water.

Again the girls are absurdly naive, not questioning why they rather than Medea should have to kill Pelias, or why they should all have to stab him and inflict many wounds, whereas a single stroke slit the ram's throat. And there is a grimly comic picture of them hacking away at him blindly in 341f. Medea's nasty sense of humour is also in evidence, as she has fun about their father's life in their hands in 335 and teases them about their hopes in 336. We can also see the poet's own wit here, in the verbal play at 339f. and 347f., and in the stupid question that he puts in the mouth of Pelias at 346 (QUESTION: 'Daughters, what are you doing?' ANSWER: 'We're killing you, daddy:').

Mischievous as ever, after leading his readers to expect a full account of the deaths of Creusa and Creon and the boys (foreshadowed at the end of our letter), Ovid passes over them very quickly at 7.394–7. Euripides in his tragedy entitled *Medea* is much more full, in particular over the first two deaths, which are reported to Medea by a messenger. He tells how Jason and his sons went to Creusa with the marvellous robe and crown and he asked her to accept the gifts and persuade her father not to banish the boys. The narrative that follows is carefully ordered. At 1156–66 the tension starts to mount as Creusa puts the presents on. Look for

(believable) realistic touches there and irony and foreshadowing of her death. At 1167–77 there is a dramatic progression as the princess feels the effect of the robe and crown. Examine those lines for vivid and small points of detail that bring out the horror. At 1177–82 there is a brief respite, to lower the emotional pitch (why?), and it looks as if Creusa is dead (why does Euripides mislead us like this?). But then she comes to, and we get more and more horrific details at 1183–1203. Analyze the various elements that give those lines real impact. Finally at 1204ff. there is another death, when Creon turns up and is killed because of his love for his daughter and in a grotesque parody of affection. Look for various instances of pathos in that passage.

When she set eyes on the finery, she gave in
and agreed to everything he had asked, and before
Jason and his boys had gone far from the palace,
she took the exquisite robe and put it on,
and placed the golden crown on her head, 1160
arranging her hair in a bright mirror,
and smiling at her lifeless reflection.
Then she got up from her chair and walked across
the room, taking delicate steps with her white feet,
thrilled at the presents, looking back again and again 1165
to see how the robe hung at her ankles.
But then we saw something terrifying.
She goes pale, staggers back sideways,
shaking all over, and only just manages to
collapse on to her chair, nearly falling to the floor. 1170
An old servant, thinking (I suppose) that a frenzy
from Pan or some other god had come upon her,
gave a cry of joy, until she saw the white froth
oozing from her lips, her eyes starting from
their sockets and her body draining of blood. 1175
Then she changed her cry of joy to a great
shriek. At once servants rushed off to Creon's rooms
and to Jason, to report the awful thing that
had happened to the new bride. The whole
house rang with lots of running footsteps. 1180
And now a sprinter running the return leg of a course
of two hundred yards would be reaching the finish-line
when the unfortunate girl broke her silence and opened
her eyes, coming to with an appalling groan.
She was being attacked by twofold agony: 1185
the golden diadem around her head was
streaming awesome, all-consuming fire,
and the delicate robe (the gift of your children)
was eating into the poor girl's delicate flesh.

She leapt up from the chair and ran off, 1190
 on fire, tossing her head this way and that,
 trying to shake off the gold crown. But it stayed
 firmly stuck to her, and when she tossed her
 hair, the fire only blazed up twice as much.
 She collapsed on the floor, crushed by catastrophe; 1195
 she was unrecognizable, except to her father.
 Her eyes looked unnatural, her lovely
 face was gone and blood mixed with
 fire was trickling from the top of her head,
 and the flesh was dripping from her bones 1200
 (like leaking resin), invisibly devoured by your poison.
 It was a hideous sight. We were all afraid to touch
 the corpse, in view of what had happened to her.
 Her wretched father, not knowing how she had died,
 suddenly entered and threw himself on the body. 1205
 He immediately sobbed, put his arms around it
 and kissed it, saying: 'My poor girl, some
 god must have made you die this degrading death,
 taking you from me when I'm old and close to the grave.
 Ah, my child, I wish I was dead too.' 1210
 When he had finished groaning and wailing,
 the old man wanted to get up, but he
 stuck to her delicate dress, like ivy clinging
 to laurel-branches. Then a grim wrestling began.
 He wanted to stand up, but she clung 1215
 to him; and when he pulled hard, he kept on
 tearing strips of aged flesh from his bones.
 Finally his suffering was too much for the poor
 man and he breathed his last, snuffed out.
 The girl and her old father lie next to each other, 1220
 corpses. A catastrophe! Enough to make anyone weep.

Euripides had built up a lot of sympathy for Medea in his play, but these two horrific deaths, described in detail and vividly, raise a moral issue (do we condone murder?) and mean that our sympathy for Medea must be diminished. It is diminished still further when she leaves the stage and slaughters her two children. This time Euripides employs a different technique for putting across death. Conventionally, in Greek tragedy an act of extreme violence could not be shown on stage, but it was an acceptable way of representing it to have somebody on stage reacting to it as it happened off stage. So at 1271ff. the children cry out for help as they are being killed, while the (intimidated) chorus dither over going to their assistance and end up too late to do anything. This is all stark and effective enough: much is left to our imagination; there is the grim silence

of Medea throughout; and the boys' cries are soon stopped, so that the murder is over with chilling speed.

The final scene of the play provides a bleak and dispiriting close. Medea appears aloft in a chariot drawn by dragons and, as a final blow, refuses to let Jason have his sons' bodies. Then two of the most famous lovers of myth begin trading insults while their children's corpses are still warm, and the impotent Jason is reduced to ineffectual appeals, as Medea disappears, and we witness one evil overcome by a stronger evil. If you want more on this powerful and thought-provoking tragedy see Grube 147ff. and Allan.

That play and adaptations of it have been put on for thousands of years (see e.g. Hall & Macintosh & Taplin 1ff.). A 1972 version by a Romanian director was set in a café basement (into which the audience were led by candle-bearing actors) and had a chained Medea cursing in Greek and a Jason who spoke only in Latin, to bring out the gulf between the two characters. In 1974 H. Müller's *Medeaspiel* had Medea (tied to a bed on stage) giving birth and then ripping up the child and hurling its limbs and intestines at Jason. Jackie Crossland's 1992 play *Collateral Damage* is a feminist retelling of the story with comic elements that depicts Medea as an innocent victim falsely accused of being a murderess.

Medea has also proved to be an immensely popular subject for many genres of post-Classical literature outside of tragedy, and also for opera, ballet, film and art (see Hall & Macintosh & Taplin 4, 100ff., 144ff., Clauss & Johnston 297ff., Griffiths 103ff. and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medea>). There is a great mass of material which really repays investigation and shows how this fascinating figure has been constantly reinterpreted and redeployed.

In literature Christa Wolf's *Medea: Stimmen* (translated by Cullen) is a new take on the myth with multiple narrators and lots of modern relevance (especially to the collapse of East Germany). This Medea is not a killer and not a witch, but a healer and wise woman. Brown-skinned and woolly-haired, she and some others from Colchis are refugees in Corinth, where she and her children fall victim to intrigue and xenophobia. This is a novel of ideas, which has much to say, about things like male power, state control, the immigrant experience and the pretensions and arrogance of 'civilization'.

For an interesting dance version of the story see *Medea: A Ballet in One Act* performed by the orchestra and ballet troupe of the Tbilisi Z. Paliashvili Opera and Ballet State Theatre (available on DVD from Kultur), especially scenes 14 (Creusa receives the fatal cloak), 15 (Medea's triumph and tragedy) and 16 (Jason's despair).

Two films in particular are worth seeing, in their different ways. *Jason and the Argonauts* (released by Columbia in 1963) is an enjoyable 'Sunday afternoon movie'. It has lots of action (including a climactic fight with skeletal earthborn men), and it is often unintentionally amusing (for instance, the Argonauts seem to wear diapers, and Aeetes has a very silly beard which his mother obviously knitted for him). Not surprisingly, given when and where it was made, this cinematic version demotes and diminishes Medea (so that the typical Hollywood hero is not upstaged by her but performs his great feats with minimal help from her), presenting her as a saccharine

and colourless bimbo. Essentially she is a female with a pretty face and prominent chest, while Jason is a handsome and neat male. They are Ken and Barbie, and this is Ken and Barbie's Greatest Adventure. Much more serious, and much more difficult and challenging, is the 1970 film *Medea* (in Italian, with subtitles), directed by Pasolini. This is a free adaptation of Euripides' play, which, like its source, questions civilization and ponders the human psyche. But Pasolini takes all that off in a new direction with a radical updating. He depicts the clash between two cultures – the primitive, instinctual culture of the Colchians (typical of the third world) and the more advanced and rational culture of the Greeks (typical of the modern western world). He shows that the latter culture exploits the former, stealing from it and devaluing what it takes, and that the two cultures cannot co-exist harmoniously, so that catastrophe results when they come into contact. In this deliberately disturbing film Pasolini jolts us into thinking, brings out the strangeness and savagery of the myth and alienates us in line with his own feelings of alienation. He gives back to Medea a major role in the action and really develops her character, especially her dark side (she is sensual, barbaric and cruel, and also strange and enigmatic).

Medea is as fascinating in the visual arts. Her power as a sorceress was a popular theme of sixth- and early fifth-century BC Attic vase paintings, and, interestingly, these vases are the first evidence we have of the death of Pelias. Medea is recognizable on the vases with this theme from her dress, her tall headdress and especially the box of drugs she holds. In the particular scene on the Pelias hydria (type in Pelias hydria in the Google Images search engine and view the first image) the sinister aspect of the rejuvenation (i.e. Pelias' murder) is not foregrounded, as Medea appears to be convincing Pelias himself of the merits of a quick dip in her cauldron filled with some nice refreshing herbs! And so, as in the earliest vase paintings, the interest lies in Medea's power.

One of the most striking vase paintings from the late fifth century BC (a bell crater of about 400 BC) shows Medea in her finest barbarian garb (type in Flight of Medea in the Google Images search engine and view the first image). She is in the magical chariot given to her by her grandfather, the Sun, and her position above the other characters reinforces her distance from everyone, and her status as a woman foreign to Greek culture. Her dress, outer garment and tiara are oriental (her headdress is very Phrygian) in their decoration and they add to her portrait as a non-Greek – she is in fact entirely 'other' in this painting. Elements of the fantastic and supernatural are played up with the wingless dragons that draw her chariot, itself encircled by a huge sun, and the presence of hideous Furies on either side of her (reminding us that the boys' murder will be punished). True to the play by Euripides that has influenced this image, Jason helplessly and pitifully looks on, as his dear sons lie slain on the altar (in the play Medea carries them away in the chariot, and on the vase this change also helps to stress her distance from those who should be closest to her). The pathos of the situation is stressed via the placement of Jason's clothing, which seems to be almost slipping down, and his expression of humiliation and grief due to his former wife is evident. The anguish of the children's tutor and nurse adds to the tragedy of the scene, as these characters clutch at

their hair in disbelief and horror. In the vase paintings subsequent to the production of Euripides' tragedy the emphasis shifts to this type of portrayal in which the focus is on Medea as a child murderer – the same association that we still have today with her name.

Equally interesting is a later fourth-century BC volute crater attributed to the Underworld Painter (type in Underworld painter Medea in the Google Images search engine and view the first image). The dense crowding of figures illustrates a clear shift in artistic taste, as the image of Medea on the cusp of stabbing one of her sons (at the bottom left) is not the central image; instead the unsuccessful attempt to remove a poisonous crown from Creusa's head inside her father's palace dominates. This type of vase painting, which shows many scenes of a myth in multiple registers (here Medea's Corinthian escapades), is regularly believed to have been inspired by tragedy and is typical of Southern Italian vases influenced by the theatre. The fullness of the painting seems almost overwhelming in contrast to the power of a single dramatic moment so effectively captured in the bell crater mentioned above. As in the earlier image, Medea is again sporting a very eastern mode of dress, complete with headdress, outer garment draped over her shoulder and tunic with decorated sleeves, all of which signal her foreignness. The horror of Medea's sinister nature is played up in the image of her seizing the boy's hair as he stands on an altar, a place of refuge. To add further to the poignancy of the scene, Jason is prevented from reaching his son as Frenzy bearing torches in his serpent/dragon-drawn chariot waits to carry Medea off. As in the preceding image, the focus remains clearly upon the 'otherness' of Medea, who is altogether different from the rest of the female figures in the painting.

Medea has remained a very popular subject in all artistic media to this day. The 1836–8 painting of Medea by the French artist Eugene Delacroix (type in Medea Eugene Delacroix in the Google Images search engine and view the first image) is a magnificent example of the continuing fascination with the heroine, her unnatural act of child-murder and her iconoclasm. Delacroix's decision to capture her on the point of slaying her sons illustrates this continued interest in her deviation from female norms. The artist's own brief comments on the painting indicate that Medea is being pursued, as does her backward glance and lengthy stride. A quick look at the painting may leave us wondering whether she has clasped her sons tightly to her body to rescue them from their pursuer, but a more careful examination conveys to the viewer Medea's unstable emotional state, effectively communicated in a number of ways. Her physical form has marked masculine aspects. She has broad shoulders, and her musculature is accentuated by the use of chiaroscuro, as the whiteness of her flesh contrasts with the shadows cast. Her angular jaw-line is also accentuated by the shadow-play. The painting has a pervasive darkness, with the sole light entering the cave in the upper left corner, thus lending itself to the overall ominous atmosphere. Furthermore, the three figures are foregrounded against a gloomy and indistinct area, so that the knife which will stab the boys is nearly lost. The lack of movement in the background is in stark contrast to the writhing of the children and their mother's movement as the children try to escape from her

violent clutches. Though Medea's breasts are bare, there is no suggestion of sensual femininity or nurturing concern for her sons, and the rigidity of expression on her face illustrates rather her resolve and defiance. Delacroix's choice of colour for clothing in the painting requires little comment. The redness of her cloak is naturally suggestive of impending bloodshed, and the choice of rose for her dress creates a neat contrast between notions of femininity and the character of Medea.

Also stimulating is the striking 1964 metal sculpture entitled *Medea* by Eduardo Paolozzi (type in Eduardo Paolozzi Medea in the Google Images search engine and view the top row of images). There is much that is intriguing and suggestive here. For example, the piece is extraordinary and mysterious; it is nearly seven feet tall (as Medea towers over lesser figures) and made of (hard) welded aluminium; and the square centre looks like (powerful, relentless) machine parts. Do the legs remind you of any particular creature, and how relevant is that creature to Medea and her story?

GLOSSARY OF CHARACTERS IN THE *HEROIDES*

- Achelous** a river-god defeated by Hercules for the hand of Deianira.
- Achilles** the greatest of the Greek fighters at Troy and the man who killed Hector.
- Acontius** the lover of Cydippe.
- Actaeon** a hunter who inadvertently saw Diana naked and was turned by her into a stag and was then killed by his own dogs.
- Adonis** a very handsome young hero loved by Venus.
- Aeetes** father of Medea, king of Colchis and possessor of the Golden Fleece.
- Aegeus** father of Theseus.
- Aegina** a nymph, ancestress of Achilles.
- Aegisthus** lover of Orestes' mother (Clytaemnestra), killed by Orestes.
- Aegyptus** brother of Danaus and father of fifty sons, whom he married to Danaus' daughters.
- Aeneas** trojan hero (son of Venus) who had an affair with Dido.
- Aeolus** the king who controlled the winds, father of Canace and Macareus.
- Aethra** daughter of king Pittheus, and mother of Theseus; also (in *Her.* 16 and 17) the name of one of Helen's maids.
- Agamemnon** commander in chief of the Greek forces at Troy and father of Orestes.
- Ajax** a great Greek warrior at Troy, cousin of Achilles.
- Alcaeus** a lyric poet on Lesbos contemporary with Sappho.
- Alcyone** one of Neptune's conquests.
- Alexander** another name for Paris.
- Allecto** one of the Furies (dread goddesses of the Underworld).
- Amphitryon** husband of Alcmena who passed as Hercules' father.
- Amymone** a heroine who slept with Neptune.
- Anactoria** a woman of Lesbos loved by Sappho.
- Anchises** father of Aeneas by Venus.

- Androgeos** son of Minos, killed in Athens.
- Andromache** wife of the Trojan hero Hector, enslaved after the fall of Troy.
- Andromeda** an Ethiopian princess rescued from a monster and married by Perseus.
- Anna** Dido's sister.
- Antaeus** an African giant killed by Hercules.
- Antenor** a wise old man of Troy.
- Antilochus** a Greek warrior killed in the fighting at Troy.
- Antinous** a leading suitor for the hand of Penelope.
- Apollo** a god of music and healing, who built the walls of Troy and shot Achilles.
- Argonauts** the Greek heroes who sailed with Jason on the ship called the Argo on the quest for the Golden Fleece.
- Ariadne** daughter of Minos (king of Crete) and sister of Phaedra; she helped Theseus kill the Minotaur, and was later abandoned by him, and then married by Bacchus.
- Ascanius** son of Aeneas.
- Astydamia** a nymph impregnated by Hercules.
- Atalanta** a beautiful heroine and great huntress loved by Meleager and Hippomenes; she would only marry a man who beat her in a race, and Hippomenes won her by throwing golden apples, which she stopped to pick up.
- Atlas** a giant who carried the sky on his shoulders; grandfather of Mercury.
- Atreus** father of Agamemnon, and grandfather of Orestes and Hermione.
- Atthis** a woman of Lesbos loved by Sappho.
- Auge** a heroine raped by Hercules.
- Bacchantes** female worshippers of Bacchus.
- Bacchus** god of wine.
- Boreas** the North Wind, lover of the Athenian princess Orithyia.
- Briseis** Achilles' slave girl, taken away from him by Agamemnon.
- Busiris** a king of Egypt who sacrificed strangers.
- Calyce** one of Neptune's conquests.
- Canace** a daughter of Aeolus who loved her own brother (Macareus).
- Cassandra** prophetic daughter of Priam.
- Celaeno** one of Neptune's conquests.
- Centaurs** violent mythical creatures (half-man half-horse) defeated by Theseus and also by Hercules.
- Cephalus** a hero loved and carried off by the goddess Dawn.
- Cepheus** father of Andromeda.
- Cerberus** the three-headed watchdog of the Underworld.
- Ceres** a goddess of agriculture and mystic rites.
- Ceyx** Alcyone's husband, who was drowned in a shipwreck.
- Chalciope** Medea's sister.
- Charaxus** brother of Sappho.
- Charybdis** a monster (opposite Scylla) that sucked down the sea three times a day, creating an inescapable whirlpool.

- Clymene** one of Helen's maids.
- Creon** king of Corinth and father of Creusa.
- Creusa** the daughter of Creon whom Jason married, leaving Medea.
- Cupid** the god of love (son of Venus); sometimes there are several Cupids.
- Cybele** a mother-goddess worshipped in the Trojan area by frenzied devotees.
- Cydippe** a beautiful young woman loved by Acontius.
- Cydro** a woman of Lesbos loved by Sappho.
- Daedalus** Icarus' father, a craftsman who invented wings for men.
- Danaus** brother of Aegyptus and father of fifty daughters who were married to Aegyptus' fifty sons.
- Daphne** a nymph loved by Apollo.
- Deianira** wife of Hercules.
- Deiphobus** a son of Priam.
- Demophoon** a son of Theseus who was given shelter by Phyllis and took her virginity, but then left her.
- Deucalion** a hero who loved Pyrrha.
- Diana** a goddess of hunting and the wilds, identified with Hecate.
- Dido** queen of Carthage, who had an affair with Aeneas.
- Diomedes** a savage king of Thrace with man-eating horses.
- Dolon** a Trojan spy killed by Ulysses and Diomedes.
- Endymion** a handsome young hero loved by the Moon.
- Enyo** a goddess who drove her worshippers into an ecstatic frenzy.
- Europa** a heroine abducted by Jupiter in the form of a bull.
- Eurymachus** a leading suitor for the hand of Penelope.
- Eurystheus** a king who ruled over Hercules and imposed the Labours on him.
- Eurytus** father of Iole.
- Fates** goddesses of fate who spin the threads on which the lives of mortals depend.
- Fauns** minor gods of the countryside.
- Faunus** a minor rustic god.
- Fury** a sinister goddess of the Underworld.
- Ganymede** a handsome Trojan prince abducted by Jupiter and made his cup-bearer.
- Geryon** a giant with three bodies.
- Glaucus** a sea-god.
- Gorge** sister of Deianira.
- Hecataeon** father of Calyce.
- Hecate** a goddess of magic and the Underworld.
- Hector** a son of Priam and the Trojans' best fighter.
- Hecuba** wife of Priam and mother of Paris.
- Helen** the wife of Menelaus who eloped with Paris.
- Helle** a young heroine who fell from the golden ram into the sea.
- Hercules** the super-hero who performed the twelve Labours.
- Hermione** Helen's daughter.
- Hero** a beautiful heroine loved by Leander.
- Hesione** a heroine taken captive by the hero Telamon.

- Hippodamia** ancestor of Hermione and a princess whose father was beaten in a chariot race by Pelops, who thus won her as his wife; also (in *Her* 17) the name of a heroine whom the Centaurs tried to carry off at her wedding, and who was defended by her husband's Thessalian subjects.
- Hippolyte** an Amazon queen whose sword-belt Hercules had to seize and bring back as one of his Labours.
- Hippolytus** a son of Theseus, loved by his stepmother Phaedra, and dear to the goddess Diana, whom he worshipped with great reverence.
- Hippomenes** a Greek hero who beat the heroine Atalanta in a foot-race by throwing golden apples, which she stopped to pick up, and thus won her as his wife.
- Hydra** a many-headed snake killed by Hercules.
- Hyllus** son of Hercules and Deianira.
- Hymen** god of marriage.
- Hypermetra** the daughter of Danaus who refused to kill her husband.
- Hypsipyle** queen of Lemnos, married and abandoned by Jason.
- Iarbas** an African chieftain and suitor for the hand of Dido.
- Icarius** Penelope's father.
- Icarus** Daedalus' son who flew too close to the sun.
- Idyia** Medea's mother.
- Ilioneus** a Trojan hero.
- Io** a river-nymph who was loved by Jupiter.
- Iole** a princess whom Hercules fell in love with after taking her captive.
- Irus** a beggar who sided with Penelope's suitors.
- Itys** son of Procne, killed by her to get revenge on her husband.
- Jason** the Greek hero who went on the quest for the Golden Fleece, and who married Hypsipyle, Medea and Creusa.
- Juno** wife and sister of Jupiter, the queen of the gods and goddess of marriage.
- Jupiter** king of the gods, husband and brother of Juno.
- Laertes** father of Ulysses.
- Lamus** son of Hercules and Omphale.
- Laodamia** the young wife of Protesilaus.
- Laodice** one of Neptune's conquests.
- Laomedon** Priam's father.
- Latona** the mother of Diana and Apollo.
- Leander** the young man who loved Hero and swam to her of a night.
- Leda** mother of Helen, raped by Jupiter in the form of a swan.
- Leucippus** the father of two heroines who were carried off by Helen's brothers Castor and Pollux.
- Lynceus** the son of Aegyptus whose life was spared by Hypermetra.
- Macareus** a son of Aeolus, who loved his own sister (Canace).
- Mars** the god of war and lover of Venus.
- Medea** daughter of Aeetes and a witch, who helped Jason get the Golden Fleece.
- Medon** a herald who associated with Penelope's suitors.

- Medusa** a beautiful heroine loved by Neptune before her hair was turned to snakes.
- Melanthius** Ulysses' goatherd who sided with Penelope's suitors.
- Meleager** a Greek hero (brother of Deianira) cursed by his mother for killing her brothers (after they objected when he awarded Atalanta the hide of the huge Calydonian boar killed in a hunt, as she had inflicted the first wound on it) and killed by her.
- Menelaus** brother of Agamemnon and husband of Helen and father of Hermione.
- Mercury** the divine messenger of the gods.
- Minerva** goddess of wisdom and crafts who favoured the Greeks at Troy.
- Minos** a king of Crete, father of Phaedra and Ariadne.
- Minotaur** a monster (half-man and half-bull) born of Pasiphae's mating with a bull; it lived in the Labyrinth and was killed by Theseus.
- Muses** the goddesses who inspire poets.
- Neptune** the god of the sea, who built the walls of Troy.
- Nereus** a sea-god, father of Thetis and grandfather of Achilles.
- Nessus** a Centaur killed by Hercules.
- Nestor** the aged king of Pylos who fought at Troy.
- Niobe** a queen who boasted that she had more children than Diana's mother, with the result that they were all killed by Diana and Apollo, and Niobe was turned into a rock.
- Nymph** goddess of the countryside.
- Oenone** a water-nymph loved by Paris before he eloped with Helen.
- Omphale** an oriental queen served and loved by Hercules.
- Orestes** son of Agamemnon, and husband and cousin of Hermione.
- Orithyia** an Athenian princess loved by the god Boreas.
- Palaemon** a sea-god.
- Pallas** another name for Minerva.
- Pans** minor gods of the countryside.
- Paris** the Trojan prince who eloped with Helen, causing the Trojan War.
- Patroclus** a Greek warrior killed at Troy and a close friend of Achilles.
- Pelasgus** a king of Argos.
- Pelias** the king of Thessaly who sent Jason on the quest for the Golden Fleece.
- Pelops** grandfather of Menelaus and great-grandfather of Orestes and Hermione; he beat Hippodamia's father in a chariot race and thus won her as his bride.
- Penelope** wife of Ulysses.
- Penthesilea** an Amazon queen who fought at Troy on the Trojan side.
- Perseus** a hero who rescued Andromeda from a sea-monster and married her.
- Phaedra** wife of Theseus and sister of Ariadne, who loved her stepson Hippolytus.
- Phaon** a ferryman on the island of Lesbos loved by Sappho.
- Phereclus** builder of Paris' ship.
- Phoebus** another name for Apollo.
- Phoenix** one of the Greeks at Troy who went on the embassy to Achilles.
- Phrixus** Helle's brother who rode on the golden ram.

- Phyllis** a princess of Thrace who gave her love to Demophoon but was left by him.
- Pirithous** a king of northern Greece who was a great friend of Theseus.
- Pisander** one of Penelope's suitors.
- Pittheus** the king of Troezen, father of Aethra and grandfather of Theseus.
- Pleiad** a divine daughter of Atlas.
- Pleione** a sea-nymph.
- Pluto** god of the Underworld.
- Polybus** one of Penelope's suitors.
- Polydamas** a Trojan hero and friend of Hector.
- Priam** king of Troy and father of Paris and Hector.
- Procne** wife of the Thracian king Tereus, who raped her sister; in revenge Procne killed her son Itys, cooked him and served him up to Tereus; she was then changed into a nightingale.
- Procrustes** a murderer killed by Theseus.
- Protesilaus** husband of Laodamia, and the first man killed in the Trojan War.
- Pygmalion** Dido's evil brother.
- Pyrrrha** a heroine loved by Deucalion.
- Pyrrihus** son of Achilles.
- Rhesus** a Trojan ally killed by Ulysses and Diomedes.
- Sappho** a Greek lyric poetess who loved Phaon.
- Satyrs** minor gods of the countryside.
- Sciron** robber killed by Theseus.
- Scylla** a six-headed monster, with dogs growing from her lower body, who lived in a cave near the sea (opposite Charybdis) and attacked passing ships.
- Sinis** a murderer killed by Theseus.
- Sychaeus** Dido's husband who was killed before Aeneas met Dido.
- Tantalus** son of Jupiter and father of Pelops and an ancestor of Hermione and Orestes, he was punished in the Underworld with perpetual hunger and thirst.
- Telamon** a hero who took captive the heroine Hesione.
- Thalia** one of the Muses.
- Theseus** an Athenian hero (father of Demophoon and Hippolytus), who abducted Helen when she was young, and who killed the Minotaur and then abandoned Ariadne after she had helped him.
- Thespius** a Greek king whose fifty daughters were impregnated by Hercules.
- Thetis** a goddess of the sea, famous for her silvery feet.
- Thoas** father of Hypsipyle.
- Tisiphone** one of the Furies (dread goddesses of the Underworld).
- Tithonus** a handsome Trojan abducted by the goddess Dawn and who became her husband.
- Tlepolemus** a Greek fighter killed at Troy.
- Triton** a sea-god.
- Tydeus** a brother of Deianira.
- Tyndareus** Hermione's grandfather and husband of Leda.

Typhos a monster which was defeated by Jupiter and imprisoned under Mount Etna.

Tyro a heroine seduced by Neptune.

Ulysses (Greek name: Odysseus) Penelope's husband who fought at Troy and who was hated by Neptune.

Venus the goddess of love.

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and Critical Essays

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and Sarah Parker*

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