A Narratological Investigation of Ovid's Medea: *Met.* 7.1–424

Daniel Libatique

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DANIEL LIBATIQUE

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I apply the methodology of narratological focalization to Ovid's account of Medea in the *Metamorphoses* (7.1–424), an episode that many scholars have acknowledged as marked by jarring shifts. Focalization allows the reader to trace more subtly and appreciate more fully the step-by-step progression in Medea's character, as the audience's sympathy is gradually alienated from the young girl in love by means of shifting focalizations. I also investigate the neglected Liber vignette (7.294–296) as an important signpost for the murder of Pelias, rather than a retrospective close to the Aeson episode.

I. Introduction

The Medea of book 7 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* undergoes three distinct journeys. The first two, geographic and thematic, are easy to glean from the text, and several scholars have adequately remarked upon their stages and delineations.[1] Geographically, Medea begins in Colchis, travels to Thessaly with Jason, flees to Corinth, flies all over the Aegean, ends up in Athens, and finally disappears thence from Ovid's text. The geographic ties into the thematic; commentators and scholars have noted a tripartite evolution of Medea, from young girl in love with Jason, to

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[1] See W. Anderson, *Ovid's* Metamorphoses*: Books 6–10* (Norman 1972) 243–89; F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso Metamorphosen: Kommentar, Buch VI–VII* (Heidelberg 1976) 196–306.

benevolent witch who rejuvenates Jason's father Aeson, to malevolent sorceress who plays a trick on the Peliades and murders their father Pelias.[2] Various parts of that geographic and thematic journey acted as the focus of other literary works: Euripides' tragedy *Medea,* Apollonius Rhodius' epic *Argonautica*, even Ovid's own lost tragedy *Medea*.[3] The shifts between thematic divisions in this particular account, however, are often noted as abrupt and, at times, unmotivated; for example, Carole Newlands writes, "Ovid passes abruptly from a sympathetic portrayal of Medea as lovesick maiden to a tragicomic account of her career as accomplished *pharmaceutria* (witch) and murderess. The Medea of *Metamorphoses* 7 is not a coherent, rounded character."[4] However, we can, in fact, see coherence if we utilize a new method of approach in order to trace more subtly and appreciate more fully the progression of Medea's character.

For that purpose, I propose a third kind of journey: a narratological one. I argue that Ovid uses a complex narratological technique to distance Medea progressively from the audience in terms of perspective and emotion; in so doing, he depicts a journey that starts subjectively with a young girl in love and culminates in an impersonal mythological abstraction. I intend in this paper to use the narratological lens of focalization

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[2] Existing analyses of the Medea episode proper, defined here as *Met.* 7.1–349, tend to split it into three major thematic parts. In his schema, B. Otis (*Ovid as an Epic Poet* [Cambridge 1966] 168) divides it thus: first, "Medea," and then two episodes subsumed under the heading of "Human miracles": "Aeson" and the "Daughters of Pelias." The subtitles in Anderson's commentary (above, n.1) 243–280 keep Medea well within the reader's view: "Medea and Jason," "Medea and Aeson," and "Medea and Pelias." Bömer (above, n.1) 196–306 delineates under the general episode heading "Medea" three geographically termed parts: first, "Iason in Colchis," and then under the subheading "Medea in Hellas" two parts, "Aeson" and "Pelias." Otis omits the three-line treatment of Bacchus and his nurses at 7.294–296, Anderson does not investigate it too deeply, and Bömer subsumes it into the "Aeson"; nevertheless, the section is an important signpost, as I will later demonstrate. I leave aside the collection of Medea's wanderings after the murder of Pelias in 7.350–403, "a sharp break in narrative continuity," as C. Segal ("Black and White Magic in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses': Passion, Love, and Art," *Arion Third Series* 9.3 [2002] 18) calls it, and the 20-line treatment in 7.404–24 of Medea's interaction with Theseus, in which the origin of aconite takes up more space than the narrative proper. I will investigate the near-effacement of Medea in these episodes later.

[3] If one believes the lost *Medea* to have been composed before the *Metamorphoses,* a likely possibility.

[4] C. Newlands, "The Metamorphosis of Ovid's Medea," in J. Clauss and S. Johnston, eds., *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (Princeton 1996) 178–79.

as coined by Gérard Genette,[5] refined by Mieke Bal[6] and Don Fowler,[7] and utilized by Philip Peek[8] with specific reference to the *Metamorphoses.* Such a method of analysis will reveal a different sort of structure to the episode than that already posited by previous scholarship. I will first define my terminology and then bring focalization to bear on select passages, especially the vignette of Liber and his nurses, an episode to which few commentaries and scholars pay much attention.

Using this methodology, I propose a narratological structure for the Medea episode that runs concurrently with the thematic structure. Broadly, focalization undergoes four major shifts in this section of *Metamorphoses* 7 and creates five sections. The first section (7–178) focalizes through Medea; the second section (179–293) focalizes through the model author; the third (294–296), very briefly, through Liber; the fourth (297–349) through the model author, the Peliades, and Pelias; and the fifth (350–424) through the model author alone. Although there are interjections of other focalizers throughout each section, for the most part each section is presented through the point of view of the focalizers indicated above. These shifting narrative voices progressively distance Medea from the audience by alienating them from her perspective, feelings, and ideas; as such, these shifts enable the reader to anticipate better the climax of horror in the Pelias episode and show the journey of Medea from tragic figure to mythological abstraction and force of evil.

II. Focalization as Methodology

Focalization is concerned with the perspective from which the story is being narrated and viewed. At any given point in the text, one of three entities narrates the story and views the action, resulting in three kinds of text: (1) simple narrator-text, in which the entity that Peek calls the "model author" (or narrator) both narrates and views; (2) character-text, wherein a character within the story narrates and views; and (3) complex narrator-text or embedded focalization, by which

[5] G. Genette, *Figures I–III* (Paris 1966–1972).

[6] M. Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative,* 2nd. edition (Toronto 1997) 142–61.

[7] D. Fowler, "Deviant Focalization in Vergil's *Aeneid*," *PCPhS* 36 (1990).

[8] P. Peek, "Procne, Philomela, Tereus in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses': A Narratological Approach," *Antichthon* 37 (2003).

the model author verbalizes a character's inner state or perspective through indirect discourse or description—that is to say, the model author narrates but the character views.[9] "Focalization" means that a certain entity is viewing the action, whether described in his or her own words or those of the model author; focalization through Medea, for example, can be expressed either through character-text, if she speaks in the narrative, or through complex narrator-text, if the model author narrates her inner feelings.

Here, a distinction must be drawn between simple narrator-text that focuses on a character and complex narrator-text that depicts a scene *through* a character's eyes. The key difference lies in the viewer of the action: the model author for the former, the character for the latter. While the latter often includes such markers as verbs of seeing (like *uidere* or *spectare*) that signpost a character's perspective, the former offers the model author's take on the scene, not the character's. This slippage between narrator and subject of narration makes simple narrator-text difficult to distinguish from complex narrator-text, but without a clear or unmistakable identification of the character as the viewer of the action while the model author narrates the character's inner emotions, there cannot be complex narrator-text.

We can see these voices at work in the first lines of book 7. Book 6 ends with the birth of two of the Argonauts, Calais and Zetes, and the disembarking of the Argo for the golden fleece (*Met.* 6.711–721). The first six lines of book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*, then, connect the events to come with those just mentioned:

> iamque fretum Minyae Pagasaea puppe secabant,
> perpetuaque trahens inopem sub nocte senectam
> Phineus uisus erat, iuvenesque Aquilone creati
> uirgineas uolucres miseri senis ore fugarant,
> multaque perpessi claro sub Iasone tandem
> contigerant rapidas limosi Phasidos undas.
>
> (7.1–6)[10]

[9] Peek (above, n.8) 36. The latter two, character-text and complex narrator-text, might be construed respectively as direct speech and indirect speech, but I adhere to Peek's assertion that those terms are insufficient to embody the concepts of both speaking and viewing.

[10] The text used throughout is R. Tarrant's 2004 OCT. This and all following translations are mine. All line citations from this point on refer to book 7 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* unless otherwise stated.

> And now the Argonauts were cutting a path through the sea with their Pagasaean ship, and they had seen Phineus, dragging out his needy old age in eternal darkness, and the sons of Aquilo had banished the maiden birds from the face of the miserable old man, and having endured many calamities, they, under the direction of distinguished Jason, at last had lit upon the rushing waters of the muddy Phasis.

Books 6 and 7 are joined seamlessly by the Boreads, participants in the sea voyage and effectors of Phineus' salvation. The connective *iamque* and continual motion of the imperfect *secabant* also serve to bridge linguistically the gap between the books. For all intents and purposes, these lines are at first glance straight narrator-text. There are no direct speeches or ostensible descriptions of a character's inner state. The model author seems simply to narrate the sailing of the Argonauts looking backward in time; they had seen Phineus (*uisus erat,* 3), driven off the Harpies (*fugarant,* 4), and reached the waters of the Phasis (*contigerant,* 6), all portrayed as accomplished action by means of the pluperfect tense.

Upon closer inspection, however, some words in the section creep into the realm of value judgment, which in turn leads to the question of who is making the judgment. For example, from whose perspective is the night unending (*perpetua*, 2) and Phineus' old age needy (*inopem*, 2)? The model author continues to describe Phineus as wretched (*miseri,* 4), another value judgment, and Jason is described as distinguished (*claro*, 5). All signs point to complex narrator-text through the *Argonauts*' eyes: they see the old man's needy state (*inopem*), compounded by the incessant nature of his suffering (*perpetua*), and want to help release him from his wretchedness (*miseri*), all in the service of their distinguished leader (*claro*). The main verb *uisus erat* indicates a specific point of view from which the story is being told; while there is no explicit agent, we can safely assume that it is the Argonauts. Focalization thus can either expand outward to encompass entire sentences and vignettes[11] or focus in on specific words and their connotative resonances within the character whose perspective they portray. With this concept in mind, we turn now to the Medea narrative proper and begin with an illustration of Medea as primary focalizer for the first part of the narrative.

[11] Medea clearly focalizes the entire character-text, or direct speech, of 11–71.

III. Medea as Focalizer: 7.7–178

The character-text and especially the complex narrator-text throughout this initial section (7–178) afford the audience both an intimate view into Medea's innermost thoughts and a deliberate alignment with her point of view as she experiences various emotions relating to her inner conflict and Jason's dangers. Ovid uses this technique of alignment to evoke sympathy in the audience and set up the devastating decline that Medea will undergo after being removed from Colchis. The audience would want a sympathetic young girl to succeed in her quest to achieve her objective, namely to protect and aid her beloved; when her objective shifts to murder for the sake of murder with Pelias, the audience will be forced to question simultaneously the source of Medea's transformation and, in light of it, their own sympathy. They must ask what violent forces, whether internal or external, have caused the sympathetic young girl to try her hand at pure evil. They may come prepared with some answers, due to the literary baggage with which Medea comes to *Metamorphoses* 7, but the structure of Ovid's narrative precludes many of them: in the *Metamorphoses,* Medea's love and the actions that it causes her to perform are not spurred by the divine agents of Apollonius' *Argonautica*; Jason's betrayal, the most powerful motivator of Euripides' *Medea*, mythologically postdates the events of the first three parts of Ovid's narrative. The audience is forced to view Medea through fresh eyes and restructure their expectations of the myth because of these differing details and these shifting narratological voices.

Medea's journey begins after the bridge between books 6 and 7. After two lines of narrator-text (7–8) on the journey of the Argonauts and their arrival in Aeëtes's court, the model author reveals a Medea plagued by pernicious love: *concipit interea ualidos Aeetias ignes / et luctata diu, postquam ratione furorem / uincere non poterat* ("Meanwhile, the daughter of Aeetes caught fire powerfully and wrestled for a long time and, after she could not overcome her frenzy with reason, [said] . . ." 9–11). Here, in the absence of a reference to Medea as a viewer, the passage must be simple narrator-text; it has to be the model author who is portraying Medea in the way that *he* sees her: a maiden battling against powerful love (*ualidos . . . ignes*, 9), wrestling for a long time (*luctata diu*, 10), and losing her fight against frenzy (*ratione furorem / uincere non poterat*, 10–11). The model author creates a

thoroughly sympathetic portrait of Medea as she languishes in love for Jason by explaining her state in his own words.

After this brief narrator-text, however, the model author builds upon this sympathy by next affording Medea a voice with which to express her innermost thoughts in the character-text of 11–71. She lucidly expresses her conflict with vocabulary and syntax to match, most strikingly at 19–21: *aliudque cupido, / mens aliud suadet; uideo meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor* ("And my desire advises one thing, but my mind advises another; I see and approve of the better [path, but] I follow the worse"). Two successive instances of an enjambed adversative asyndeton set up the two dilemmas that engender the decision that Medea must make: desire (*cupido*) versus reason (*mens*), the path of paternal obedience (*meliora*) versus the path of submission to her own desire (*deteriora*). In addition, both sentences are balanced by chiastic structures: object-subject-subject-object in *aliud cupido—mens aliud*, verb-object-object verb in *uideo meliora—deteriora sequor*. The speech is deliberately crafted and constructed so as to illustrate the constant vacillation between extremes that will end in Medea's decision to obey her father and banish her love for Jason: *effuge crimen!* "Escape the charge!" (71). The impact of the character-text and focalization through Medea puts the audience in her position and evokes the audience's sympathy as they gain access to her inner struggles and her warring thoughts. These are the mental processes of a young girl in love, one whom the audience would want to recover and regain control over her emotional state. That desire stems directly from this opening foray of sympathy-evocation, where the young girl not only gives voice to her wretched state but also communicates directly with her audience.

After the monologue, the encounter of Medea and Jason at Hecate's altars (74–94) contains a powerful and unmistakable instance of complex narrator-text that aligns Medea's point of view (rather than the model author's) with that of the audience through the model author's description. The model author builds a connection between the audience and Medea by depicting the scene from her perspective and concomitant emotional state as she sets eyes on Jason:

> et iam fortis erat pulsusque resederat ardor,
> cum uidet Aesoniden extinctaque flamma reluxit.
> erubuere genae totoque recanduit ore,
> utque solet uentis alimenta adsumere quaeque

> parua sub inducta latuit scintilla fauilla
> crescere et in ueteres agitata resurgere uires,
> sic iam lenis amor, iam quem languere putares,
> ut uidit iuuenem, specie praesentis inarsit.
> et casu solito formosior Aesone natus
> illa luce fuit; posses ignoscere amanti.
> spectat et in uultu ueluti tum denique uiso
> lumina fixa tenet nec se mortalia demens
> ora uidere putat nec se declinat ab illo.
>
> (76–88)

> And now she was strong and her passion, beaten away, had abated, when she sees the son of Aeson, and the flame that had been snuffed out now rekindled. Her cheeks blushed, and her whole face was inflamed, and just as a tiny spark is wont to taking nourishment from the wind, a flame which, hidden under ash strewn on top of it, is wont to grow and regain its previous strength once stirred, so her love, which just now was gentle, which just now you could think was growing weak, burned as she saw the youth, at the sight of him present. And the son of Aeson in that light was even more beautiful than usually chanced to happen; you could pardon the girl in her infatuation. She watches and keeps her eyes fixed on his face, as though she saw him just then [for the first time], nor does she in her madness think she sees a mortal face, yet she does not turn herself away from him.

The model author describes what physiologically happens to Medea upon the sight of Jason (*uidet* 77): there is fire imagery throughout the narrative (*extincta flamma reluxit* 77; *recanduit* 78; the simile of a spark surging into flame 79–81; and *inarsit* 83), which recalls the reference to powerful fires (*ualidos ignes* 9) before the monologue in which she decides to banish her desire for Jason. The physical sight of him has undone her resolve and brought her back to where she began. Even though the model author exploits his direct relationship to the audience in the second-person addresses of *putares* (82) and *posses* (85), the passage as a whole is complex narrator-text focalized through Medea. The model author highlights the processes of her mind: *in uultu ueluti tum denique uiso / lumina fixa tenet* ("She keeps her eyes planted on his face, as though she finally saw him at that time," 86–87); he describes what is seen through her eyes: *nec se mortalia demens / ora uidere putat* ("nor does she in her madness think she sees a mortal face," 87–88). The repetition and polyptoton of *uidere* and the use of synonyms highlight the fact that it is Medea's perspective from which the story is being told,

that it is Medea who is viewing the narrative's action: *uidet* 77; *uidit* 83; *spectat* and *uiso,* 86; *uidere* 88. Newlands perhaps best sums up the monologue and the following encounter of Jason and Medea at Hecate's altars: "In its omission of divine agencies and its subjective focusing upon the heroine, the first half of the Medea narrative provides a psychological study of how human passion involves contradictory emotions and voluntary self-deception."[12] That "subjective focusing" not only "upon" but also through Medea allows us to build a level of sympathy for the lovelorn young girl, as we see the scene through her eyes and hear described what is happening to her.

The evocation of sympathy with Medea by means of complex narrator-text continues into Ovid's account of Jason's three trials. As Jason and the spectators lay eyes upon the *terrigenae* for the first time, the model author gives Medea a cutaway from the action, as it were:

> demisere metu uultumque animumque Pelasgi.
> ipsa quoque extimuit quae tutum fecerat illum,
> utque peti uidit iuuenem tot ab hostibus unum,
> palluit et subito sine sanguine frigida sedit;
> neue parum ualeant a se data gramina, carmen
> auxiliare canit secretasque advocat artes.
>
> (133–138)

> The Pelasgians cast down their faces and spirits in fear. But she who had made him safe was terrified. And as she saw the lone youth beset by so many enemies, she blanched and sat frozen, bloodless all of a sudden. And lest the herbs that she gave him not be efficacious enough, she sings a song to help, and she invokes her occult skills.

Her fear outweighs that of the other spectators; the prefix *ex-* of *extimuit* (134) intensifies the degree of her fright beyond that of the Pelasgians. Medea is again the viewer of the narrative's action: *utque peti uidit iuuenem tot ab hostibus unum* (135). Her gaze (*uidit*) becomes one with the audience's as she fears for his safety as a lone combatant against so many enemies (*tot ab hostibus unum*). The complex narrator-text continues as the author describes what Medea experiences: *palluit et subito sine sanguine frigida sedit* ("she blanched and sat frozen, bloodless all of a sudden," 136). Up to this point, the narratological focalization through

[12] Newlands (above, n.4) 185.

Medea (in the character-text of 11–71 and in the complex narrator-text of 76–88 and 133–138) has thoroughly established Medea as a sympathetic figure.

When Medea lands with Jason in Thessaly, the site of her rejuvenation of Aeson, the focalization remains largely with her after some interruptions. In narrator-text, she is depicted as Jason's *spolia altera* (157), an appellation by which the model author indicates Jason's "materialistic evaluation of Medea's worth. . . . There is no mention of love here and Jason will exploit Medea's worth in his subsequent treatment of her."[13] However, after a brief interjection of character-text from Jason in which he asks her to save his aging father (164–168), the focalization importantly returns to Medea. After the model author describes her reaction to Jason in simple narrator-text (*nec tenuit lacrimas. mota est pietate rogantis,* "Nor did he hold back tears. She is moved by his loyalty as he pleads," 169), she rebuffs his request (to take away years of life from him to add them to his father) in emotional character-text: *quod . . . / excidit ore tuo, coniunx, scelus? ergo ego cuiquam / posse tuae uideor spatium transcribere uitae?* ("What wickedness has fallen from your mouth, husband? Do I seem able then to transfer an interval of your life over to anyone?" 172–173). A tenderness for Jason underlies her words: she addresses him as *coniunx*, she rejects his suggestion as *scelus*, and she generalizes with the indefinite *cuiquam*, which may indicate his importance beyond anyone else, let alone his father, to her.[14]

Focalization through Medea, both in character-text and complex narrator-text, bleeds through the thematic and geographic boundary between Colchis and Thessaly at line 159. The narratological shift happens twenty lines later at line 179, with the end of Medea's character-text to

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[13] See J. Rosner-Siegel, "Amor, Metamorphosis and Magic: Ovid's Medea (Met. 7.1–424)," *CJ* 77.3 (1982) 237. G. Tissol (*The Face of Nature: Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's* Metamorphoses [Princeton 1997] 140–41) paints a similarly unflattering view of Jason with respect to his "heroism" by examining the way Ovid undercuts the heroic expectations that Apollonius has set up for Jason in book 3 of the *Argonautica*: "In [7.115–119], all narrative momentum vanishes, as does any chance of heroic behavior on Jason's part. . . . As if to correct Apollonius, Ovid eliminates Jason's one moment of heroic excellence."

[14] I diverge here from Newlands (above, n.4) 186, 187, n.16, who asserts that Medea's "reply to Jason's request . . . reveals little emotion for her spouse." It is true that "Medea says nothing of *amor* here," but while *amor* may not be explicitly evoked, the diction of Medea's speech, still indicates some sort of "misguided love," as Rosner-Siegel (above, n.13) 238 observes. Newlands would argue for the split in Medea's character beginning with this speech; I see it as happening after it.

Jason. There, the focalization shifts forcibly from Medea to the model author, beginning a section of simple narrator-text that distances Medea from the audience. Remaining, however, are questions of how and, more to the point, why.

IV. Model Author as Focalizer: 7.179–293

Line 179 marks the beginning of a section of simple narrator-text that lasts all the way to the end of the Aeson episode proper at 293, save for the prayer of 192–219 (character-text focalized through Medea), which nevertheless contributes to a portrayal of Medea as self-interested or distant. I characterize the whole section as simple narrator-text because of its preponderance and the alignment of the effect of the character-text with that of the simple narrator-text. Ovid's portrayal of this detached Medea in the context of an episode with a happy ending (the rejuvenation of Aeson) creates distance between Medea and the audience and provides the next step in Medea's journey towards an archetypal figure of evil.

From lines 179 to 191, the model author describes Medea's journey through a quiet world at night; at 188, she begins to prepare for the ritual of rejuvenating Aeson by purifying herself. The character-text that follows, the most notable exception to my characterization of this section as strictly simple narrator-text, shows Medea invoking such divinities as Nox, the stars, Hecate, and the earth (192–198), but she is always set on the task at hand.[15] Jason provides the link between this section of the narrative and the last discussed above, inasmuch as it is his request that has led Medea to issue the prayer, but here there is no mention of Jason, let alone of *amor*[16] or any motivating force for her endeavor. She focuses rather on her own accomplishments and how they must act as precedent for what she intends to undertake. The egocentrism is compounded by the glut of first-person adjectives and verbs, especially in the first part of the prayer.[17] The self-obsession is notable too as she turns her attention towards Jason's trials:

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[15] Rosner-Siegel (above, n.13) 239 summarizes and divides the speech into its constituent parts.

[16] See above, n.13 and n.14.

[17] *Coeptis conscia nostris*, 194; *uolui*, 199; *sisto*, 200; *concutio, pello*, 201; *induco, abigo, voco*, 202; *rumpo*, 203; *moveo,* 205; *traho*, 207; *carmine nostro*, 208; *nostris*

> uos mihi taurorum flammas hebetastis et unco
> impatiens oneris collum pressistis aratro,
> uos serpentigenis in se fera bella dedistis
> custodemque rudem somni sopistis et aurum
> uindice decepto Graias misistis in urbes.
> nunc opus est sucis per quos renouata senectus
> in florem redeat primosque recolligat annos.
>
> (210–216)

> For me, you have blunted the flames of the bulls, and you have pressed their neck[s] beneath the curved plow, a burden that they would not endure; you have incited fierce wars amongst those born of the serpent among themselves, and you have put to sleep the rough guardian of sleep and sent his gold into the cities of Greece after its protector was deceived. Now I need juices through which old age might return to its prime refreshed and recollect its youthful years.

The very telling and prominent dative of advantage *mihi* at 210, set at the beginning of Medea's recapitulation of Jason's three trials, intensifies the self-focus of the speech. The compound relative clause of characteristic at 215–216 does not even attribute the youthful years (*primos annos*) or the old age that is to return to its prime (*senectus* / *in florem redeat*) as belonging to Aeson; he and Jason have dropped linguistically out of the picture. To judge by Medea's own words, it is all about Medea. She does say a prayer for aid for Aeson and Jason to the appropriate divinities, but she begins by orienting the attention of those divinities towards herself. The character-text focalizes through Medea, but the egocentrism differs markedly from that of 11–71 in its insistence on Medea's power and decisiveness rather than her helplessness and indecision. Already here we get a sense of an evolving (or devolving) Medea, who has taken a step beyond the lovesick young girl of the first part of the narrative towards someone more self-assured, powerful, and self-interested.

After this speech, the model author gives the audience almost 75 lines of simple narrator-text with the occasional intrusion of value judgment that takes the narrative to the Liber vignette at 294–296. These subjective intrusions up to 287 are tied specifically to the magic ritual: for example, *herbas . . . placitas partim radice reuellit* ("in part, she tears up by the root some grasses that are pleasing," 224–226), grasses pleasing to Medea inasmuch as they will be efficacious for the ritual. At

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venenis, 209.

another point, Medea strictly controls vision and who is allowed to witness her actions: *hinc procul Aesoniden, procul hinc iubet ire ministros / et monet arcanis oculos remouere profanos* ("She orders that the son of Aeson go far from here, that the attendants go far from here, and warns that they move their unholy eyes away from these secrets," 255–256). The chiastic arrangement of *hinc procul, procul hinc* signposts her important instruction, but a word of viewing (*oculos*) is mentioned here only to signal the viewers' exclusion from the rite; *profanos* indicates the evaluation of one (Medea) who has undergone the proper purification.[18] Only her eyes are allowed to see what will happen; theirs must be kept away from the rite, outside of the ritual space, as *profanos* indicates in its basic etymology (*pro-* + *fanum*, "in front of [i.e., outside] the ritual space"). If Medea's journey takes her from the audience's emotional sympathy towards alienation, this proves to be a pivotal moment in that journey. By denying Jason and the attendants access to her ritual in the midst of this narrator-text, we as the literary audience also lose access to Medea herself, to her actions and her emotions. At this moment, the model author draws attention to the widening rift between Medea and the literary audience with the use of chiasmus and emphatic placement of key words (for example, *profanos* in the final position of the line).

The exposition of the ritual itself remains simple narrator-text. It involves motifs such as purification, as noted above, and repetition, evidenced by the triple anaphora of *ter* in 261, which harks back earlier to the double anaphora of *ter* at 189.[19] A catalogue of ingredients for the potion from 264–274 ends with a quasi-comical summation of the countless remaining ingredients that the model author did not wish to continue listing: *his et mille aliis . . . sine nomine rebus* ("with these and a thousand other things without name," 275). Gareth D. Williams wittily points out how Ovid, in ceasing to list the ingredients, concedes the contest of imagination to Medea. Her quest is one to commit deeds that are

[18] Rosner-Siegel (above, n.13) 240 n.27 explains that "The request that Jason remove himself along with the other attendants may be interpreted . . . as another attempt by Medea to protect him"; if so, this fact introduces embedded focalization through Medea of an affective, emotional nature. While the diction does not directly support it, such an interpretation could help tie Medea the witch thematically back to Medea the young girl and negate Newlands' assertion (above, n.14) that the emotionally detached witch *sans* human affection appears as early as her response to Jason. However, Rosner-Siegel also offers the simplest explanation, that "this is again in accord with proper ritual procedure which requires that the witch perform her rite in solitude."

[19] See Segal (above, n.2) 20.

ever *maius*, as she declares in the final line of *Heroides* 12 (*nescioquid certe mens mea maius agit*); indeed, her collection of ingredients proves greater than Ovid's ability (or patience) to enumerate them.[20] The rejuvenated stirring stick indicates that the potion is ready, so Medea performs the ritual (285–292): she slits Aeson's throat, the horror of which act the model author exploits in the gory indecision of portraying the potion "taken either through the mouth or through the gash [in his neck]" (*aut ore acceptos aut uulnere,* 288). Importantly, the final focalization of the Aeson episode is through Aeson himself: *miratur et olim / ante quater denos hunc se reminiscitur annos* ("he marvels and recalls that he was once a man like this, some forty years ago," 292–293).

This overall focalization through the model author and self-obsession in the character-text of Medea unifies 179–293 into an account of a powerful enchantress at work. The purposely detached tone differs markedly from the affect-laden character-text and complex narrator-text of the first part of the narrative, but the final focalization here reminds the audience that this story, at least, has a happy ending. That happy ending encourages the audience to look backward towards the girl who helped Jason in his trials and Aeson in his old age. The violence of the slitting of Aeson's throat, the sterile tone, and other linguistic markers, however, simultaneously encourage the audience to look forward to the horrors to come; *hinc procul, procul hinc* (255) marks this magical rite as a place of origin to which Medea, once she has gone far enough away, can never return.

V. Liber as Focalizer: 7.294–296

The bridge between the Aeson and Pelias episodes is the three-line complex narrator-text focalized through the god Liber at 294–296:[21]

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[20] G. D. Williams, "Medea in Metamorphoses 7: Magic, Moreness, and the Maius Opus," *Ramus* 41.1 (2012): 56.

[21] Liber in fact made an earlier appearance in the Medea narrative within the exposition of the magic ritual: *passis Medea capillis / bacchantum ritu flagrantis circuit aras* ("Medea, hair undone, circled the burning altars in the ritual fashion of Bacchantes," 258*)*. Bömer (above, n.1) 270 notes that the act of circling was not itself part of the Bacchic cult but rather characterizes Medea as a bacchante. Anderson (above, n.1) 272 similarly states that Ovid "compares her to Bacchantes, women who epitomize wildness, not only by their loosened locks (cf. 3.726 and 4.6), but also by their swift and passionate movements." This reference looks both backwards and forwards in Medea's biography, backward to the Pentheusesque dismemberment of her brother Apsyrtus (A.R. 4.421–81) and forward to this Liber vignette and, transitively, to the gruesome murder of Pelias.

> uiderat ex alto tanti miracula monstri
> Liber et admonitus iuuenes nutricibus annos
> posse suis reddi capit hoc a Colchide munus.
>
> (294–296)

> He had seen from on high the marvels of so great a portent, the god Liber, and reminded that youthful years could be restored to his own nurses, he takes this gift from the Colchian woman.

This transition has received little serious attention in scholarship. Anderson calls it the "intrusion of an unimportant metamorphosis designed to articulate the two portions of a long drama."[22] Along similar lines, Segal calls it a "brief and amusing digression."[23] Bömer explores its possible roots in a lost satyr-play of Aeschylus.[24] Judith Rosner-Siegel and Christine Binroth-Bank both highlight the magnitude of the preceding rejuvenation by means of the mortal-divine divide described in these three lines.[25] I argue, however, that the deliberate placement of, and focalization through, Liber is an important signpost. The abrupt narratological shift to Liber's point of view (*uiderat ex alto*, 294, lacking any conjunctions or particles to aid the transition from Aeson) draws attention to Liber as an analogue for Medea, both in action and in character attributes, and this assimilation helps the audience prepare for the murder to come.

The placement and specific evocation of Bacchus as Liber cannot be as unimportant or monolithically backward-looking as critics have concluded. Up to book 7, Bacchus is mentioned by name or unmistakable periphrasis eighteen times during several important appearances in the *Metamorphoses*.[26] To take one example, in book 6, Bacchus and his rites were evoked as a pretense for Procne's rescue of Philomela

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[22] Anderson (above, n.1) 275.

[23] Segal (above, n.2) 15.

[24] Bömer (above, n.1) 277.

[25] Rosner-Siegel (above, n.13) 240 observes that "To add to the spectacular nature of this achievement, Bacchus witnesses the act and asks Medea to perform the same for his nurses . . . The now barbarous Medea has achieved something not only more than mortal . . . but more, too, than what a god can do." Similarly, C. Binroth-Bank (*Medea in den Metamorphosen Ovids: Untersuchungen zur ovidischen Erzähl- und Darstellungsweise* [Frankfurt 1994] 123) notes that Medea's accomplishment is so great that even a god considers it *tanti miracula monstri.*

[26] Ov. *Met.* 3.317, 421, 572, 573, 629, 630; 4.2, 11, 273, 416, 523 (twice), 605, 765; 5.329; 6.587, 596, 598.

(6.587–600).[27] His appearance in the Philomela episode is in a liminal position, after Tereus' violation of Philomela but before the murder of Itys; Bacchus' appearance in the Medea episode occurs in a similarly liminal position, after the violation of Aeson but before the murder of Pelias. Again, Aeson's tale, unlike Itys', comes to a happy ending, but this god in past episodes of the *Metamorphoses* has caused, for example, the dismemberment of Pentheus in book 3. In these episodes, Bacchus constitutes a dark presence in the text whose presence often anticipates a pathetic and downright gory end to an episode, and indeed, Medea's next episode will see her cause the utter destruction of Pelias.

Outside those eighteen instances, the god appears explicitly as Liber on five occasions.[28] One instance is particularly notable: 3.636, in the context of Acoetes' story about his crew finding Bacchus and intending to sell him as a slave. Acoetes' description of Bacchus highlights his extreme youth: *. . . sociorum primus Opheltes, / utque putat, praedam deserto nactus in agro / uirginea puerum ducit per litora forma* (" . . . Opheltes, the foremost of my allies, gained possession of what he thought was a prize in a deserted field and led the boy of virginal beauty along the shores," 3.605–607). Bacchus is a child, making his appellation "Liber" at 3.636 particularly appropriate in this instance. Indeed, because of the identical vowel quantities in Liber and *liber* ("child"), the only key to the translation of the word is the editor's decision on whether or not to capitalize the term (either *ait Liber,* "Liber says," or *ait liber*, "the child says"). The god's later appearance as Liber in the passage under discussion (7.294–296) then seems also to invite the witty punning on Liber and *liberi*, the children who will play such an integral role in the episode to follow, the murder of Pelias at the hands of his own daughters and Medea.

Furthermore, if one reads the Liber episode as anticipatory (inasmuch as it signals what will happen in the Medea episodes to follow) rather than as retrospective, the particular evocation of Bacchus as Liber

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[27] The rites of Bacchus are described as *trieterica* (6.587), a recurrence of the motif of repetition. Additionally, both Newlands (above, n.4) 192–95 and D. Larmour ("Tragic *Contaminatio* in Ovid's Metamorphoses: Procne and Medea; Philomela and Iphigenia (6.424–674); Scylla and Phaedra (8.19–151)," *ICS* 15 [1990] 132–134) investigate the thematic ties between the two episodes.

[28] Ov. *Met.* 3.520, 528 (Pentheus rejecting Bacchus); 3.636 (Acoetes' crew intending to sell the young Bacchus); 4.17 (the beginning of Bacchus' festival; the name is planted amongst numerous appellations for Bacchus); 6.125 (Bacchus deceiving Erigone with false grapes on Ariadne's tapestry).

invites a punning association with the license that Medea will exhibit in her interactions with the Peliades, Pelias, Aegeus, and Theseus, and the freedom of her airborne voyage around the Aegean. That freedom extends to her portrayal as a fugitive from punishment: *non exempta foret poenas; fugit alta superque* ("She would not have escaped punishment; she flees on high and above," 351); *Iasonis effugit arma* ("She escapes the arms of Jason," 397); *effugit illa necem nebulis per carmina motis* ("She escapes death after moving the clouds away through her songs," 424). Personified Liber appears again at 360 in an Alexandrian-style reference to an otherwise unknown story wherein Liber's son steals a calf, which Liber transforms into a stag so as to preclude punishment.

The slitting of Aeson's throat and the presence of Liber act as double monitory signposts to the audience, especially when coupled with the newly unemotional bent of Medea; however happily Aeson's episode may have ended, they both suggest that the audience is about to witness something horrible and brutal, without a happy ending. Medea's gift is indeed divine, perhaps super-divine, as Rosner-Siegel and Binroth-Bank have noted,[29] and beneficial to Liber's nurses, aspects that point backward toward the divine and beneficial actions that Medea performed for Jason and Aeson. However, the Liber vignette, in addition to wrapping up neatly Medea's divine exercise of power over life with Aeson, simultaneously points forward to her divine exercise of power over death with Pelias. This external tier of complex narrator-text informs the audience that something gruesomely Bacchic is about to happen, and indeed the narrative shifts next to the murder of Pelias.

VI. A New Kind of Medea: 7.297–349, 350–424

Medea completes her journey towards mythological abstraction in the fourth and fifth sections of book 7's narrative. In the first section (7–178), character-text and complex narrator-text were focalized through Medea to create a sense of sympathy with a young girl in love that upended the audience's expectations of the Medeas of Euripides' tragedy, Apollonius' epic, and possibly Ovid's tragedy. The second section (179–293) utilized mainly simple narrator-text with some character-text to distance Medea somewhat from that first characterization by attributing to her a new

[29] Boner (above, n.1) 277.

sense of self-assuredness and power. The third section (294–296) provided an abrupt narratological cutaway to the divine sphere to bridge the slightly detached Medea of the second section with the murderous, tricky Medea of the fourth (297–349) and fifth (350–424) sections. In these last two, Medea no longer focalizes at all; because of the preponderance of straight narrator-text and complex narrator-text through other entities, we have completely lost access to Medea's emotions and intentions.

The Pelias episode of the fourth section begins with a frustratingly curt introduction: *neue doli cessent* ("lest trickery be lacking," 297). In the absence of any markers of viewpoint, we cannot say that this is complex narrator-text, but the definition of *dolus* implies both an actor fully cognizant of the deceptive nature of his or her actions and a recipient (or recipients) of those actions who cannot see past the deception. The denotation of *dolus*, then, allows some capacity for inferring the presence of a subjective viewpoint. As such, if *neue doli cessent* comes from any particular entity's viewpoint, it must be that of either the model author or Medea (since it cannot be the Peliades, who will be the ones tricked). The audience does not receive a subject of the main clause until the beginning of the next line (*Phasias*, 298), but the *doli* of 297 remain without any attribution. It seems most accurate to construe *neue doli cessent* as simple narrator-text. The model author in his omniscience knows that Medea is about to effect a *dolus*; the Peliades surely do not. The phrase surely here also acknowledges the audience's knowledge of the intertextual baggage with which Medea comes; they have come to expect a Medea who effects *doli* (the infanticide of Euripides' *Medea,* the fratricide and other crimes of Apollonius' *Argonautica*), so the model author will give them what they expect; the portrait of Medea that the model author depicts cannot be entirely sympathetic or without trickery. The dramatic irony becomes even more apparent in a string of similarly problematic subjective evaluations presented by the model author, all centered around falsehood: *odium . . . falsum* (297), *amicitiae mendacis* (301), *ficta gravitate* (308). The ritualistic *ter* that begins the "rejuvenation" of Pelias at 324, a word which may lead the audience to expect a rite along the lines of Aeson's rejuvenation, is almost immediately undercut by yet another evaluation, *fallax* (326), as Medea prepares the boiling waters and grasses without power (*sine uiribus herbas,* 327) for Pelias. The distance between Medea and the audience, one created by the focalization through the narrator, is already pronounced, even before the audience sees the full effect of Medea's newfound powers in her murder of Pelias.

In the space of one line, from 296 to 297, Medea has gone from the rejuvenator of life to the author of *doli*. The full extent of her ability is actualized in Aeson's rejuvenation, a power that even a god wanted to appropriate for himself, but perhaps that monumental power over life and death proved too attractive an ability not to manipulate. As Segal notes, "Magic becomes increasingly an expression of the dangers of this predominantly female mode of exercising power over life and death."[30] Does Medea's first successful exercise of that power over life make inevitable the exercise of her power over death? The corrupting force of such power seems to account for this jarring transition: the good girl with too much power must end up as a bad and vengeful sorceress.

The episode does contain flashes of complex narrator-text and character-text, but through the Peliades and Pelias himself respectively. The focalization through the Peliades highlights their marvel at the rejuvenated lamb (*mirantibus*, 320; *obstipuere satae Pelia*, 322) and their consideration of not acting on Medea's commands as disloyal and wicked (*impia,* 339; *ne sit scelerata, facit scelus*, 340). The focalization through Pelias happens through a brief and horrifying character-text as they hack him apart: *quid facitis, natae? quis uos in fata parentis / armat* ("What are you doing, daughters? Who arms you for the destruction of your father?" 346–347); however, before he can say more (*plura locuturo*, 348), Medea slits his throat and plunges him into the water. Despite these intrusions, for the most part, the model author through narrator-text remains the dominant focalizing force throughout the episode.

The lack of affective focalization in the latter part of the Aeson episode, as previously argued, helps Medea focus on the task at hand to accomplish Jason's request; yet it simultaneously distances Medea from the audience, since we lose some of the insight into Medea's thought processes and emotions that the character-text and complex narrator-text of lines 7–178 afforded us. Here, there is a similar lack of affect inasmuch as neither the model author nor Medea herself gives any indication of pleasure or satisfaction derived from the murder. It is sadistic, to be sure, but the horrifying aspect comes from the act itself, not from any explication or focalization of it as such.

That lack of emotional resonance continues into the fifth section, the catalogue of Medea's journey after the murder (350–403), a rapid-fire

[30] Segal (above, n.2) 14.

list of fifteen places enumerated in straight narrator-text that each can be linked to a metamorphosis. Anderson asserts that "in this section, we are not interested in Medea as a dramatic character at all. She merely serves as a vehicle for the amusing display of Ovid's erudition."[31] Nevertheless, certain episodes have direct bearing on, or deliberately parallel, the Medea narrative, including the aetion of Cycnus as a swan (371–81). One lover requests that the other perform tasks of exceeding difficulty, which the other will perform out of love. One request includes the domination of a bull. The swan's connections with death and musicality or poetry are attested as early as Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*[32] and Plato's *Phaedo*;[33] as such, the inclusion of a swan aetion is appropriate in the context of the narrative of a murderous witch who sings enchantments and prayers.

The narrator-text remains even into the throwaway four-line compression of the Euripidean Medea (394–397). That Ovid spends little time on a topic treated thoroughly by a predecessor and instead focuses on more obscure aspects of the myth in question is indisputable and unsurprising,[34] perhaps more unsurprising at this point in the narrative after Ovid has given such prominence to the Jason, Aeson, and Pelias episodes. Medea's viewpoint is increasingly elided until her final episode in the *Metamorphoses*, a twenty-line description of the reunion of Theseus and Aegeus (404–424). Focalization through Medea, whether character-text or complex narrator-text, is gone; instead, the episode is taken up mostly by an eleven-line aetiology of aconite (408–419).

VII. Conclusion

This narratological investigation opens up many questions and avenues of inquiry. How does this structure help inform genre? How does focalization key into other episodes within the *Metamorphoses*? Perhaps most pressingly, what is the effect of the author's narratological technique on the audience, especially within this episode? The girl with whom the

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[31] Anderson (above, n.1) 281.

[32] A. *Ag.* 1444–46: ὁ μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἡ δέ τοι κύκνου δίκην / τὸν ὕστατον μέλψασα θανάσιμον γόον / κεῖται φιλήτωρ τοῦδ' . . . ("Thus he lies, and she, like a swan, sang her final deathly lament and lies there, his lover . . .").

[33] Pl. *Phd.* 84e–85b.

[34] The most notable examples include Ovid's focus on the transformation of Acoetes' ship and crew rather than the *Bacchae*-relevant elements of the Bacchus myth in book 3 and the "Little Iliad" of books 12 and 13.

audience's sympathy aligned so powerfully at the beginning of the story is the same figure who becomes abstracted and commits brutal acts of murder. Thematically, that sympathy must remain intact until Medea murders Pelias, but I have argued that narratologically, by means of the gradual distance created by both simple and complex narrator-text, the audience's sympathy has already been alienated by the time Medea begins the process of rejuvenating Aeson. The shock of the thematic shift has been softened by the narratological distancing.

True enough, Medea comes to *Metamorphoses* 7 with enough literary baggage that the audience cannot but think of Medea as child- or brother-killer. The key to the difference in Ovid's version of the myth lies in the way that he uses different voices and points of view to create his story while altering or eschewing established mythological details (such as the divine provenance of Medea's love for Jason). The prominence of sympathetic focalization in the first section of the narrative sweeps the audience's expectations of a Euripidean or Apollonian Medea aside; the lack of it in the second through fifth sections brings them back and fulfills them. Ovid creates his account of Medea in such a way as to challenge and validate the audience's expectations simultaneously.

Medea embarks on a journey from a fully fleshed out, young, tragic character, subject to the vicissitudes of *amor* and devoted to Jason, towards the archetypal wicked sorceress. She progresses step by step until all that remains is a mythological abstraction. Ovid marks the stages of this movement through shifting focalizations. First, he allows the audience insight into Medea's inner state through character-text and complex narrator-text and thereby creates a sympathetic connection between Medea and the audience. Next, he distances Medea from the audience by shifting the focalization to the model author. Then the shift to Liber as focalizer simultaneously ends the Aeson episode on a happy note and presages the Pelias episode by means of the brutality associated with, and linguistic parallels evoked by, Liber. Finally, the narrative settles into focalizations that deny the audience access to Medea's thoughts and emotions, focalizations that take her as emotionally far away from the audience as she can be taken. She will and can never be the young girl again; her narratological journey and Ovid's shifting narrative voices have taken her past a point of no return.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY
DLLIBA10@bu.edu