

Medea's *ars amandi* and *ars medendi* in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 7*

For poetry makes nothing happen...
W.H. Auden, *In memory of W.B. Yeats*

This is the story of a different story. What this essay seeks to unveil is a principle of internal unity in the mesmerizing maze of *Ovid's Metamorphoses Book 7*: the mythical surface of the disrupted narration seems to conceal, in fact, a well-known array of intertextual metaphors. And the metamorphic way in which Ovid 'represents' these metaphors in his epic poetry will perhaps appear as a daring coup de theatre, that even crosses its literary boundaries and questions the very limits of poetry.

All readers of classical literature, and in particular of didactic Roman poetry, know they should be wary of (literary) plagues: very often this literary death is not at all 'the end of the story'. As recognised and convincingly analysed by many scholars¹, the plague, as a literary digression in, e.g., Lucretius' *De rerum natura* and Virgil's *Georgics*, refer to the wider frame of a book or to the rest of the poem as a whole, or even to other parts of the story and other interludes and digressions, which then receive (and in turn reverberate) new meanings. Plagues thus can become a metaphor to illuminate other ideas, concepts, systems within and outside the boundaries of the poem, from inner literary worlds to the outer reality of history and politics. The play with the plague becomes even more intricate if that plague occurs at the very centre of an epic poem that overtly plays with its didactic models (as well as, indeed, with many other literary genres)² and is studded with intertextual references to other literary (and metaphorical) plagues.

Book Seven of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has a peculiar structure and raises many problems (not often confronted). After an initial epic narrative connection with *Book 6* (and the journey of the Argonauts, 1-6), at the first syntactic turn³ the story takes an abrupt different course and the centre of the stage is taken by Medea, who holds it, on land sea and air, for more than four hundreds lines (7-452). What seems just a syntactic detour⁴ (*dumque...* 7.7) from epic becomes the central romance of the book, with Medea in Colchis (7-158), her passion for Jason, and her 'charms' in the conquest of the Golden Fleece. From magic to magic, the following episode of Aeson's rejuvenation in Iolcos (159-294) is paralleled by the gory dismemberment of Pelias (297-349), which causes Medea's flight on her dragon-drawn chariot (350-403). From above, she 'overlooks' seventeen minor metamorphoses, up to her arrival in Athens, her marriage with King Aegeus and her attempted murder of his (unknown and lost) son Theseus (404-452). The poisonous plot is foiled and Medea escapes again on her Euripidean «Schlangenwagen» and disappears forever from Greece. And from the poem. Theseus' story provides the narratological link with the account of the looming war between Athens and Minos (453-489), and this, in turn, introduces the other two main stories of the book, Cephalus' visit to Aegina in search of allies and King Aeacus' tale of the Plague in Aegina (490-660), and finally Cephalus' narration (which encompasses a hunting scene and the minor metamorphoses of the dog Laelaps and the fox) of his tragic story and the death of his wife Procris (661-866). As an aside, surprisingly for an epic poem that sings the «changing of forms into

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¹ Cf. e.g. Commager 1957 and Schiesaro 2007 for Lucretius; Hardie 1986, 167 and Hardie 1998, 45-48 (with further bibliography), Conte 1986 and Clare 1995 for Virgil's *Georgics*.

² For a good précis, see Barchiesi 2005, cxliv-cxlix.

³ As duly noticed by Anderson and Galasso *ad loc.*

⁴ A syntactic equivalent to an ironic and implicit statement of poetics in the manner of the *recusatio* in *Amores* 1.1?

new bodies» (1.1-2), none of the three main ‘narrative’ stories in its central book ends with a ‘proper’ metamorphosis. This paper is concerned with the macro-architecture of the book and seeks to identify persistent patterns and intertextual frames that subtly (and meaningfully) link the three main episodes (Medea, the Plague, Cephalus & Procris). For now, it could be cryptically summarised as the analysis of an epic representation of a metaphor. With an interrogative coda: does Medea really leave the poem on her ‘tragic’ chariot?

1. *Medea queen of genres*

«How many Medeas are there in Ovid? Three, goes a plausible answer»⁵. Whenever we address the matter, the elephant in the room is of course the ‘lost Medea’, Ovid’s only tragedy, praised by Quintilian and Seneca the Elder, of which only two fragments remain⁶. The other is the elegiac lover of the *Heroides*, whose authenticity has often been disputed⁷. In chronological terms, the Medea of the *Metamorphoses* is the last and final in the Ovidian corpus and, as far as one can tell (also for ‘generic’ assumptions), she is the most heavily indebted to the epic genre and to her Hellenistic ‘self’ in Apollonius’ *Argonautica* (Books 3 and 4). Then comes tragedy: in spite of the scant direct allusions to ‘her tragedy’ – a mere four line account (*Met.* 7.394-397)

sed postquam Colchis arsit nova nupta venenis
flagrantemque domum regis mare vidit utrumque,
sanguine natorum perfunditur inpius ensis,
ultraque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma.

the whole first part of *Book 7* is interwoven with references to Euripides’ *Medea*.⁸ In his analysis of Medea’s ‘theatrical’ monologue (with which she enters the stage of the *Metamorphoses*: the first dramatic soliloquy in the poem⁹ and a *sphragis* of her tragic character) Richard Heinze¹⁰ highlighted the ‘dramatic’ parallel dynamics of love and vengeance. As if the struggle between *cupido* and *mens* of in girl falling in love (*Met.* 7.19f) forecast (and determined) the tragic contrast between *ratio* and *furor* at the end of the Euripidean tragedy. Or as if (like the *inreparabile tempus* of Eliot’s *Four Quartets*) in her ‘erotic’ past (which is in the meantime an ‘epic’ present or indeed a ‘literary’ future) there lay her ‘tragic’ future (i.e. her ‘literary’ pre-history). The most engaging recent readings¹¹ of Medea in Ovid have in fact stressed Ovid’s intertextual exploitation and expansion of mythological and literary time,¹² as well as his (and his characters’) constant self-reflexivity. The case of Medea is of course ‘spectacular’ because of the auto-allusive continuation of her story through (at least three) different genres.¹³ The most famous (and rather lucky, if credible) example of this multiple ‘generic re-codification’ of Medea in Ovid (which also tests the boundaries of each *genre*) is, as known, the one ‘recovered’ from the lost tragedy’s second fragment (Fr. 2 *feror huc hilluc, vae, plena deo*) which was (and ‘will be’) recalled in the *Heroides* (*Her.* 12.211f *viderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora versat. / nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit*) and at the climax of Medea’s soliloquy in the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.* 7.55 *maximus intra me deus*

⁵ Hinds 1993, 9.

⁶ See Bessone 1997, 14-19.

⁷ For analyses of the twelfth epistle of the *Heroides*, cf. Knox 1986 (who questions its authenticity), Hinds 1993, Barchiesi 1993, and Bessone 1997, 16f.

⁸ Cf. Bessone 1993, 26-28 and Anderson 1972 and Bömer 1976 *passim*.

⁹ Anderson 1972, 243.

¹⁰ Heinze 1960, 190f, 399; cf. also Bessone 1997, 23-26 and Galasso 2000, 1080.

¹¹ In particular, Barchiesi 1993 and Hinds 1993.

¹² Cf. Hinds 1993, 17 «This temporal paradox is a familiar one in the intertextual life of Medea, exploited long before Ovid; as Richard Hunter well brings out in his *Argonautica 3* commentary, Apollonius’ narrative makes much poetic capital of the fact that it simultaneously *recalls* Euripides’ Medea and *foreshadows* it».

¹³ Cf. Bessone 1997, 14, and for the ‘self-quotations’ and the ‘continuity of texts’ in Ovid, Hinds 1987 and Barchiesi 1986.

est!)¹⁴. Now, can Medea's self-reflexivity be stretched further, and even as far as her 'epic' in the *Metamorphoses*? This is one question that this paper tries to answer, by relating the two sections that properly portray her (Medea's passion in Colchis and Medea's power as a magician) to tPlague.

2. *Medea in love: a future (and post-intertextual) heroine?*

«One area in which intertextuality comes to play a central role when expanded in this way is that of the construction of character, in both literature and life. As Oliver Lyne remarked,¹⁵ 'characters allude': the character of Dido is constructed out of her intertextuality with a superset of Circe, Nausicaa, Calipso, Penelope, Medea (in Euripides and in Apollonius), Ariadne, Ajax, Phaedra, Semiramis, Cleopatra».¹⁶ What Don Fowler and Oliver Lyne say about Dido is even more true and more complicated for another elegiac-epic-tragic [as lord Polonius would have it] heroine who 'lives' after Virgil and after Dido (and has to deal with a monolithic Bloomian anxiety of influence towards both). But we had left Medea in the middle of a temporal clause:

Met. 7.7-9

dumque adeunt regem Phrixaeque vellera poscunt
lexque datur Minyis¹⁷ magnorum horrenda laborum,
concipit interea validos Aetias **ignes**

The 'syntactic departure' from the epic journey of the *Argonauts* unveils a new subject: it is love that is going to be the main concern of the first part of the book. And with it there flows in a new kind of poetry endowed with the rhetorical devices of its code and a whole new imagery. This passage from one 'generic code' to another (coinciding with the beginning of a new book) is reminiscent (also on a verbal level) of the transition from the 'epic' *Books 2 and 3* to *Book 4* in Virgil's *Aeneid*:

Aen. 4.1f

At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura
vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur **igni**¹⁸

Brooks Otis deserves credit for having pointed out the importance of Virgil's Dido as a structural model for this first Medea passage.¹⁹ That that Medea had 'literarily' bewitched Dido is well known: long before the cited Don Fowler and Oliver Lyne (and Damien Nelis' excellent work), Servius²⁰ had highlighted Virgil's use of Apollonius' *Book 3* in *Book 4* of the *Aeneid*; and even Euripides' Medea is an absolutely vital intertext Dido.²¹ Conversely, we shall try to demonstrate how, in the literary charms of the *Metamorphoses*, Dido becomes a fundamental intertext in the representation of this (third) Ovidian Medea, and in particular in her 'tragedy of love' (which one could even call her 'proto-tragedy', following Heinze's insight about her 'future-reflexivity'). This means that, in this further intertextual affair between the two heroines in this first part of the book, the plot and the narrative cues are usually Apollonian (at times Euripidean), but the language, the imagery, the metaphors (especially those of love poetry) are culled mainly from Dido's tragedy of love. A close textual analysis of this 'new' language unveils Ovid's consistent reworking of *Aeneid 4* (with multiple revealing nuances). A few cursory examples will suffice:

¹⁴ Cf. Bessone 1997, 27 and, for an analysis, Barchiesi 1993, 343-345.

¹⁵ Lyne 1987, 100-144

¹⁶ Fowler 1997, 17.

¹⁷ For the textual problem in l. 8 cf. Galasso 2000 *ad loc.*

¹⁸ For the verbal parallel between the two passages on the metaphor of the fire of love, see Anderson 1972, 244.

¹⁹ Otis 1970, 59ff., 179ff., see also Galasso 2000, 1080; both Bömer and Anderson at times seem to overlook the fact.

²⁰ And cf. also Macr. *Sat.* 5.17.4-6.

²¹ From Pease 1935 to Schiesaro 2008.

Met. 7.17-22

excute virgineo conceptas pectore **flammas**,
si potes, **infelix**! si possem, sanior essem!
sed trahit invitam **nova vis**, aliudque cupido,
mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque,
deteriora sequor. quid in **hospite**, **regia virgo**,
ureris et **thalamos** alieni concipis orbis?

The elegiac *topos* of the flames of love is further developed: they have a new strength for the *regia virgo* (see also Catullus 64 as opposed to the *veteris vestigia flammae* of the *regina*); both Dido and Medea refer to ‘Love & Marriage’, for the first time, with the same rhetorical image of *thalamus*. Also, they both address themselves twice with an apostrophe²² and call themselves *infelix*, the adjective that from *Aen.* 4.68f (*uritur infelix Dido totaque vagatur / urbe furens*) will stay with Dido throughout *Book 4*:

Met. 7.11

frustra, Medea, repugnas

Met. 7.17f

excute virgineo conceptas pectore **flammas**,
si potes, **infelix**! si possem, sanior essem!

Aen. 4.24

agnosco **veteris** vestigia **flammae**.

Aen. 4.18f

si non pertaesum **thalami** taedaeque fuisset,
huic uni forsitan potui succumbere culpae.

Aen. 4.596

infelix Dido, nunc te facta impia tangunt?

Aen. 4.539-42

quis me autem, fac velle, sinet ratibusue superbis
invisam accipiet? nescis heu, perdita, necdum
Laomedontae sentis periuria gentis?

Even the physical traits (and the dynastic and social status) that arouse love for the *hospes* are the same (and here it is worth noticing Medea’s witty and allusive quip at line 28):

Met. 7.25-28

quid enim commisit Iason?
quem, nisi crudelem, non tangat Iasonis aetas
et **genus et virtus**? quem non, ut cetera desint,
ore movere potest? certe mea **pectora** movit.

Aen. 4.3-5

multa viri **virtus** animo multusque recursat
gentis honos; haerent infixi **pectore vultus**
verbaque nec placidam membris dat cura quietem.

Aen. 4.9-12

Anna soror, quae me suspensam insomnia terrent!
quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus **hospes**,
quem sese **ore** ferens, **quam forti pectore** et armis!
credo equidem, nec vana fides, genus esse deorum

Medea then, in a hypothetical insult (‘if I do not help Jason...’), abuses herself with Dido’s most scorching words for Aeneas at the climax of her furious reproach:

Met. 7.31

hoc ego si patiar, tum **me de tigride natam**

Aen. 4.365-67

nec tibi diua parens generis nec Dardanus auctor,
perfide, sed duris **genuit te** cautibus horrens
Caucasus Hyrcanaeque admorunt ubera **tigres**.

And it is again love, this time as a disease, reminiscent of the Lucretian *timor*, that unites the two women when Medea ‘quotes’ another very famous line from *Aen.* 4:

Met. 7.47 quid **tuta times**?

Aen. 4.296-98

At regina dolos (quis fallere possit amantem?)
praesensit, motusque exceptit prima futuros
omnia tuta timens.

Finally, at the end of Medea’s soliloquy – almost as a Virgilian *sphragis*, enclosing the dramatic inset – (and ironically, even before even talking to Jason!), Medea refers to her ‘guilty’ union with Dido’s very words.

²² Cf. also Eur. *Med.* 401ff.

Met. 7.69-71

coniugiumne putas **speciosaque nomina culpae**
inponis, Medea, tuae?—quin adspice, quantum
adgrediare nefas, et, dum licet, effuge crimen!

Aen. 4.171f

nec iam furtivum Dido meditatur amorem:
coniugium vocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam.

A last analogy²³ with the beginning of *Book 4* (e.g. *Aen.* 4.24) and the rekindling of the dead flame, though not literal, provides us with a cue for a further development:

Met. 7.76-83

et iam fortis erat, pulsusque recesserat ardor,
cum videt Aesoniden **extinctaque flamma reluxit.**
erubuere genae, totoque recanduit ore,
utque solet ventis alimenta adsumere, quaeque
parva sub inducta latuit **scintilla favilla**
crescere et in veteres agitata resurgere vires,
sic iam lenis amor, iam quem languere putares,
ut vidit iuvenem, **specie praesentis inarsit.**

The scene of Medea burning with passion as she meets Jason is narrated by Apollonius in 3.284-298; there, however, what burns like a flame is Cupid's arrow (and the accompanying simile is different as well). It is via the imagery and the metaphors of *Aeneid 4* that, by now, Medea has come down with all the symptoms of the elegiac lover (cf. e.g. Propertius 1.1). This 'generic transformation' of Medea is further confirmed by the usual Ovidian self-reflexivity: the same simile of the flame smouldering under the ashes was already employed (almost *verbatim*) by Ovid in his love poetry, and even more interestingly, in his didactic love poetry, in *Ars amatoria* 2.439ff and 3.597ff and in *Remedia amoris* 729-34.

As a first conclusion on this 'first Medea' in *Book 7*, we could therefore observe that, woven on top of the Apollonian (and Euripidean) framework, there emerges an unexpected Medea (the more so since this time we are, finally, in an epic poem):²⁴ this Medea in love, often through the filter of Virgil's Dido – who burns with the flames of *amor* and *furor*, and is wounded by the plague of love (*Aen.* 4.90) and even irredeemably dies for love – is portrayed with the imagery (and above all the metaphors) of erotic poetry. Dido is once again provocatively (and consciously, as we know from *Trist.* 2.533-6) used by Ovid to furnish his poetry with all the complex poetic devices of a kind of love poetry that meddles with epos and tragedy.²⁵ And at a closer look this is even sharper and more radical: Virgil had painted his Dido with some of the colours of Euripides' tragic and furious Medea;²⁶ Ovid's intertextual re-writing seeks an opposite (and more entangled) effect. To Medea's noted (and tragic) oppositions love / vengeance, *cupido / mens*, *amor / pudor*, we should therefore also add (through the metaphors of her literary allusions) the very elegiac polarity of *eros / nosos*²⁷ (or, in Dido's vocabulary, *amor* and *furor*). The attempt to cure this disease of love (and a re-reading of Ovid's didactic 'love' poetry) will be, surprisingly, the subject of the second Medea episode in the book.

3. This Charming... Medea

²³ Galasso 2000, 1086.

²⁴ For the tension epos-elegy in the *Metamorphoses* see Barchiesi 2005, cxlv and the fundamental Heinze 1960, Otis 1970, Hinds 1987.

²⁵ For another example of «evocation of Virgilian epic», in *Met.* 5, where «the subject of genres continues to tease», cf. the important Hinds 1987, 134. On Virgil's Dido and genres, see also Barchiesi 1993, 352f.

²⁶ Cf. in particular Schiesaro 2008.

²⁷ cf. Conte 1986b, 31 and for an example Prop. 3.8.23ff.

Medea, along with Circe (her sister or aunt, according to the different versions of the myth),²⁸ is probably the most powerful and ruthless magician of classical mythology. Apollonius refers to her prodigies in the conquest of the Golden Fleece. In *Argonautica* 3.528-537, in particular, Argos presents Medea's powers to convince Jason and the Greeks to avail themselves of her supernatural help. As known, Medea's magic also plays a vital (or rather deadly) part at the end of her Euripidean tragic history.²⁹ No trace remains of Medea's charms in Ovid's lost tragedy (as well as in the other Latin Medea tragedies by Ennius and Accius), but – surprisingly enough – no other classical literary work devotes so much space and entrust so much meaning to this trait of her *persona* as the epos of *Met.* 7.³⁰ This might seem unjustified at first sight, but at a closer look the prominence of the 'sorceress character' – in all three sequences of the narrative about Medea (Love and Magic in Colchis, Medea and the rejuvenation of Aeson and the killing of Pelias) – can be taken as an underlying and unifying aspect of the whole book and might even shed some light in the reading of this section within the whole poem.

Jason's (already ambiguous) heroism in Apollonius is further diminished by Ovid: all the merit of success is given to Medea's *carmina*, *medicamina*, *herbae*. Medea's magic is the only saviour, as Medea herself confirms: he would only be saved by her supernatural help,³¹ which he receives, as *herbas*, 7.98, after swearing – in hyperbolic terms too lofty to be epically credible – his love for her.

Met. 7.92-94
 quid faciam, video: nec me ignorantia veri
 decipiet, sed **amor. servabere munere nostro**,
 servatus promissa dato!

Again, it is only through the agency of the *medicamina* – stressed by a powerful *epiphonema* (***tantum medicamina possunt!***) that echoes Lucretius' didactic language³² – that Jason can resist the fiery breath of the bulls and can finally overtake them in battle.

Met. 7.115f
 subit ille nec **ignes**
 sentit anhelatos (***tantum medicamina possunt!***)³³

One could already notice here a metaphorical play with fire (and remedies) that will become even more meaningful later. Another implicit link between love and drugs (*amor* and *herbae*) is given by yet another rather humorous and very revealing passage, where Medea – unlike her Apollonian counterpart and evidently not so sure about the effectiveness of her own cures – at the sight of Jason beset by herds of earth-men, joins the Greeks in their fear (***ipsa quoque extimuit***) and undergoes a proper elegiac metamorphosis (she grows pale, almost faints, cold, with the blood abandoning the veins) with all the *topoi* and symptoms of erotic poetry (from Sappho onwards), and lest the *gramina* that she has already given him should not succeed, she 'sings an extra charm' (revealingly called '*carmen auxiliare*') and summons the secrets arts.

Met. 7.133-138
 demisere **metu** vultumque animumque Pelasgi;
ipsa quoque extimuit, quae **tutum** fecerat illum.

²⁸ Galasso 2000, 1090.

²⁹ Cf. e.g. Bessone 1997, 12.

³⁰ Galasso 2000, 1078, 1086.

³¹ Sul ruolo di salvatrice di Medea, vero e proprio leitmotiv nel libro 7, cf. also Bessone 1997 ad Her. 12.76 (7.49 servatrix... celebrare) and Bömer 1976 ad 7.49 and 6.357).

³² P. Fowler (1989) has noticed the importance and the recurrence of such a figure of speech in Lucretian closures.

³³ Bömer ad loc. *Medicamina* also used in 14.285 for Circe; in 6.140 (of Athena for Arachne).

utque peti vidit iuvenem tot ab hostibus unum,
palluit et subito sine sanguine frigida sedit,
neve **parum valeant a se data gramina, carmen**
auxiliare canit secretasque advocat artes

The second (and perhaps more revealing) passage about magic is the prodigy of the rejuvenation of Jason's father, Aeson. After even the insomniac dragon that guards the Golden Fleece is duly put to sleep with a soporific cocktail of weeds *gramine suci* (7.149) the epic feat of the conquest and the epic journey back to Greece is – again with a rather parodic distance from the model – dismissed in three lines (156-58). Back to Iolcus, knowing her new bride's magical powers, Jason asks her perform a rite to save his father from death:

Met. 7.164-168

o cui debere **salutem**
confiteor, coniunx, quamquam mihi cuncta dedisti
excessitque fidem meritorum summa tuorum,
si tamen hoc possunt (quid enim non carmina possunt?)
deme meis annis et demptos adde parenti!

Besides the acknowledgement of his debit to her for his former success (*o cui debere salutem*), one should also notice the implicit irony (and again, the metaliterary ambiguity of the discourse) that links Jason's (and only Jason's?) question (*quid enim non carmina possunt?*) to the authorial and 'didactic' *epiphonema* at 7.116 (*tantum medicamina possunt!*). Again, it is only with Medea's powers and her *ars* that this task will be done:

7.176s

arte mea soceri longum temptabimus aevum,
non annis revocare tuis

Though already part of the Medea myth, the Aeson's sure is largely expanded by Ovid. The other accounts usually devote more attention to the killing of Jason's evil uncle Pelias,³⁴ hewed by his daughters. Here, the whole episode becomes a narrative pretext to show Medea's powers in action. But once again, a closer intertextual look conveys more than meets the eye

To perform the rites she has promised Jason, Medea has to invoke the natural elements and gods who protect magic. Her prayer reveals, yet again, a wider underlying intertextual framework for the whole story that might hint to a coherent explanation (a literary one, at a first level) for the meaning of Medea's magic.

Met. 7.179-191

Tres aberant noctes, ut cornua tota coirent
efficerentque orbem; postquam **plenissima fulsit**
ac solida terras spectavit imagine luna,
egreditur tectis **vestes induta recinctas,**
nuda pedem, nudos umeris **infusa capillos,**
fertque vagos mediae per muta silentia noctis
incomitata gradus: homines volucresque ferasque
solverat alta quies, nullo cum murmure saepes,
inmotaeque silent frondes, silet umidus aer,
sidera sola micant: ad quae sua bracchia tendens
ter se convertit, ter sumptis flumine crinem
inroravit aquis ternisque ululatibus ora
solvit

³⁴ Galasso 2000, 1091.

The definitive intertext for this entire scene is again in Virgil, again in the *Aeneid*, and again in *Book 4*. When Dido, overcome by grief and caught by folly (*furias*, *Aen.* 4.474f), decides to die, in order to conceal her true intentions, she tells Anna (in her famous Trugrede) that, though reluctantly, she is turning to magic (*magicas inuitam accingier artis* 4.493) as a *remedium amoris* and sends her sister to summon a sorceress (*Massylae gentis sacerdos* 4.483) to bring back her love or to free her from love forever (*quae mihi reddat eum uel eo me soluat amantem* 4.479). Around what will then turn out to be Dido's funeral pyre³⁵ (where Aeneas' *exuviae* are lain), the sorceress thus performs her magical rites:³⁶

Aen. 4.509-532

stant arae circum et **crinis effusa sacerdos**
ter centum tonat ore deos, Erebumque Chaosque
tergeminamque Hecaten, tria uirginis ora Dianae.
 sparserat et latices simulatos fontis Averni,
 falcibus et messae **ad lunam** quaeruntur aenis
 pubentes herbae nigri cum lacte veneni;
 quaeritur et nascentis equi de fronte revulsus
 et matri praereptus amor.
ipsa mola manibusque piis altaria iuxta
 unum **exuta pedem** vinclis, **in veste recincta**,
 testatur moritura deos et conscia fati
 sidera; tum, si quod non aequo foedere amantis
 curae numen habet iustumque memorque, precatur.
 Nox erat et placidum carpebant fessa soporem
 corpora per terras, silvaeque et saeva quierant
 aequora, cum medio volvuntur sidera lapsu,
 cum tacet omnis ager, pecudes pictaeque uolucres,
 quaeque lacus late liquidos quaeque aspera dumis
 rura tenent, somno positae sub nocte silenti.
 at non infelix animi Phoenissa, neque umquam
 soluitur in somnos oculisue aut pectore noctem
 accipit: ingeminant curae rursusque resurgens
 saeuit amor magnoque irarum fluctuat aestu.

As can be seen, both rites (Medea's and Dido's) take place under a topical full moon; Medea and the *sacerdos* share the same dishevelled hairdo (*crinis effusa and infusa capillos*), they both have one bare foot³⁷ and are 'scantly dressed'. Besides, *effusa* and *infusa*, *induta* and *exuta* are etymologically linked and they also share the same syntactic construction (both taking the accusative of relation). Finally, both passages mention, repeatedly, the thrice performed actions of the rites (which, by the way, will also remain with Dido in the moment of her very death, cf. 4.690f). The similarities (and the differences) in the Ovidian adaptation (*Met.* 7.522-529) of what is perhaps Virgil's most famous nocturnal scene (*Aen.* 4.521ff) should also be noticed; as well as, even more importantly, the overlapping, in the text of *Aeneid*, of the figures of the sorceress and of Dido (*sacerdos* vs *ipsa*) in the rite: a detail that casts some more meaningful light on the Dido/Medea relationship.

Now, in this part of *Book 7*, we would expect Medea as scary sorceress, but what do we have instead? In the light of her Virgilian intertext, we only find a desperate lover in search of a cure against love. Ovid's distortion of the literary genre and of the alluded intertext reaches here a new climax. Within the new epos of the 'changed bodies', in order to portray Medea's magic in its most powerful display, once again the text harks back to the epic Dido and her 'tragedy of love', and even more strikingly, it overtly quotes, from the same context, a typically elegiac magical cure for (or against) love, namely Dido's (failing) *remedia amoris*. Once again Virgil is used in a jarringly

³⁵ On Dido's death as sacrifice, see Panoussi 2009.

³⁶ On the whole passage, cf. the convincing analysis of Scarcia (1991) and also Schiesaro 2008.

³⁷ For a discussion on that, see Scarcia 1991.

(or typically Ovidian) twisted way: it is the *Aeneid* that provides the language of erotic poetry and it also introduces (in this new epic poem) a new element that will stay with us until the end of the book: (elegiac) didactic poetry.

The parallelism goes on (and further) in the following passage in *Met.* 7. Faithful to her dramatic *persona*, Medea once again interrupts the narrative of the book with another soliloquy, her prayer to the elements of the sky and of the earth and the goddess Hecate, patron of magic and of the magicians. The passage, which soon turns, from an invocation, to a proper first person catalogue of the powers of a sorceress, is fraught with other meaningful intertextual allusions.

Met. 7.192-219

'Nox' ait 'arcanis fidissima, quaeque diurnis
aurea cum luna succeditis ignibus astra,
tuque, triceps Hecate, quae coeptis conscia nostris
adiutrixque venis **cantusque artisque magorum**,
quaeque magos, Tellus, pollentibus instruis herbis,
auraeque et venti montesque amnesque lacusque,
dique omnes nemorum, dique omnes noctis adeste,
quorum ope, **cum volui, ripis mirantibus amnes
in fontes rediere suos**, concussaue sisto,
stantia concutio cantu freta, nubila pello
nubilaue induco, ventos abigoque vocoque,
vipereas rumpo verbis et carmine fauces,
vivaque saxa sua **convulsaue robora terra
et silvas moveo** iubeoque tremescere **montis**
et **mugire solum** manesque exire sepulcris!
te quoque, Luna, traho, quamvis Temesaea labores
aera tuos minuant; currus quoque carmine nostro
pallet avi, pallet nostris Aurora venenis!
vos mihi taurorum flammis hebetastis et unco
inpatiens oneris collum pressistis aratro,
vos serpentigenis in se fera bella dedistis
custodemque rudem somni sopistis et aurum
vindice decepto Graias misistis in urbes:
nunc opus est **sucis**, per quos renovata senectus
in florem redeat primosque recolligat annos,
et dabit. neque enim micuerunt sidera frustra,
nec frustra volucrum tractus cervice draconum
currus adest

The first 'catalogue' of such powers is in Apollonius 3.528-35, in the same speech already mentioned above, where Argos, almost incredulously, relates the young girl's power of taming the strength of fire, stop the watery flow of rivers and enchain the stars in the sky and the secret courses of the moon.

Arg. 3.528-533

κούρη τις μέγαροισιν ἐνιτρέφετ' Αἰήταο,
τὴν Ἐκάτη περίαλλα θεὰ δάε τεχνήσασθαι
φάρμαχ' ὅς' ἠπειρός τε φύει καὶ νήχυτον ὕδωρ
τοῖσι καὶ ἀκαμάτοιο πυρός μειλίσσετ' αὐτμήν
καὶ ποταμοὺς ἴστησιν ἄφαρ κελαδεῖν ἄ ῥέοντας,
ἄστρα τε καὶ **μήνης** ἱεράς ἐπέδησε κελεύθους.

The passage and the language became then almost topical for any scene of magic, from Alexandrian to Roman poetry.³⁸ As for the (also topical) stopping of the moon as a traditional claim of witchcraft, a precedent is already in Aristophanes (*Nub.* 749-52). We cannot avoid, however, to turn

³⁸ Cf. Hor. *Epod.* 5.45f, Prop. 1.1.19 and *infra*.

back to the intertext that we framed our analysis so far. These are in fact Dido's words when she describes the powers of the *sacerdos*:

Aen. 4.487-491
haec se **carminibus** promittit soluere mentes
quas uelit, ast aliis duras immittere curas,
sistere aquam fluuiis et uertere sidera retro,
nocturnosque mouet Manis: **mugire** uidebis
sub **pedibus terram et descendere montibus ornos**.

The multiple parallelism, i.e. mention of the sorceress' will (*quas uelit and cum uolui*); of the oaks moved from the mountains (*uidebis... descendere montibus ornos and robora... moveo*) and the bellowing of the ground (*mugire uidebis / sub pedibus terram and mugire solum*), confirms Dido's Trugrede as the primary intertext for Medea's prayer in the *Metamorphoses*. And a further Virgilian intratext strengthens this conviction and will lead us to a decisive interpretative turning point.

Critics have long noticed³⁹ the intratextual dependence of the magic scene in *Aen.* 4 from a similar, and broader scene in Virgil's early poetry of the eclogues⁴⁰ (modelled, in turn, on Theocritus *Id.* 2). The second part of *Eclogue* 8 (whose overall theme is the delusions and the pain caused by cruel love), in the song of the shepherd Alphesiboeus, draws in fact on Theocritus' *pharmakeùtria* and stages a magic rite performed by a woman to win back her forgetful lover. Throughout the eclogue there are close textual parallels both to *Aen. Book 4* and to *Met. 7*. For example:

Ecl. 8.66-72
coniugis ut magicis sanos auertere sacris
experiar sensus: nihil hic nisi **carmina** desunt.
Ducite ab urbe domum, **mea carmina**, ducite Daphnim.
Carmina uel caelo possunt deducere lunam;
caminiibus Circe socios mutauit Vlixii;
frigidus in pratis cantando rumpitur anguis.
Ducite ab urbe domum, mea **carmina**, ducite Daphnim.

Apart from the parallel details of the moon and the insistence on the power of the *carmina*, repeated as a refrain for the rest of the poem (e.g., *Ecl.* 8.69 seems to be the implicit answer for Ovid's *quid enim non carmina possunt?* 7.167) it is the wider and deeper structural dependence that proves that *Eclogue* 8 is a decisive intertext for the magic scene in *Met. 7* (on a par with Dido's Trugrede) and, more importantly, it also seems to work as a sort of blueprint for the whole of *Book 7*.

The very beginning of the poem (outside the frame of the magic scene) already establishes a connection with both *Aen. 4* and *Met. 7*, in the detail of the stopped courses of the rivers (8.4).

Ecl. 8.1-5
Pastorum musam Damonis et Alphesiboei,
immemor herbarum quos est mirata iuuenca
certantis, **quorum stupefactae carmine lynces**,
et **mutata suos requierunt flumina cursus**,
Damonis musam dicemus et Alphesiboei.

As we shall see later, however, the context here exceeds the discourse of magical powers *strictu senso*: this time poetry is the 'magic' that stops the rivers! It is another detail in the text, though,

³⁹ For a summary, cf. Scarcia (1991)'s article.

⁴⁰ Cf. Servius in Verg. Buc. VIII *Apud Theocritum est una ecloga, quae appellantur pharmakeùtria, in qua inducitur mulier quaedam sacris quibusdam pervertens mentem amatoris, a quo spernebatur: quam Vergilius transtulit ad huius eclogae ultimam partem*

that further anchors *Met. 7* to *Ecl. 8* (and to Virgil). In the first half of the eclogue, the other shepherd, Damon, sings the terrible and devastating effects of love. To portray the climax of cruelty that *saevus amor* can lead to Damon provides this example:

Ecl. 8.47-50

Saeuos Amor docuit natorum sanguine matrem

commaculare manus; crudelis tu quoque, mater:

(crudelis mater magis, an puer improbus ille?)

Improbis ille puer; crudelis tu quoque, mater).

«Ruthless love taught the mother to stain her hands with the blood of her children»: Medea is *already* here. Servius already took these lines to refer to Medea «*Et bene fabulam omnibus notam per transitum tetigit: quis enim ignorat Medeam, ab Iasonem contemptam, suos filios interemisse?*» and a tragic fragment from Ennius' lost tragedy, *Medea exul* (216 Jocelyn, *Medea animo aegro amore saevo saucia*) seems to confirm it.

But this clear allusion to Medea brings our intertextual level to a further height. She is not mentioned 'directly' in *Aen. 4* (our first direct intertext in Medea's magic scene in Ovid); but now, thanks to *Ecl. 8* (and to Ovid's re-reading of both *Aen. 4* and *Ecl. 8*) we have yet another reason to see her there as well.⁴¹ Besides, she is also alluded to at the end of the incantation of *Ecl. 8* (95f) where the *herbae* needed for the rites come from *Pontus*, a poetical equivalent for the barbaric Colchis⁴²; and even Theocritus (*Id. 2.15-16*) had already coupled Medea and Circe as archetypical enchantresses. But *this* Medea (in the magical context of the eclogue) is of a rather different kind. This is not our sorceress: this is a tragic Medea, the heroine, as Damon suggests, of a tragedy of Love and its dire consequences. And this (already Ennian) *saevos amor*, as Schiesaro (2008) puts it, «also stands behind the all-important opening line of *Book 4*»⁴³ (*At regina gravi iam dudum saucia cura / vulnus alit venis et caeco carpitur igni*), which we have examined at the beginning of the discussion while treating the 'tragic' metaphors of love poetry. It will suffice for now to remark another other Virgilian intratext for this 'love': the poet's apostrophe to Dido at 4.412 *improbe Amor, quid non mortalia pectora cogis*, which we shall come across later on too.

The final ring (surprisingly, not noticed by commentators)⁴⁴ in this intertextual chain that unites Medea as lover and Medea as a magician (via 'tragic love' of *Aen. 4* and *Ecl. 8*) is given (now not so surprisingly) by Ovid's 'tragic' Medea. In the only four lines that, as we have seen, describe 'Medea's tragic future' (or 'past' in the Ovidian literary chronology), the proper (Euripidean) tragedy is described with the very same *iunctura* that we have in *Ecl. 8.47* («the impious sword was covered with the blood of her children»):

Met. 7.397f

sanguine natorum perfunditur inpius ensis,

ultraque se male mater Iasonis effugit arma.

To sum up: we had left Medea, at the beginning of *Met. 7* (through the intertextual agency of Virgil's Dido and all that she stands for) playing with fire and with other elegiac metaphors for love, love also declined as the incurable disease of erotic poetry. The second part of the book should show us Medea in Greece as the most powerful sorceress of classical mythology. But the more we read through the thick (and, somehow paradoxically, still Virgilian) intertextual filigree that shape her 'epic' magic character, the more we realise that we are still enmeshed in metaphors and *topoi* of love poetry and that all Medea's charms are, in the end (and in Ovid), just (and no less than) *remedia amoris*. Though her actions (and her claims) are heroic and epic, her language and her

⁴¹ Cf. Schiesaro 2008.

⁴² See also Th. *Id. 2.162*, Hor. *Epod. 5.21*.

⁴³ Also via *Cat. 64.249-50* and Apollonius 3.286-87 (cf. also *Ecl. 10.29* and *Prop. 3.19.17f*).

⁴⁴ Bömer only refers to Euripides *Med. 1236ff*.

‘intertextual life’ tell us she has been a heroine of elegiac poetry and has now been turned into a paradigm for elegiac didactic poetry (Cf. Prop. 1.1 and *Amores* 2.1 and, in a didactic context in *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* 35ff and above all in a long passage, in fact, in the *Remedia amoris*). And this is further confirmed by the use of the same poetic material made by the Roman elegists. We find a *deducta luna* as result of the power of magic (and poetry) in Propertius’s *monobiblos*’ opening poem 1.1.19, along with an allusion to Medea (*Cytinaeis ducere carminibus*, 1.1.24), whose counterpoint (and indeed a request for *remedia amoris*) is to be found in Prop. 3.24.9f where the poet asks his friends for a Medea, namely, «a witch to free him from the *furor* of love»⁴⁵ (cf. also Prop. 2.4.7-8, 15-16; Tib. 1.2.42ff.; Hor. *Epod.* 5.71f; *Carm.* 1.27.21f). But above all, the same dynamics are to be found in Ovid’s own love poetry and then his didactic poetry. First and foremost, *Amores* 2.1, a vital poem in the discourse of *recusatio* and escape from the epic genre (2.1.2 *ille ego nequitiae Naso poeta meae*), which also plays with (and mocks) *Aen.*4:

Am. 2.1.5-8
 me legat in sponsi facie non frigida virgo,
 et rudis ignoto tactus amore puer;
 atque aliquis iuvenum quo nunc ego saucius arcu
agnoscat flammae conscia signa suae

And then, after an attempt to write epic, the poet turns back to love poetry and plays with the power (and magic) of the elegiac *carmina*:

Am. 2.1.19-28
 Iuppiter, ignoscas! nil me tua tela iuvabant;
 clausa tuo maius ianua fulmen habet.
 blanditias elegosque levis, mea tela, resumpsit;
 mollierunt duras lenia verba fores.
carmina sanguineae **deducunt cornua lunae**,
 et revocant niveos solis euntis equos;
 carmine dissiliunt abruptis faucibus angues,
inque suos fontes versa recurrit aqua.
 carminibus cessere fores, insertaque posti,
 quamvis **robur** erat, carmine victa sera est.

The same topical images (of the power of magic) are used again in Ov. *Am.* 1.8.6ff, in *Her.* 6.83ff and, in a didactic context in *Medicamina Faciei Femineae* 35ff, and, above all, in a long passage, in fact, in the *Remedia amoris* [Ovid’s own didactic ‘cure against love’, that follows the erotic didactic of the *Ars amatoria*] 249-290, where the poet compares the power of his own didactic teaching (*ars*) and his poetry (*carmina*) to the failing remedies of the magic *carmina*.

Finally, it should be clear by now that a metaliterary issue is underlying the ambiguity on *carmina* as charms and as poetry itself: we shall see at the end how far we can stretch this metaliterary metaphor. For now, another question: does this epic Medea realise that she is actually singing her own ‘love tragedy’ and that, as we have just seen, her intertextual self declares the defeat of her remedies/*carmina*? The elegiac Medea of the *Heroides* could not be clearer.⁴⁶

Her. 12.163-168
 serpentes igitur potui taurosque furentes,
 unum non potui perdomuisse virum.

⁴⁵ Heyworth 2007, 10; see also Prop. 2.4.7-8, 15-16; Tib. 1.2.42ff.; Hor. *Epod.* 5.71f; *carm.* 1.27.21f)

⁴⁶ Bessone 1997, 12 «ancora, facendo pronunciare alla maga per eccellenza un lamento sull’inutilità della magia in amore (163-74), Ovidio sfrutta una zona di intersezione tra mito ed elegia e rende visibile la loro divaricazione: il lamento, che contrasta con la prossima efficacia dei filtri magici di Medea in Tragedia, sfocia in una minaccia inequivocabile».

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

4. Medicamina for a Plague

What shall we make of the plague then? *Eclogue* 8 provides us with another very important cue in order to read the rest of *Book 7* and to try and set a bigger structural frame between its parts. As we saw before, the magic power of poetry stopped the rivers and, we can now notice, the song of Damon and Alphesiboeus amazed the heifer and even made her forget to eat (*immemor herbarum*).

Ecl. 8.1-5
Pastorum musam Damonis et Alphesiboei,
immemor herbarum quos est mirata iuvenca
certantis, quorum stupefactae carmine lynceae,
et mutata suos requierunt flumina cursus,
Damonis musam dicemus et Alphesiboei.

The same *iunctura* is extremely meaningful in *Book 3* of Virgil's didactic poem, the *Georgics*. A long section in the book, devoted to the care of the cattle (3.209-283) deals, in Lucretian terms, with love and its destructive consequences among animals. The amorous disease is mirrored – as scholars have long argued⁴⁷ in establishing multiple structural correspondences between different parts of the poems – by the long Lucretian digression concerning the Noric plague of the cattle (3.470-566). The structural analogy is further confirmed by its Lucretian didactic antecedent, where (as e.g. in Commager's analysis (1957) of the *iunctura* 'anxius angor') the Plague of Athens (at the end of the poem) mirrors the dire effects of Love (in *DRN* 4). The same Virgilian plague (in *Georgics* 3) also plays a meaningful reverberating part if paralleled with the very end of the poem, the Aristaeus episode and the *bougonia* and the Orpheus *epyllion* (cf. e.g. Conte 1986 and Clare 1995).

But Love and the Plague are also connected in *Georgics* 3 by our *iunctura* from *Ecl.* 8, *immemor herbarum*. This, at first, describes the lethal power of Venus that renders the animals forgetful of their food (*Geo.* 3.216):

carpit enim viris paulatim uritque uidendo
femina, nec nemorum patitur meminisse nec herbae
dulcibus illa quidem inlecebris, et saepe superbos
cornibus inter se subigit discernere amantes

it is then used as a consequence of the disease that seizes even the racing horse (*Geo.* 3.498f):

labitur infelix studiorum atque immemor herbae
uictor equus

It should be clear by now (after all these metaphors) that the plague *is* the biggest metaphor in play and, as we shall see, it is precisely used by Ovid in his *metamorphic* discourse of love as an incurable disease. That Ovid, in his account of the Plague of Aegina, overtly alludes to and combines Lucretius' human plague and Virgil's animal plague is a critical commonplace for commentators and scholars.⁴⁸ What I want to argue is that Ovid's intertextual use of Lucretius' and Virgil's plagues goes beyond the verbal and thematic allusion and also mirrors some of the

⁴⁷ Cf. Harrison 1979, Conte 1980, xvi, Farrell 1991, 84-94, Clare 1995 and Hardie 1998, 45 for an effective summary and further bibliography.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Galinsky 1975, 116-119.

structural analogies that frame the two great didactic Latin poems. Let us go back to a now familiar intertext that tells the story of the ineffectiveness of the remedies against love:

Ecl. 8.85-89

Talis amor Daphnin, qualis cum fessa **iuvenum**
per nemora atque altos quaerendo bucula lucos,
propter aquae rivum, viridi procumbit in ulva
perdita, nec serae meminit decedere nocti,
talis amor teneat, **nec sit mihi cura mederi.**

In his account of the plague, Ovid repeatedly stresses and emphasises the detail of the incurability of the disease. This peculiar feature is already in Lucretius (6.1179 *mussabat tacito medicina timore* and again 6.1179, 1226), the ‘historical’ plague of Thucydides (2.47.4) as well, and is taken up again by Virgil (*Geo.* 3.349f *quaesitaeque nocent artes; cessere magistri...*). Whereas the tone in Lucretius and Virgil is strictly didactic,⁴⁹ in treating this detail Ovid resorts to a vocabulary and to some literary *topoi* that we have already noticed (and, in his love for conceits, he also exploits a revealing pun). No remedy nor *medens* (doctor) can cure a disease that, in its vocabulary owes much to the symptomatology of erotic poetry (from Sappho 31 L-P onwards) and that hinges on some of the metaphors we have already considered:

Met. 7.554-562

viscera torrentur primo, **flammaeque latentis**
indicium **rubor** est et ductus anhelitus; **igni**
aspera lingua tumet, tepidisque arentia ventis
ora patent, auraeque graves captantur hiatu.
non stratum, non ulla pati velamina possunt,
nuda sed in terra ponunt **praecordia**, nec fit
corpus humo gelidum, sed humus de corpore fervet.
nec moderator adest, **inque ipsos saeva medentes**
erumpit clades, obsuntque auctoribus artes

And as Medea’s initial battle with the flames of love (7.11 *Frustra, Medea, repugnas*) and as she herself noticed in *Her.* 12.165f (*quaeque feros pepuli doctis medicatibus ignes, / non valeo flammam effugere ipsa meas*) the ‘plague’ even defeats who tries to cure it; and the very *ars medendi* become lethal to itself. The same idea shapes the beginning of the narration of the Ovidian plague:

Met. 7.525-27

dum visum mortale malum tantaeque latebat
causa nocens cladis, pugnatum est **arte medendi**:
exitium superabat opem, quae victa iacebat.

In the distorted treatment of Lucretius’ and Virgil’s didactic (through the filter of ‘elegiac didactic’ poetry), Ovid adds to the internal parallels (provided by the language and the metaphors of erotic poetry) the verbal play between the name of *Medea* and the verb *mederi*, «to heal, to cure» (unlike Lucretius and Virgil’s *Georgics* but like Virgil’s *Ecl.* 8). A pun on the name of Medea exploiting the etymological connection between Μήδεια and μήδομαι (as «to plot, to contrive») had already been exploited by Pindar (*Pyth.* 4.27) and occurs in Apollonius too,⁵⁰ but the union of Medea and the *ars medendi* for the plague (via the *remedia amoris* of *Ecl.* 8) is peculiar to Ovid.

Another internal link triggered by a Virgilian passage (that further confirms the parallelism between the plague and Medea’s magic) is the one regarding infected blood. At *Geo.* 3.491ff, the victims slaughtered on the altar hardly shed any blood⁵¹ because of the disease:

⁴⁹ For the parody of Lucretius in Ovid’s didactic poetry, cf. Sommariva 1980.

⁵⁰ Hunter 185, 825-7 and Barchiesi 1993.

⁵¹ For further details on this *topos*, Tarrant’s note ad Agamemnon 294 (657f.)

Geo 3.491 ff
nec responsa potest consultus reddere vates,
ac vix suppositi tinguntur sanguine cultri
summaque ieiuna sanie infuscatur harena.

The same detail is taken up by Ovid in his description of the plague (7.599)

Met. 7.596ff
ipse ego sacra Iovi pro me patriaque tribusque
cum facerem natis, mugitus victima diros
edidit et subito conlapsa sine ictibus ullis
exiguo tinxit subiectos sanguine cultros.

But it is worth noticing that the same detail had been mentioned before, for Medea's rites in the Aeson episode:

Met. 7.312ff
protinus innumeris effetus laniger annis
atrahitur flexo circum cava tempora cornu;
cuius ut Haemonio marcentia guttura cultro
fodit **et exiguo maculavit sanguine ferrum**

This verbal self-reflexivity, from one part of the book to the other, becomes thus extremely meaningful in setting a structural frame for the book and in shedding semantic light over apparently unrelated fragments. In treating extremely famous and powerful *topoi* of epic and didactic poetry, the poetry of the *Metamorphoses*, surprisingly (or not), still resorts to the conventions of erotic poetry (and didactic erotic poetry): the 'didactic' plague becomes conceivable in Ovid only through the elegiac metaphor of *eros* as *nosos* (and its incurability). But this can also give way to a further rhetorical interpretation.

5. «*Metamorphoses as narrative metaphors*» (...and *similes as proto-metamorphoses*)

Ovid's attitude to play with the proper and the metaphorical sense of images and expressions⁵² and the importance of rhetoric and of certain figures of speech in 'preparing' the ground for proper 'metamorphoses' have been highly stressed in recent scholarship.⁵³ Metaphor in particular, e.g. in Pianezzola's analysis, embodies the closest rhetorical device to the 'process of change' that informs the whole of the *Metamorphoses* and it is therefore endowed with a privileged interpretative value. Also, as Hopkinson puts it «if metaphor is to be classed as a type of metamorphosis and figurative language is a sort of transfiguration, then a connection can be made between the style and rhetoric of the poem and its subject».⁵⁴ Medea therefore might well disappear from the poem without undergoing any metamorphosis. But her 'metaphors' remain with us. And her story and her intertextual 'elegiac' metaphors are subsumed, via the didactic epos of Virgil and Lucretius, by one of the metaphors of «the pangs of love» *par excellence*. Or to stretch further Charles Segal's analysis of the importance of the physical body⁵⁵ in the *Metamorphoses*, the plague can be read as an 'incarnation' of the elegiac metaphors for love.

That this 'metaphorical' order reigns here is further confirmed by the very last episode in *Book 7*, the unhappy story of Cephalus and Procris. In Gianpiero Rosati's fine analysis⁵⁶ of the episode, the whole story becomes a tragedy of rhetorical equivocation: Procris is unwittingly killed

⁵² Rosati 1983, 166-170.

⁵³ Cf. Rosati 1983, Pianezzola 1999, Barchiesi 2005.

⁵⁴ Hopkinson 2000, 5.

⁵⁵ Segal 2005; cf. also Barkan 1986, Segal 1998 and 1971, and, above all, Most 1992.

⁵⁶ Rosati 1983, 97-101.

by her own husband for her confusion between the real level of the language (of Cephalus' song to 'Aura') and the metaphorical level of love poetry.⁵⁷ Metaphors can kill.

Met. 7. 813-820

"aura" (recordor enim), "venias" cantare solebam,
"meque iuves intresque sinus, gratissima, nostros,
utque facis, relevare velis, quibus urimur, aestus!"
forsitan addiderim (sic me mea fata trahebant),
blanditias plures et "tu mihi magna voluptas"
dicere sim solitus, "tu me reficisque fovesque,
tu facis, ut silvas, ut amem loca sola: meoque
spiritus iste tuus semper captatur ab ore."

Tellingly, this story is also used by Ovid in the 'didactic' of the *Ars amatoria* (3.687-746) as an *exemplum* against the credulity of the lovers.

To close the analogy, and to come back to the original metaphors (and to stress once again the undercurrent Virgilian intertextuality), Procris does not simply die: she dies exactly like Dido in *Aen.* 4 (and, as Dido kills herself with the sword Aeneas had given her, Procris is pierced by another amorous 'gift', the magic javelin she had given Cephalus). It is easy to detect the strong verbal intertextual correspondence between Procris' last words and Dido's last words to Aeneas:

Met. 7.852ff

"per nostri foedera lecti
perque deos supplex oro superosque meosque,
per si quid merui de te bene perque manentem
nunc quoque, cum pereo, causam mihi mortis amorem,
ne thalamis Auram patiare innubere nostris!"

Aen. 4.314ff

mene fugis? per ego has lacrimas dextramque tuam te
(quando aliud mihi iam miserae nihil ipsa reliqui),
per conubia nostra, per inceptos hymenaeos,
si bene quid de te merui, fuit aut tibi quicquam
dulce meum, miserere domus labentis et istam,
oro, si quis adhuc precibus locus, exue mentem.

Furthermore – still with frames in mind – the story of Cephalus and Procris and the account of the plague (told by king Aeacus to Cephalus) in *Book 7* share a **reverse pattern**: the passage from life and happiness on the one hand, vs the 'metamorphic' path from death to resurrection and regeneration.⁵⁸

The Plague is in fact the only one (of the main episodes in the book) that seems to undergo a 'proper' metamorphosis. In the paradoxical epic of the *Metamorphoses* death is not the end⁵⁹. The metamorphosis of the plague, however, unveils another rather magic rhetorical trick. The death of the whole population of Aegina in the plague is the pretext for the aetiological account of the origin of the Myrmidons.⁶⁰ Through Aeacus' prayer to Jupiter, 'a long line' of ants descending from an oak is turned into humans and becomes the new people of the island.

Ov. *Met.* 7.662-626

forte fuit iuxta patulis rarissima ramis sacra
Iovi quercus de semine Dodonaeo;
hic nos frugilegas adspeximus **agmine longo**

⁵⁷ Cf. Rosati 1983, 100f «Ovidio imposta la vicenda dell'inganno fatale sulla sfasatura dei codici, sullo scarto di competenze tra Cefalo e l'anonimo testimone, tra la dizione 'ingenua' dell'uno e la lettura 'metaforica' operata dell'altro (appunto secondo il codice delle *blanditiae* erotiche): con un procedimento che vedremo applicato spesso nel poema, egli gioca a svelare l'equivoco che si annida tra le pieghe del linguaggio, lo scarto tra la concreta realtà che esso 'dice' e l'apparenza figurata che lo riveste».

⁵⁸ Galasso 2000, 1118, cf. also Pechillo, M. (1990), 'Ovid's framing technique: the Aeacus and Cephalus epyllion (*Met.* 7.490-8.5)', CJ 86, 35-44.

⁵⁹ Hardie 1999, 89 «Metamorphosis as a narrative device is often supposed to be inimical to the deepest concerns of the epic genre not least because by denying death as the end of human stories it is held to destroy the moral seriousness of epic».

⁶⁰ Cf. Bömer 1976, 331.

grande onus exiguo formicas ore gerentes
rugosoque suum servantes cortice **callem**

In spite of adverb (*forte*), these are not ‘ants by chance’. They come from a very famous Virgilian simile in, again, *Book 4* of the *Aeneid*; and, for verbal intratextuality, they also gesture towards the Virgilian bees of *Book 4* of the *Georgics* (4.26 and 4.164). But the adverb is even more interesting and more ironic, because in *Aen. 4* these rhetorical ants (i.e. *this* simile) are what Dido sees from her window just before dying, i.e. the Trojans *abandoning* Carthage and provoking her ‘tragedy of love’.⁶¹ The passage, tellingly, culminates in the famous apostrophe that we had noticed earlier as a *trait d’union* between love (and *remedia amoris*) and Medea in *Ecl. 8* (and therefore in this *Met. 7*).

Aen. 4.402-412
ac velut ingentem formicae farris aceruum
cum populant hiemis memores tectoque reponunt,
it nigrum campis agmen praedamque per herbas
convectant calle angusto; pars **grandia trudunt**
obnixae frumenta umeris, pars agmina cogunt
castigantque moras, opere omnis **semita** fervet.
quis tibi tum, Dido, cernenti talia sensus,
quosve dabas gemitus, cum litora fervere late
prospiceres arce ex summa, totumque videres
misceri ante oculos tantis clamoribus aequor!
improbe Amor, quid non mortalia pectora cogis!

This unusual metamorphosis (with the peculiarity – rare in the poem – where animals are turned into humans) is thus revealing at least for two reasons. On the intertextual level of mutual correspondences and self-reflexivity that we are now familiar with (again, via *Aen. 4* and *Egl. 8*), it further strengthens the link between the plague and Medea, and with the ‘metaphors’ at the core of this book. But it also strengthens the metaliterary and rhetorical plot that has been taking shape in the meantime, stressing the ‘magic’ and the artifices of the poetical language of the *Metamorphoses*. As sharply noticed by Leonard Barkan (1986) and Philip Hardie (1999) «Ovid frequently uses similes as protometamorphoses»⁶², i.e. often, on a par with what we said about metaphors and *tropoi* as ‘metamorphoses’, a rhetorical element in the text iconically triggers the real change that will take place later. [As an aside, as a sharp reader of Ovid, Shakespeare seems to be aware of this literary device and often «converts literal Ovidian metamorphoses into metaphors»⁶³]. But, even more interestingly, here the ‘rhetorical protometamorphosis’ (i.e. the ants simile) is in Virgil. A paradigm of the fate (and of the metamorphic process) undergone by all the other Virgilian intertexts analysed so far?

6. *Quid enim non carmina possunt?*

Now that we know that the only cure for (and the only escape from) the plague is a rhetorical and a literary one it is time to conclude and to try to answer Jason’s question on the power of *carmina* (7.167, *quid enim non carmina possunt?*). It has become clearer and clearer, throughout the book, that via Medea (and her metaphors) we are not simply dealing with a conscious re-reading of previous epic poetry, tragedy, and, indeed, didactic, through the filter of Virgil, and in a progression from love poetry to erotic didactic to epic that mirrors Ovid’s own poetry (and literary career). Much more is at stake. Through the revealing verbal ambiguity on the power of *carmina*, in *Met. 7* and *Ecl. 8*, we have seen a constant (and topical) overlapping of the power of charms with the magic of the poetic word (cf. Solodow’s metapoetic reading of the last three eclogues).⁶⁴ Not only

⁶¹ The same simile is in *Ars* 1.93-99.

⁶² Barkan 1986, 20.

⁶³ Bate 1993, 191.

⁶⁴ Solodow 1977.

does Medea cast her shadow over the rest of the book: her presence goes even further than the boundaries of ‘her’ book, and beyond the underlying metaphors and structural parallels. In the all-important incipit to *Ecl.* 8

(Pastorum musam Damonis et Alpheisiboei,
immemor herbarum quos est mirata iuuenca
certantis, **quorum stupefactae carmine lynces,**
et **mutata suos requierunt flumina cursus,**
Damonis musam dicemus et Alpheisiboei)

poetry rivals with love and magic and it possesses the same charming power of the songs of Orpheus⁶⁵ (to which Silenus’s song in *Ecl.* 6 is also paralleled, as one of the clearest antecedents of Ovid’s plan in the *Metamorphoses*):⁶⁶

Ecl. 6.26-30
Tum uero in numerum Faunosque ferasque uideres
ludere, **tum rigidas motare cacumina quercus.**
Nec tantum Phoebus gaudet Parnasia rupes,
nec tantum Rhodope miratur et Ismarus Orphea

And this means that, through the *magic* of her ‘spectacular’ language⁶⁷ (and its metaphors), Medea thus truly ‘becomes’ yet another metapoetic figure, another narrator⁶⁸ (in the manner of Orpheus, like Arachne, like Pythagoras and so forth) in the poetry of the *Metamorphoses* in its constant attempt to test the limits of *carmina*.

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⁶⁵ On which cf. Barchiesi 1989, 65.

⁶⁶ Barchiesi 2005, CXLVII, Otis 1970, 48f, Knox 1986, 10-14

⁶⁷ Cf. Rosati 1983, 152.

⁶⁸ Barchiesi 1989.

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