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The Classical Quarterly, New Series, Vol. 50, No. 1. (2000), pp. 197-209.

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Fri Feb 9 16:12:25 2007

Classical Quarterly **50.1** 197–209 (2000) *Printed in Great Britain*

OVID'S *HEROIDES* 6: PRELIMINARY SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF AN INTERTEXTUAL HEROINE*

Ovid regarded the *Epistulae Heroidum* as a collection with a consistent theme. He indicates as much at *Am.* 2.18.18–26, where he describes the unified conception of nine or ten of the *Heroides* as the result of Amor's insistence that he be an elegiac poet:

> deque cothurnato uate triumphat Amor.
> quod licet, aut artes teneri profitemur Amoris
> (ei mihi, praeceptis urgeor ipse meis!), 20
> aut quod Penelopes uerbis reddatur Vlixi
> scribimus et lacrimas, Phylli relicta, tuas,
> quod Paris et Macareus et quod male gratus Iason
> Hippolytique parens Hippolytusque legant,
> quodque tenens strictum Dido miserabilis ensem 25
> dicat et †Aoniam Lesbis amata lyram†.[1]
>
> 26 *ys*: Aoniam . . . lyram *PYS*$_S$: aoniae . . . lyrae

At *Am.* 2.18.23 Ovid describes Jason as *male gratus*. The epithet is often understood as an allusion to *Heroides* 6, the letter from Hypsipyle to Jason, because of the reference ten lines later to the fictive response that Ovid's friend Sabinus wrote (2.18.33): 'tristis ad Hypsipylen ab Iasone littera uenit'.[2] In general terms, too, Hypsipyle's spin on *querimonia*, the rhetorical theme of the *Heroides*, is betrayal by an ungrateful lover;[3] this has been another reason for considering *Am.* 2.18.23 a reference to her letter. Yet for Medea Jason is also *male gratus*, indeed more archetypally so than for Hypsipyle.[4] Since the epithet can refer to either *Heroides* 6 or 12—we know from the *Amores* passage only that Jason is the recipient of at least one letter—the question is whether it can apply to both. What might appear as a redun-

* My sincere thanks to Cynthia Damon for her guidance during this article's formative stages as an undergraduate thesis chapter. I am also grateful to Frederick Griffiths, Stephen Heyworth, and *CQ*'s anonymous referee for their valuable criticism, which this paper has profited from in every respect.

[1] The lack of reference to the twelve other letters in the collection has cast doubt over their authenticity. S. E. Hinds, 'Medea in Ovid: scenes from the life of an intertextual heroine', *MD* 30 (1993), 9–47 at 30–4, however, persuasively demonstrates the inadequacies of using *Amores* 2.18 to draw positive conclusions about the unmentioned letters' authenticity.

[2] See Hinds (n. 1), 32, who follows Palmer's similar observation.

[3] Cf. S. Casali, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Heroidum Epistula IX* (Florence, 1995), 12–13. R. J. Tarrant writes, 'Extended argument with persuasion as its object is central to the *Heroides* as to no other work of Ovid; perhaps not coincidentally, the futility of those arguments is nowhere else as obvious' ('Ovid and the failure of rhetoric', in D. C. Innes, H. Hine, and C. Pelling [edd.], *Ethics and Rhetoric* [Oxford, 1995], 63–74 at 67). The argument is often conducted in a plaintive tone, as the frequency of *queror* and *querela* (in the single letters) indicates: *Her.* 1.8, 1.69–70, 2.1–2, 2.8, 2.26, 3.5–6, 5.73, 6.17, 7.29–30, 8.68, 9.2, 13.158, 14.67, 14.110; the words also appear in the *Epistula Sapphus* at 15.71, 15.136.

[4] But cf. what Helen says at *Her.* 17.193 (although she also develops Medea's betrayal at greater length [17.229–33]). At Prop. 1.15.17–20 Hypsipyle is also mentioned as the lover abandoned by Jason.

dancy in fact makes *Heroides* 6 and 12 positively unique in the collection.[5] We shall see that these letters function as a pair. They derive meaning from each other, and they also conduct an internal dialogue. With Hinds's concern ('I am less concerned to *identify* the author *per se* than to defend the author's workmanship'[6]) as our starting-point, we should bear in mind that concern over authenticity need not limit our appreciation of *Heroides* 12's craftsmanship.

The concept of 'paired poems' in the Ovidian corpus is not controversial. In the *Amores*, poems 1.11–12, 2.2–3, 2.7–8, 2.13–14, and most probably, 2.9a–b and 3.11a–b are generally recognized as pairs; which is to say that they are related 'spatially (i.e. the poems are adjacent) and causally (i.e. the situation in the second poem presupposes the events of the first)'.[7] Paired poems, however, need not be adjacent: Propertius 1.7 and 1.9, *Amores* 1.4 and 2.5, and 2.19 and 3.4 demonstrate as much.[8] *Heroides* 6 and 12 do not constitute a pair in strictly formal terms (as do the letters of Paris and Helen, for instance), but they acquire enhanced meaning when read in the light of each other; and because they share the same recipient, they are easily read together and in this sense are a twosome.

Jacobson considers *Heroides* 6 among the most successful epistles in the collection because it presents a third perspective, never before contrived, on the myth of Jason and Medea. He writes:

> . . . this [presentation] is a kind of *tour de force*, for Ovid thus manages to present within the *Heroides* two very different versions of the same events and peoples, seen as they are through the eyes of two women involved in quite different ways, Hypsipyle (*Her.* 6) and Medea (*Her.* 12).[9]

Ovid's invention of events in the lives of *heroides* is limited by their traditional biographies, but the autobiographical quality of epistolary writing allows him to apply a unique perspective, the heroine's own, to her story. Knox calls this a 'distinctly elegiac perspective' and claims that it 'provides a taste of what is possible in narrative verse when the elegiac perspective is employed in the service of a critical commentary on the traditions of the past'.[10] In Euripides and Apollonius, Medea's story is told by a tragedian and a hexametric poet. In *Heroides* 12 the presentation is by an elegiac poet but from Medea's perspective. In *Heroides* 6 Ovid narrates it through another mythological heroine who, it turns out, concerns herself deeply with Medea's life. For Hypsipyle's letter deals above all else with Medea's story.[11]

[5] See F. Verducci, *Ovid's Toyshop of the Heart* (Princeton, 1985), 66.

[6] Hinds (n. 1), 44.

[7] C. Damon, 'Poem division, paired poems, and *Amores* 2.9 and 3.11', *TAPhA* 120 (1990), 269–90 at 278.

[8] The progression from Catullan A–B–A sequencing (5–6–7) to Propertian pairing within a book (1.7–9) to Ovidian pairing in separate books (1.4–2.5 and 2.19–3.4) is an important heuristic precedent for considering *Heroides* 6 and 12 a pair.

[9] H. Jacobson, *Ovid's Heroides* (Princeton, 1974), 108. A. Barchiesi, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Epistulae Heroidum I–III* (Florence, 1992), 21 discusses the tendentiousness of Hypsipyle's portrayal of Medea to Jason.

[10] P. Knox, *Ovid: Heroides, Select Epistles* (Cambridge, 1995), 24–5.

[11] Hinds (n. 1), 27: 'Hypsipyle's letter, in fact, is more about Medea than it is about Hypsipyle herself.' Cf. Verducci (n. 5), 62: 'Only Ovid exploited the erotic potential merely suggested in Apollonius, and only Ovid made any connection at all between Jason's casual treatment of Hypsipyle and his rejection years later of his wife, Medea, for his new bride, the princess Creusa. Thus, it is apparent that however otiose in its rehearsal of the stale details of Medea's career Hypsipyle's malediction might seem to be, it would still strike the reader as surprising, and as a surprisingly unfamiliar, daring, unprecedented alteration of the tradition, simply by virtue of the fact that it is Hypsipyle who speaks.'

Jacobson writes of *Heroides* 6 that irony 'is so pervasive, so informing a factor that one is almost inclined to suggest that the poem exists for the irony in it'.[12] Jacobson does not consider this irony in the light of *Heroides* 12; rather, he suggests that it arises because of the external reader's presumptive familiarity with Medea's story, which he will recall while reading Hypsipyle's words. Fair enough, but, to use Jacobson's own criticism of another scholar's remarks, it 'manages to miss the point precisely as it hits it on the head'.[13] The existence of *Heroides* 12 in the collection creates irony and intertextual meaning in *Heroides* 6 that would not otherwise be present, or at least not to the same degree. And Medea's letter itself benefits from Hypsipyle's. No other of the single epistles in the *Heroides* collection share such an intimate and indeed dependent relationship as these two.

Critics often note the unusual presentation of Hypsipyle in *Heroides* 6. The story of the Lemnian women and of Hypsipyle and Jason received much attention in classical literature.[14] Structurally Ovid has followed the general outlines of Apollonius' account: 'the Argo arrives at Lemnos on its outgoing voyage, not on its return . . . and the affair between Hypsipyle and Jason follows the massacre by the Lemnian women of the male population'.[15] Yet beyond the structural continuity Ovid's poem contains an anomalous presentation of Hypsipyle: the duration of Jason's stay on Lemnos is lengthened to two years in Ovid, rather than the few days it was in Apollonius (*Arg.* 1.861–2), and Hypsipyle alludes to her marriage with Jason (6.41–4), which is not contemplated, much less fulfilled, in the *Argonautica*.[16] The departures from the canonical *Argonautica* are important:[17] the lengthy duration of the Argonauts' stay strengthens Hypsipyle's claims on Jason as husband (and father to her children);[18] the marriage that Hypsipyle shares with him places her in opposition to Medea (who in her own letter is thus set against Creusa); the Lemnian massacre can be considered *vis-à-vis* Medea's transgressions (if one retains the couplet). These observations are useful, but the poem's language allows us to see most clearly where it is at play with Medea's letter.

Medea bolsters her mythographical 'record' by claiming that she and not Jason completed Aeetes' contest and won the golden fleece (12.105–8):

> illa ego, quae tibi sum nunc denique barbara facta,
> nunc tibi sum pauper, nunc tibi uisa nocens,
> flammea subduxi medicato lumina somno,
> et tibi, quae raperes, uellera tuta dedi.[19]

[12] Jacobson (n. 9), 102.

[13] Ibid., 113 in reference to Palmer's interpretation of *Her.* 12.121–2.

[14] Ibid., 94. [15] Ibid., 95.

[16] Knox, following Peters, deletes the couplet 6.139–40 in which Hypsipyle explicitly mentions the Lemnian women's crime; his reasons are persuasive to me. Retaining the two verses, as Goold does, amounts to another important difference between *Heroides* 6 and Apollonius, in which Hypsipyle attempts to conceal the *Lemniadum facinus* (*Arg.* 1.793–833). Jacobson (n. 9), 96–7, 106–8 provides a more comprehensive account of similarities and differences between *Heroides* 6 and Apollonius.

[17] Knox observes dangers of postulating influences in the absence of complete textual records ('Phaethon in Ovid and Nonnus', *CQ* 38 [1988], 536–51 and 'Ariadne on the rocks: influences on Ovid, *Her.* 10', in P. Knox and C. Foss [edd.], *Style and Tradition* [Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998], 72–83). Nevertheless, calling Apollonius' *Argonautica* 'canonical' is fair with reference to Medea's story. M. Leigh, 'Ovid, *Heroides* 6.1–2', *CQ* (1997), 605–7 at 607 makes a useful point: '[The approach suggested] may be said to privilege two accounts which survive at the expense of the multiplicity of ancient versions of this legend which do not. . . . However, closer examination suggests that [Euripides' *Medea* and Apollonius' *Argonautica*] are indeed the crucial texts.'

[18] Dido makes a similar point to Aeneas at *Her.* 7.133–8. See also Knox (n. 10), ad loc.

[19] At Apoll. Rh. *Arg.* 4.162–3 Jason takes the fleece at Medea's bidding. The Ovidian *dedi* corresponds with Apollonius' κούρης κεκλομένης.

Medea uses temporal antitheses to underscore the different light under which Jason now views her: once a princess, now a barbarian; once wealthy, now poor; once a balm, now a threat. Time has been cruel to Medea, who cannot reconcile herself to an unjust situation. She finds recourse in epistolary writing, for, as she says (12.21), 'est aliqua ingrato meritum exprobrare uoluptas'.[20] Medea does not say, 'You, Jason, won the fleece by my assistance', but, as she famously does in Euripides' tragedy, uses a first-person verb (*subduxi*) to make explicit that Jason took (*quae raperes*) what she gave (*tibi . . . dedi*) him.[21]

Medea continues these conceits. She writes:

> serpentis igitur potui taurosque furentes;
> unum non potui perdomuisse uirum,
> quaeque feros pepuli doctis medicatibus ignes,
> non ualeo flammas effugere ipsa meas. (*Her.* 12.163–6)

> quae me non possum, potui sopire draconem;
> utilior cuiuis quam mihi cura mea est. (*Her.* 12.171–2)

Medea, sorceress *par excellence*, knows spells without erotic power.[22] She cannot extinguish the flames of love that consume her; much less can she ensorcel Jason. Again using first-person verbs, Medea makes her *querela*. She concludes this passage by noting with frustration (12.172) that her efforts only benefit another, namely Creusa.

Hypsipyle is similarly enraged that completion of vows she swore for Jason's safety would be Medea's profit (6.75): 'uota ego persoluam? uotis Medea fruetur'. Hypsipyle's heart aches, and her love is mixed with wrath (6.76); this is the core of her *querimonia*. She cannot comprehend that Jason could leave her for one she considers (6.81) a *barbara paelex*. So she seizes upon Medea's witchcraft as the source of her woes. Thus she writes (6.97–104):

> scilicet ut tauros, ita te iuga ferre coegit
> quaque feros anguis, te quoque mulcet ope.
> adde, quod adscribi factis procerumque tuisque
> se iubet, et titulo coniugis uxor obest. 100
> atque aliquis Peliae de partibus acta uenenis
> inputat et populum, qui sibi credat, habet:
> 'non haec Aesonides, sed Phasias Aeetine
> aurea Phrixeae terga reuellit ouis.'

Hypsipyle believes Medea won Jason in the manner that Medea, not Jason, won the fleece. She knows her man. She recalls that her intercession on Jason's behalf

[20] The verse recalls the *incipit* of Catullus 76, but does so perversely: Catullus recalls his good deeds to demonstrate the good things he deserves; Medea recalls her kind services to emphasize the punishments Jason should endure.

[21] In Ennius' *Medea Exul* Medea also uses first-person verbs (frs. 274–5 Vahlen; but see H. D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius* [Cambridge, 1967], 350 on the authenticity of these lines): 'non commemoro quod draconis saeui sopiui impetum, / non quod domui uim taurorum et segetis armatae manus'.

[22] For Medea's fame as an enchantress, cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 4.233; Theoc. *Id.* 2.15–16; Apoll. Rh. *Arg.* 3.26, 3.528ff., and 4.1677; Euphorion 14.3 Powell; Hor. *I.* 4.9–14, 5.61–6, *C.* 2.13.8; Prop. 2.1.54, 2.4.7, 3.11.9; Tib. 2.4.55–60. At *Met.* 7.135–8 Medea doubts the efficacy of her *gramina*, only to celebrate her magic powers at *Met.* 7.199–206; Hypsipyle uses language similar to *Met.* 7.199ff. to caricature Medea at *Her.* 6.86–93.

protected him from the Lemnian women (6.53–5): 'Lemniadesque uiros, nimium quoque, uincere norunt. / milite tam forti terra tuenda fuit! / urbe uirum uidua, tectoque animoque recepi!' This thought leads to her conclusion that Medea's magic, not Jason's strength, overcame the bulls, soothed the serpent. Medea and Hypsipyle ironically and unknowingly agree: the hero to whom they write cannot be a 'hero' without the assistance of women. In so many words Hypsipyle claims credit for Jason's warm reception on Lemnos. Likewise she is aware that Jason's triumph at Colchis was through a woman whose agency diminishes his glory. 6.99–100 can be read as a specific reference to the other version of the story at *Her.* 12.105–8 and 12.163ff. (or vice versa).[23] By including a 'crowd-thought' (6.101–4) Hypsipyle also emphasizes that she (and by implication Medea) do not have an idiosyncratic take on Jason's achievements. This normative statement deprives Jason of glory he enjoys with comparatively less qualification in the Apollonian narrative where he actually engages the *spartoi*.[24]

Medea feels similarly about her role; Hypsipyle was spot on. And Medea even considers her past assistance to Jason her dowry. She writes (12.199–206):

dos ubi sit, quaeris? campo numerauimus illo,
  qui tibi laturo uellus arandus erat. 200
aureus ille aries uillo spectabilis alto
  dos mea, quam, dicam si tibi 'redde!' neges.
dos mea tu sospes; dos est mea Graia iuuentus!
  i nunc, Sisyphias, inprobe, confer opes!
quod uiuis, quod habes nuptam socerumque potentis, 205
  hoc ipsum, ingratus[25] quod potes esse, meum est.

Medea makes explicit in this passage what she implied at 12.105–8 with first-person verbs. Her magical assistance was her dowry, and as she conventionally enumerates the manner of her aid she makes a rueful addition: Jason's very ability to lead a new bride (12.205) and be ungrateful (12.206) is a debt he owes, perversely, to her. *Her.* 6.97–104 is an allusion to the unheroic portrayal of Jason's deeds seen in such passages in *Heroides* 12 (and of course Eur. *Med.* 469ff., among other productions);

[23] That Eur. *Med.* 469ff. and Apoll. Rh. *Arg.* 4.355ff. lurk in the background is a given; it is quite possible that Ovid's *Medea* (e.g. fr. 1 Owen), among other productions, does as well. *Met.* 7.56, where Medea herself says, 'magna sequar: titulum seruatae pubis Achiuae', appears to take into account Hypsipyle's words here. Knox's comment (n. 10), 190–1, on *tauros* (*Her.* 6.97) fails to appreciate the especial relevance of *Heroides* 12 in the light of 6.97–104: 'apparently the fire-breathing bulls of Aeetes, whom Medea did not yoke, though she did make it possible for Jason to harness them by protecting him from the flames. O. is more interested in equipping Hypsipyle with a rhetorical point than in mythographical precision.' This comment indirectly reveals the kind of loss that ensues when one excludes *Heroides* 12 from the collection (as Knox, 'Ovid's *Medea* and the authenticity of *Heroides* 12', *HSCP* [1986], 207–23 recommends doing—although he acknowledges in his recent commentary that his *Harvard Studies* judgement is not shared by many: 'Despite occasional protests . . . Ovidian authorship of *Her.* 1–14 is assumed by most modern scholars' [pp. 7–8]).

[24] Apoll. Rh. *Arg.* 3.1380ff. Although Jason does engage the *spartoi*, he does so under Medea's instruction: he knows it is safe. With that said, Jason's heroism is far too complex to be judged only in terms of Homeric *βίη*. The bibliography here is vast; for some recent studies of this perennial issue, see R. Hunter, '"Short on heroics": Jason in the *Argonautica*', *CQ* 38 (1988), 436–53; A. R. Dyck, 'On the way home from Colchis to Corinth: Medea in book 4 of the *Argonautica*', *Hermes* 117 (1989), 455–70; J. J. Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts* (Berkeley, 1993); R. Hunter, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (Cambridge, 1993); and now I. E. Holmberg, '*Μῆτις* and gender in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*', *TAPhA* 128 (1998), 135–59.

[25] A further echo of Catullus 76?

it provides a pointed connection between the two poems. The reader who recognizes this reflexive allusion is alive to an artful instance of intertextual irony within the *Heroides* collection. Hypsipyle even agrees (6.137–8) that Medea's crimes were her bride-gift: 'quid refert, scelerata piam si uincit et ipso / crimine dotata est emeruitque uirum?' An ironic assumption Hypsipyle makes is that Medea's spells had the same efficacy on Jason's love as on his martial success; at 12.163ff. Medea categorically denies just what her rival alleges. The Medeas in Euripides and Apollonius never dwell on this erotic theme.

In the preceding excerpts we observed irony that arose from the subtextual, mythographical background that the *Heroides* inhabit. More conventional irony in *Heroides* 6 also is created by Hypsipyle's attempts to distinguish herself from Medea. Proud ruler of her island, Hypsipyle repeatedly criticizes Jason for having chosen a spouse less worthy than her. She writes (6.79–82):

> non equidem secura fui semperque uerebar,
> ne pater Argolica sumeret urbe nurum.
> Argolidas timui: nocuit mihi barbara paelex!
> non exspectata uulnus ab hoste tuli.[26]

Hypsipyle feared Greek maidens, but a foreign concubine stole her man against expectation. Medea evinces a similar conception of her rival, Creusa, when she writes (12.173–4), 'quod ego seruaui, paelex amplectitur artus, / et nostri fructus illa laboris habet'. This couplet in turn recalls Hypsipyle's remark (6.75), 'uota ego persoluam? uotis Medea fruetur'.

We noted before that Hypsipyle explains Jason's preference for Medea by claiming he was spellbound, since to her reckoning Medea could possess no other charms (6.83–4): 'nec facie meritisque placet, sed carmina nouit / diraque cantata pabula falce metit'. Following this couplet, Hypsipyle details Medea's magical exploits in a topical passage worthy of Medea's own self-celebration at *Met.* 7.199–206. Medea brings down the moon (6.85), causes eclipses (6.86), changes the flow of waters (6.87), enchants trees and rocks (6.88), practises aphrodisiac magic (6.91–2); as Verducci gleefully wonders, 'Isn't [Jason] afraid of waking up dead?'[27] Hypsipyle makes her essential point at 6.93–4: 'male quaeritur herbis / moribus et forma conciliandus amor'. Yet as she makes Medea her antithesis, Hypsipyle becomes more like her.[28]

Heroides 6 has won praise because of its apparent character development: 'Hypsipyle moves from proud and scornful anger to the depths of violence and hate. In this she is virtually unique among Ovid's heroines', says Jacobson.[29] Hypsipyle is 'virtually unique' because she is also rather like Medea. On the one hand, she opposes herself to Medea by presenting her rival as a witch (6.85ff.). She also stresses her own propriety (6.133–5):

> turpiter illa uirum cognouit adultera uirgo;
> me tibi teque mihi taeda pudica dedit.
> prodidit illa patrem; rapui de caede Thoanta.
> deseruit Colchos; me mea Lemnos habet.

[26] In this instance Hypsipyle fits the Ovidian conceit, *militat omnis amans*. *Her.* 6.79–82 also resonate against the Euripidean speech (*Med.* 536ff.) in which Jason kindly reminds Medea of the benefits she has accrued by living in a civilized, Greek polis.

[27] Verducci (n. 5), 57.

[28] Ibid., 66: 'From the vantage point of [*Heroides* 6] the true irony of Hypsipyle's letter emerges with shocking clarity: it is she, and not Medea, who is the true Medea of Ovid's collection.'

[29] Jacobson (n. 9), 104.

Yet as Hypsipyle's rage mounts, she becomes who she claims she is not. In a contrafactual imagining she projects what would have happened had Jason been blown to Lemnos with Medea on their return from Colchis. She famously writes (6.147–51):

> ipse quidem per me tutus sospes fuisses:
> non quia tu dignus, sed quia mitis ego.
> paelicis ipsa meos implessem sanguine uultus,
> quosque ueneficiis abstulit illa tuos! 150
> Medeae Medea forem!

Hypsipyle imagines (6.147–8) she would spare Jason because she is *mitis*. In the subsequent lines, however, she unmasks herself as, or rather dons the mask of, the malevolent Medea in Euripides' dire tragedy. In *Heroides* 12 Medea displays this infamous side of her character when she writes too presciently of Creusa (12.179–80): 'rideat et Tyrio iaceat sublimis in ostro— / flebit et ardores uincet adusta meos!' Hypsipyle's letter draws import from *Heroides* 12 as she envisages treating her enemy in the manner of her enemy's own vengeance.[30]

Medeae Medea forem raises an interesting issue that relates to irony in *Heroides* 6. Critics have observed that Hypsipyle 'knows too much about Medea, inexplicably much'; that 'At the time Hypsipyle writes to Jason, Medea is still the romantic adolescent girl of Apollonius' epic. . . . But she has not yet become the mature Medea, whether the sorceress of folk tradition or the formidably malevolent, maddened creature of Euripides' play.'[31] Hypsipyle displays little less than clairvoyance into Medea's biography.[32] At *Her*. 6.127–8, for instance, she explains her reluctance to send her children as ambassadors to Jason: 'Medeam timui: plus est Medea nouerca; / Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus'. Dramatic and future reflexive irony contribute to this couplet's success. In the subsequent lines (6.129–30) Hypsipyle justifies her fear of Medea's hands by alluding to their role in Absyrtus' dismemberment. Yet Hypsipyle had spoken 6.127–8 specifically in reference to her children's safety. As an intertextual character, Hypsipyle creates dramatic and reflexive irony when we recall the murder of her children that Medea has yet to accomplish in her eponymous tragedies, but that she obliquely predicts near her own letter's conclusion ('quo feret ira, sequar', 12.209) and raises in the reader's mind elsewhere ('saeuiet in partus dira nouerca meos', 12.188). Such irony is exuberant in the *Heroides*, but this use that arises from a three-way exchange among a tragedy and two single epistles is unique.

It is most salient in *Heroides* 6 when Hypsipyle damns Medea at her letter's end. This developed usage is unparalleled in the collection. Hypsipyle prays (6.153–63):

> quod gemit Hypsipyle, lecti quoque subnuba nostri
> maereat et leges sentiat ipsa suas;
> utque ego destituor coniunx materque duorum, 155
> cum totidem natis orba sit illa uiro!
> nec male parta diu teneat peiusque relinquat:
> exulet et toto quaerat in orbe fugam![33]

[30] Hinds (n. 1), 34–43 and A. Barchiesi, 'Future reflexive: two modes of allusion and Ovid's *Heroides*', *HSCPh* 95 (1993), 333–65 at 343–5 have separately demonstrated how the conclusion of Medea's letter displays signs of generic consciousness: Medea is about to enter Euripides' tragedy. Yet whereas Medea hesitates to become *cothurnata*, Hypsipyle not only is happy to allude to (and predict [sc. 6.153ff.]) Medea's buskined existence, but even suggests (6.151) she would rise to such enormity herself.

[31] Verducci (n. 5), 58–9.

[32] Leigh (n. 17), 605–7 notes how the beginning of Hypsipyle's letter displays this quality.

[33] At Apoll. Rh. *Arg*. 4.438ff. Medea prays that the Furies drive Jason from his country. Virgil's

quam fratri germana fuit miseroque parenti
filia, tam natis, tam sit acerba uiro! 160
cum mare, cum terras consumpserit, aera temptet;
erret inops, exspes, caede cruenta sua!
haec ego, coniugio fraudata Thoantias, oro.

The heavy-handed irony of Hypsipyle's malediction is its virtue: one wonders how long Ovid can sustain the joke.[34] And Ovid manipulates his epistolary medium rather cleverly. Kennedy has observed that a letter with a subtext should serve as 'the agency which precipitates subsequent events' in that subtext; this makes closure in the *Heroides* a fraught, complex enterprise.[35] *Heroides* 6, if limited to Hypsipyle's 'life', precipitates nothing. In Euripides' fragmentary *Hypsipyle* the heroine is compelled to leave Lemnos after the Argo's departure (though this may be reflexively prefigured in her curse against Medea at 6.158); she also never learns of Jason's future exploits, much less expects to see him again. *Heroides* 6 bears no relation to Hypsipyle's subsequent exile and Jason's general absence in other (surviving) texts. Although nominally addressed to Jason, the letter is so overwhelmingly about Medea that Hypsipyle concludes it with a polysyndetic address to them both (6.164): 'uiuite, deuoto nuptaque uirque toro'. The letter does, however, anticipate action that occurs in, and after, *Heroides* 12: Hypsipyle's curses are exquisitely realized in *Heroides* 12 itself and its aftermath, the *Medea* tragedies. Jason abandons Medea for another woman; Medea slaughters her children; dispossessed of her one-time wealth, Medea enters a desolate exile; and so forth.[36] *Heroides* 6 relates far more to events in Medea's later life than to those in Hypsipyle's. And so we would do well to recall Knox's observation that 'Each of the heroines' epistles refers self-consciously to a specific source in earlier literature; . . . they represent episodes set in the interstices of the literary tradition' (p. 18). Ovid has added a novel twist to the myth of Medea and Jason by his clever and unique association of the similar experience of Medea and Hypsipyle with Jason, *male gratus* to them both.

We turn to *Heroides* 12 and its ironic interplay with *Heroides* 6. Williams in his article on dramatic irony in Canace's letter to Macareus refers to the 'privileged position' of the epistle's reader, whose knowledge of Canace's story in earlier mythography makes him 'alive to the ironies' of her death in Ovid's presentation.[37] Likewise the reader of *Heroides* 12, who brings to this poem knowledge of Hypsipyle's letter, is placed in a privileged position, able to appreciate irony and meaning that arise from Ovid's linkage of the two.

As they recall the false words with which Jason seduced and consoled them,

Dido, another persistent parallel for Ovid's *heroides* (and author of the next letter!), draws similar curses on Aeneas' head at *Aen.* 4.615ff.

[34] Jason and Medea's discussion of Ariadne at Apoll. Rh. *Arg.* 3.1074–1101 is a happy parallel.

[35] D. Kennedy, 'The epistolary mode and the first of Ovid's *Heroides*', *CQ* 34 (1984), 413–22 at 414. G. D. Williams, 'Ovid's Canace: dramatic irony in *Heroides* 11', *CQ* (1992), 201–9 at 201 and Leigh (n. 17), 605 emphasize the same point. D. P. Fowler, 'First thoughts on closure: problems and prospects', *MD* 22 (1989), 75–122 at 100–1 contains a brief discussion of the complexity that intertextuality introduces to closure.

[36] G. Rosati, 'Il parto maledetto di Medea (Ovidio, *Her.* 6, 156s.)', *MD* 20–1 (1988), 305–9 at 309 writes, '. . . il tragico storico di Medea (in una disposizione cronologicamente conseguente dei suoi momenti più drammatici) è compiutamente delineato nella maledizione di Ipsipile'.

[37] Williams (n. 35), 201; cf. S. Casali, 'Tragic irony in Ovid, *Heroides* 9 and 11', *CQ* 45 (1995), 505–11.

Hypsipyle and Medea unknowingly evoke each other for the external reader and, presumably, for Jason himself (but only if he remembers, and Jason is probably rather forgetful, like Catullus' Theseus). Hypsipyle writes:

> tertia messis erat, cum tu dare uela coactus
> implesti lacrimis talia uerba suis:
> 'abstrahor, Hypsipyle; sed dent modo fata recursus,
> uir tuus hinc abeo, uir tibi semper ero.' (*Her.* 6.57–60)

> hactenus, et lacrimis in falsa cadentibus ora
> cetera te memini non potuisse loqui. (*Her.* 6.63–4)

To Hypsipyle Jason swore fidelity and accompanied his words with tears.[38] In *Heroides* 12 Medea quotes at length the words Jason used to seduce her. She begins by asking Jason (12.71–2), 'noscis? . . . / orsus es infido sic prior ore loqui', and then spits his words back at him (12.85–91):

> 'spiritus ante meus tenues uanescet in auras 85
> quam thalamo nisi tu nupta sit ulla meo!
> conscia sit Iuno sacris praefecta maritis,
> et dea marmorea cuius in aede sumus!'
> haec animum—et quota pars haec sunt!—mouere puellae
> simplicis, et dextrae dextera iuncta meae. 90
> uidi etiam lacrimas—an pars est fraudis in illis?

91 *Pω*: an pars est *Showerman–Goold*: sua pars et

Jason appears to have settled upon a method of seduction that does not fail him; with these passages in mind we can imagine how he approached Creusa. Medea says his words moved her simple heart and that his tears played their part in her deception. We should not be surprised that an embittered heroine recounts her lover's false words. Yet the experiences of Hypsipyle and Medea are presented as distinctively and deliberately parallel: both recount words of Jason that are undeniably similar; both describe Jason's gestures in an uncannily similar way; both refer to his other deceptive ploys (sc. 6.64, 12.89). The passages recall and foreshadow each other. Hypsipyle's *memini* (6.64) is a kind of reflexive allusion; it is a metapoetic annotation that directs the reader not to a previous textual incarnation of Hypsipyle but to the textual incarnation of Medea at *Her.* 12.85–91. And these lines in *Heroides* 12 direct the reader to *Arg.* 3.1128–30, the most immediate source for the reason Medea asks Jason (12.71), 'Do you remember?'[39]

Thematic continuity between these letters occurs when each heroine discusses the same subject from her own perspective—a rhetorical technique epistolography can

[38] Many of the *heroides* note the tears they shed over their letters (e.g. Briseis at *Her.* 3.4, Phaedra at *Her.* 4.175–6, Dido at *Her.* 7.185–6, Ariadne at *Her.* 10.149–50, Laodamia at *Her.* 13.113–14); Ovid himself does so at *Am.* 2.18.22 and, importantly, at *Trist.* 1.1.14. L. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca, NY, 1986), 36 describes how tears can function in epistolary discourse as an irrefutable communication with the power to materialize words.

[39] J. F. Miller, 'Ovidian allusion and the vocabulary of memory', *MD* 30 (1993), 153–64 discusses a number of such annotations. See also J. Wills, *Repetition in Latin Poetry* (Oxford, 1996), 30–1. R. Hunter, *Apollonius of Rhodes: Argonautica Book III* (Cambridge, 1989), 200 notes the interplay (through memory and time) of *Her.* 12.67–9 with *Arg.* 3.927–31.

readily exploit.[40] The dismemberment of Absyrtus is a notable example. In *Heroides* 12 Medea blanches when she considers the topic. She briefly writes (12.113–16):

> at non te fugiens sine me, germane, reliqui!
> deficit hoc uno littera nostra loco.
> quod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere dextra.
> sic ego, sed tecum, dilaceranda fui.

Medea makes explicit reference to her current epistolary project. Yet the memory of Absyrtus' gruesome murder is so horrifying that she can only discuss it obliquely in her first-person narrative; *dilaceranda fui* implies but does not quite explicate the details of Absyrtus' death.[41] Hypsipyle, describing Medea's deeds in the third person, has no such qualms. She contemplates sending her children as ambassadors to Jason, but thinks better of it, writing at 6.128–30: 'Medeae faciunt ad scelus omne manus. / spargere quae fratris potuit lacerata per agros / corpora, pignoribus parceret illa meis?' The reader familiar with both epistles cannot help but read these passages together. Medea refers to her inability to record in a letter Absyrtus' death and emotively apostrophizes her half-brother.[42] Hypsipyle, discriminating between her virtue and Medea's menace, underscores her rival's fratricidal role and even neglects to mention Jason's significant part in it. At *Arg.* 4.464–81 Medea betrays Absyrtus (ominously described at 4.460 as an ἀταλὸς παῖς), but Jason actually perpetrates the murder. Hypsipyle's emphasis on Medea's agency links the two *Heroides* accounts in defiance of the Apollonian tradition. Like Apollonius, however, Hypsipyle recounts Medea's deeds in a third-person narration; but with that said, the first-person epistolary context of Hypsipyle's remarks allows her to be especially selective about what she chooses to tell.[43] Irony is not at hand here so much as inter-epistolary and generic play.

Medea recognizes that Jason seeks to marry Creusa for her powerful connections to Creon. Consequently she reminds Jason that she once possessed riches and, more to the point, that Creusa's dowry falls so very short of the assistance Medea bestowed on him in Colchis (12.25–8):

> hoc illic Medea fui, noua nupta quod hic est;
> quam pater est illi, tam mihi diues erat.
> hic Ephyren bimarem, Scythia tenus ille niuosa
> omne tenet, Ponti qua plaga laeua iacet.

Creusa's dowry, which Jason now finds so attractive, meant nothing when his life was in danger; so Medea exclaims (12.53–4): 'quam tibi tunc longe regnum dotale Creusae / et socer et magni nata Creontis erat!' Similarly when she recounts Jason's confrontation with the serpent, she asks him (12.103–4), 'dotis opes ubi erant? ubi erat tibi regia coniunx, / quique maris gemini distinet Isthmos aquas?' Medea

[40] Cf. also Ajax and Ulysses in *Metamorphoses* 13.

[41] Medea also hesitates to describe the murder at Apoll. Rh. *Arg.* 4.736–7, where she tells her story to Circe.

[42] Hypsipyle refers to the infamous hands of Medea (6.128), whereas Medea's own, the agent of so much evil, cannot recount its deeds (12.115). Medea's inability to describe the details of Absyrtus' murder is a sign of Ovidian generic play. See Barchiesi (n. 30), 343–5.

[43] C. Guillén, 'On the edge of literariness: the writing of letters', *Comp. Lit. Stud.* 31.1 (1994), 1–24 at 5: 'There is hardly an act in our daily experience, rooted in life itself, that is as likely as the writing of a letter to propel us toward inventiveness and the interpretation and transformation of fact.'

reminds Jason (12.25–6) that her present destitution belies her former royal trappings; here she appropriates the lure of Creusa's wealth. She then diminishes its value by telling Jason that her dowry, worth so much more, saved his life and endowed him with the fleece (as she will note again at 12.199–206).

Hypsipyle attempts to manipulate Jason in a corresponding manner. She mentions her noble descent and the dowry she can *now* offer Jason, should he return to her (6.113–18):

> si te nobilitas generosaque nomina tangunt—
> en, ego Minoo nata Thoante feror!
> [Bacchus auus; Bacchi coniunx redimita corona 115
> praeradiat stellis signa minora suis.]
> dos tibi Lemnos erit, terra ingeniosa colenti;
> me quoque dotales inter habere potes.

Both Hypsipyle and Medea recognize what in a woman appeals to Jason. The thematic similarities of their epistolary approaches become especially apparent when the letters are read in the light of each other. Rather than sharing coincidental solidarity in their ill-treatment by the same scoundrel, Jason's betrayed women denigrate each other while exalting their own assets.

The association of Hypsipyle with Medea was a novel mythographical invention by Ovid. Irony—especially dramatic and future-reflexive irony—plays an important role in this linkage, and when Ovid's 'voice' resonates louder than his character's, we can witness a conscious poetic effort to make use of intertextual sources, including other letters in the *Epistulae Heroidum*.

We have noted that *Heroides* 6, with its concentration on *ira mixtus amor*, does little to advance the plot of Hypsipyle's mythographical story. This observation deserves emphasis because it makes the mechanics of Hypsipyle's letter seem anomalous in the *Heroides* collection. When *Heroides* 6 concludes (6.151–64) with Hypsipyle's lengthy and meticulous curse on Medea, we cannot foresee how the letter, much less its malison, will bear on Hypsipyle's subsequent, non-epistolary life in Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and others. The only conclusion we can make with certainty is that, as her letter progresses, Hypsipyle follows *quo feret ira*.

And Hypsipyle's anger leads to the epistle of Medea. Ovid's association of these two allows Hypsipyle's letter to precipitate Medea's own epistolary composition, which itself, as Hinds and Barchiesi have shown, advances Medea into Euripides' tragedy (and Ovid's). To make this connection we must believe that the curses Hypsipyle draws on Medea's head are heard by a god, an intertextual god also known as P. Ovidius Naso, who makes them come to fruition exactly as Hypsipyle writes them—and they do.[44] In other words the reader can inventively supplement the factor of Medea's will and personality as compelling forces in her life: poor Medea, whose fate in Ovid's hands was always already written! This addition may be difficult to make in a character famous for extended self-exegetical monologues and wilful misimaginings; each reader must decide how much stress it deserves.[45] Yet each *Heroides*

[44] Dido's curses against Aeneas and his descendants (*Aen.* 4.622–9) have similar literary ramifications: in a less direct manner they occasion the composition of Ennius' *Annales*. I owe this point to Professor Barchiesi.

[45] Apollonius is quite clear that his Medea lacks control over some important decisions in her life once Hera and Aphrodite have conspired to direct it (*Arg.* 3.25ff.).

reader should also bear in mind that Hypsipyle's letter, for all its brilliant irony and character development, would have a solipsistic existence were its relation to *Heroides* 12 sundered.[46] It is the intertextual nature of the *Heroides* that distinguishes Ovid's epistolary poems from other fictional works in the genre, like Propertius 4.3. An epistle with a literary subtext, like *Heroides* 6, should not exist on its own, as Kennedy has written, but should relate to subsequent events in its subtext. Based on admittedly fragmentary evidence, *Heroides* 6 does not.[47]

Medea claims (12.21) she writes to Jason because of the pleasure to be had in reproaching a person ungrateful for past favours. By the end of her letter (12.207–12), Medea's threats can also be seen as attempts at bullying Jason into stopping his marriage and returning to her. In microcosmic terms her letter exists for its therapeutic worth: she can simultaneously vent her furious frustration at Jason and try to intimidate him. Other heroines can and do make similar claims against unfaithful lovers: we can be more precise about defining the novel contribution *Heroides* 12 makes to the collection.

Medea concludes her letter, as Hypsipyle does, on a note of *ira*.[48] She writes (12.207–12):

> quos equidem actutum—sed quid praedicere poenam
> attinet? ingentis parturit ira minas.
> quo feret ira, sequar! facti fortasse pigebit—
> et piget infido consuluisse uiro.[49] 210
> uiderit ista deus, qui nunc mea pectora uersat!
> nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!

Medea's regret (12.210) that she assisted an unfaithful man is her immediate motivation for writing *Heroides* 12, a motivation that arises from the dramatic and temporal circumstances of her intertextual existence.[50] In Corinth she writes to Jason at the same time as he marries Creusa (sc. 12.137–58). Medea's repeated and emphatic references to her *ira* at her letter's conclusion, however, make her *querimonia*'s relevance apparent as she starts to assume tragic stature. 'nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit' is as much a generic and allusive signpost as an exclamation with

[46] One could make the case that Hypsipyle's letter offers Jason precisely what he seeks in marrying Creusa, and so could be relevant to a later life. However, Euripides' *Hypsipyle* would suggest this was never a possibility.

[47] See note 17 *supra*.

[48] In our texts *Heroides* 12 also begins like *Heroides* 6. (Whether or not we have the beginnings as Ovid wrote them is for now an irresolvable issue.) Medea starts abruptly, with no salutation, as she recalls the time she gave Jason in Colchis. Hypsipyle, too, begins her letter without greeting as she accuses Jason of his failure to write her. *Heroides* 12's beginning also implies that Jason has yet to give Medea the time for a conversation (hence the striking delay of the standard *Medea* opening); this implication brings with it the concomitant need for a letter (not a drama). I owe this point to Dr Heyworth.

[49] Unlike Jason, Propertius will not abandon his mistress. He fears in 1.6 Cynthia will say (1.6.18), 'et nihil *infido* durius esse *uiro*', when (1.6.9–10) 'minatur / quae solet *ingrato* tristis amica uiro' (cf. *Her.* 12.21). Jason must be hard as a Virgilian oak: he endures *querimoniae* from two *heroides*, while Propertius says right off (1.6.11), 'his ego non horam possum durare *querelis*'. Propertius offers an instance of the success of 'Ovidian' rhetoric (*contra* Tarrant [n. 3]).

[50] Medea, however, vacillates at moments in her letter and asks to be taken back (12.193ff.). On such occasions Ovid follows *Argonautica* 4, in which Medea reinstates herself at an earlier point in her relationship with Jason. In Euripides' (and Ovid's?) tragedy Medea addresses Jason only as she plots her revenge.

immediate relevancy to *Heroides* 12.[51] Yet as Medea writes a *querimonia* that places her in generic transit, she also makes *Heroides* 6 consonant with the uniquely intertextual nature of the *Heroides* collection. Medea's *querimonia*, coherent and cogent as it is in her intertextual life, makes Hypsipyle, via her curses, necessary to the *Medea* tragedies.

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[51] See Barchiesi (n. 30), 343–5 and Hinds (n. 1), 41–3 for the import of this line in relation to Prop. 2.34.66.