Facing Facts

Ovid's Medicamina through the Looking Glass

Victoria Rimmell

Medusa, sit down. Take the weight off your snakes. We have a lot in common. Snekies, I mean.

"Tell me, can you really turn men to stone with a look? do you think, if I had a perm— maybe not.

Don't you think Perseus was a bit of a coward? not even to look you in the face.

you were beautiful, when you were a moon goddess, before Athene changed your looks through jealousy

I can't see what's wrong with making love in a temple, even if it was her temple

it's a good meal; you must feel safe and loving behind it,

you must feel very powerful.

tell me, what conditioner do you use?

—M. Wandor, "Eve meets Medusa"
Ovid's *Medicamina* is not much to look at, it seems. Very little has been written about this fragmented poem, of which the final one hundred lines or so are missing, and until quite recently (with the arrival of Rosetti's commentary in 1985), it was mostly tagged as a pedestrian, plodding, grocery list that made very little effort to sweeten its didactic pill. In one of the few brief discussions of Ovid's *thesis* on cosmetics, L. P. Wilkinson synthesized: "After fifty or so spirited lines of introduction, the reader plunges into a series of versified recipes, presumably taken from some prose treatise by a professional pharmacologist. It is hardly a matter of regret that after a further fifty lines our manuscript breaks off. One would like to think that Ovid broke off too" (1955:188). When it has been read at all (and it's worth noting that Ovidian critics in the last twenty years have not even read the text, let alone the *Medicamina*), it has been packaged as self-evidently frivolous, superficial, and pragmatic. Thus for Peter Green (1979), as for Wilkinson, when Ovid does his "science bit" and dismisses the hocus-pocus of beautifying spells, he seriously intends to inform and instruct. While few critics today would take Ovidian didacticism or claims of authenticity at face value, it is not clear what else we might make of the *Medicamina,* a poem that instructs on perfecting facades. This essay considers the role this text might play within Ovidian poetics and within classical thought. I will be discussing how the *Medicamina* fuels and abridges the ways in which Ovid wields the arts of mirroring and making up in his mapping of subject-object relations. In particular, I want to suggest, antiquity's central (and related) myths of matriarchal triumph, Personae's killing of Medusa and the tragedy of Narcissus, become animating subtexts in the *Medicamina* both for Ovid's imagining of the self-indulgent poëta at her toilette and for the poet's and readers' experience of spying on her cosmetic routine.

In purporting to address a female audience of aging beauties, past it Venuses who will soon be forced to discard narcissis's most vital accessory ("cempus erit, quo vos spectaculum vidisc pigebit," "The time will come when you'll hate looking in the mirror," 47), the *Medicamina* does the charitable deed of performing for them the function of a looking glass: this is how they actually look. What we see in the *Medicamina* might be constructed as a mirror image; yet despite its claims to genuineness and objectivity, this reflection or representation must remain (necessarily, and self-consciously) a virtual reality, one fantasized by a wannabe voyeur or by a Personae-poet unable to look (and cunning enough to avoid looking) his vile Medusa in the eye. Ovid's didactic poem is all done with mirrors, those dubious and perilous tools for presenting truth—particularly in the hands of a writer who has made Narcissus the primal incarnation of delusory desire and of self-reflexive, duplicitous poetics. In this polished, specular poem that (in a gesture vindicated by the ubiquity of cultus) employs and embodies women's instrument of self-formation, Ovid conjures up and re-presents the female face, imagining the lumpy, malodorous pastes and potions applied to the reflective surface of his text that, once removed, will reveal a complexion that shines "more radiant" than her own mirror ("quaerente afficiet tali medicamina vultum / fulgebis speculo levior illa suo," 67–68).

By the end of the poem, Ovid predicts, and by the time those crushed narcissis bulbs have taken effect (64–65), the subject who has been "brought into being" alongside the composition of the poem itself (and alongside the brewing and blending of ingredients to constitute the final *medicamina*), will be able to rival, even usurp, the poet's command and incantation of the *sparsanum.* Re-armed with a mirror-like countenance, the born-again poëta is more than a match for her master, fulfilling Ovid's fantasies of agonistic "equality" in *Ars Amatoria* 3 (in *bella parem, "Go into battle on equal terms," 3.3). As we read, the ingredients for this ritual, Gorgon-like face mask become less and less mundane, until at lines 8:ff., the subject is to smear herself with the golden honey, myrrh, frankincense, and incense that might otherwise have been offered to a goddess (8:3–8:4). Ovid's poem is a (potentially inverted) version of the Pygmalion myth that narrates the making up and metamorphosis of an elegiac *paula,* the Narcissus-Medusa hybrid who, since Petronius, has been hellbent on capturing her master's and her readers' eyes as soon as they so much as set eyes on her. With its didactic, realist looks, the *Medicamina* toys with the illusion of exposing the mechanics of writing elegy (along with the Medusan "other face" of sister Venus glimpsed behind closed doors)—that is, with revealing the potential unsightly process of conjuring up an object of desire. This is precisely the trick Ovid pulled off in the opening poems of the *Amores* and in *Ars Amatoria* 1, which began without a loved. Yet in the *Medicamina,* the project is one of (comic) self-googling, as the challenge is to recycle, or make over, the same old girl. This is one he prepared earlier.

**Making It Up**

The *Medicamina* has an axe to (re)grind about the wonders of imperialist cultivation (the message is hanged out, aggressively, in the opening lines: *culmus, cultus, cultus, cultus,* 7). And in terms of its in-her-face celebration of *cultus,* in which *medicamina* and cosmetics play a funda-
mental role, the poem could be said to read like a micro-manifesto of Ovidian poetics. Just like the small, often convex mirrors found on the Roman woman’s dressing table, this short, frivolous poem has a miniaturizing, epitomizing effect: the spotlight is on the puella’s face (no full-length mirrors in these boudoirs), and we home in on some defining features of Ovidian poetry. Philip Hardie opens his recent book on Ovid by reminding us of the centrality of cultus (as well as of spectacula) to both Ovid’s lifestyle and poetics. In dealing solely with cosmetics, an arena synonymous with cultus or art, the Medicamina offers up a prime showcase for authorial self-positioning (as well as for the molding of the Ovidian reader as viewer). The long-suffering puella is patched up to serve another stint as mannequin for Ovid’s poetics of artifice, making his predecessors Propertius and Tibullus (for whom the natural look is always in) seem drab and passe by comparison. This is where we are shown (alongside Ars 3.155-92) Ovid’s most explicit and concentrated packaging of a twisted moral code, which not only privileges contrivance and novelty over primitiveness and tradition, but also marks cultus as a means to improve and emancipate nature. The Medicamina, which reveals itself even the Ars Amatoria in simulation and self-pleasing (for both sexes), rubs up against the ethos of Tibullus 1.8 and Propertius 1.2 in particular. In 1.8.9-16, Tibullus tells Delta:

quid tibi nunc molles probest coelos capillos
serpens mutata dispositio comas,
quod facce splendente genas ornare, quid augues
artificis doctae substinciscit manus.

frustra iam vestes, frustra mutandar anicitias;
insaque compressas colligat arma pedes.
ilia placet, quamvis insidio vacaut ore;
nec nihilo varia comparit arte caput.

What good does it do to style those silky curls,
and try out different hairstyles?
Why paint your cheeks with bright red rouge, why
get your nails professionally trimmed?

To keep changing your tunic and your cloak is daft,
and so is cramping dainty feet in tight-laced shoes.
That girl’s attractive, though she’s free of makeup,
and takes no pains to slick her hair.

Propertius, likewise, fixates on unadorned beauty: see 1.2.1-8 (cf. Prop 2.18):
main,” 97–98. If “natural” is fake, so is nature itself, which can provide examples of the kind of narcissistic vanity that defines Ovid’s Rome: the peacock, Juno’s bird, takes pleasure in self-display, just as other birds exult in their own beauty (33–34), and as line 29 hints, the Narcissus myth is an eternal reminder of the way in which natural, wild landscapes offer up more (watery) mirrors than Venus’s bed chamber (cives latentes frigantique comae, "They hide out in the country, but still they’re all confused"; how else is one to avoid a bad hair day when out of town?). Traditionally, the elegist claims to want to situate himself in opposition to everything that the art of making up represents: luxury, hedonism, frivolity, wealth. Yet in Ovid, and in the Medicamina in particular, age-old anxieties about women as consumers are sidelined in favor of a celebration of the imperial cosmopelia (see Halinek 2003:53). Cosmetics play a vital role in what Duncan Kennedy (1995) has termed Ovid’s "taste-utilization of eros."

For Ovid, then, making up is the ultimate ara, standing for experimentation, mutability, transformation. Just as the pudica puts on a face mask to become a new woman, so the made-up poet deceives and dazzles his audience with a succession of guises peeled off and reapplied. Ovid’s idylls with a wardrobe of looks, is seduced (or inspired) by dozens upon dozens of women, all of a different “type” (see Amores 2.4), and can produce a new poem for each day’s new style (“hac gemina omnibus unum est,” “Not there just one form of adornment,” Ars 3.135, “nee mili toto positus numero comprehendere fas est: adicit omnas proximas gapeaque dies,” “Not can I count up all the fashions there are these days—every day adds more adornments,” 3.151–53). The Medicamina’s systematic denuding of the elegiac pudica, its voyeuristic gaze at uncovering the unfinished opus of her face, is also an exercise in Ovidian self-exposure: it is all too apt that the poet breaks off mid-glance (“vidi quaer gellis maddicata papaver lypsea” / conterretur, terrens illustre specta genia, “I saw one woman pounding poppies mastered with cold water, and rubbing them onto her tender cheek,” 100–01), allowing his audience, whether intentionally or not, to eavesdrop as a promising position as his self-cultivating subject. At Ars 3.216, Ovid spells out the notion that ara (with a lower-case or capital a) is synonymous with cosmetics, when he advises women that ara faciem decemduode tunc: don’t forget, girls, load on those mascaras and read my Ars. We might imagine that the dressing table, stacked with pots and paints, looks rather like the poet’s desk in the middle of a writing session, and that spying on a girl while she is making herself up is uncannily like discovering the poem you’re reading is unfinished, a rude opus (Ars 3.128). The idea that the success of the completed, made-up face depends on disguising the exhaustive, dirty work of creating it recalls Horace’s famous portrait of creative genius in Epode 3.1.122–23, in which the poet in full flow looks playful and casual, while, beneath the mask, he strains with the sheer effort of the work. Ovid’s fly-on-the-wall documentary of his pudice staggering under the weight of her jewelry, or wearing a striking face paint, is similarly tortuous.10

Likewise, in Ars 3.205–208, when Ovid recommends his Medicamina as further reading, the poet’s perfectionism is implicitly twinned with the pains women should take over their own beauty: the poem is "parvus, sed cura grata, liberis, opus." (I have a book, a small work, but great in terms of the effort it cost, Ars 3.206), echoing the first line of the Medicamina (Vulcania vocat cunctis communis cura, pudicitiae, “Learn what pains can enhance your looks, girls”). Ovid’s ara is not iners on women’s behalf (Ars 3.208), in the same way as its inspiration will transform an unkempt woman (compared to an unknown, inerum lump of rock) into a million-dollar gem. The beginning of the Medicamina traces, through the use of the self-cultivating pudica, a crude aetiology of Roman elegy—from the rustic Sabines, Tiro sub rogo (11), who cared for the curas paternas rather than themselves and spun an altogether different one ("in eodem damnum pollice adempta opus," "With tireless thumb she spun, a harsh labor," 16), to their descendants, the amores pudicas who last after fashion, more contemporary, Ovidian texts ("veluti inarata corpora vestre tegi," "You want your bodies clothed in gold-embroidered gowns," 18). Writing a poem and creating a look are analogous, corresponding, mirroring projects.

In composing a poem about the activity of measuring out raw materials for recipes that also amount to this Medicamina, Ovid rubs our faces in the poetic unsuitability of these ingredients, exposing the crafted patternings, blendings, and juxtapositions of his poetic process. Thus the weighing scales, used to measure and balance out the vetula and burley, gum and Tuscan seeds, roasted lupins and blazing beans, double as technology to churn out distichs with textbook precision, again and again. Ovid’s model Augustan pudica is already a paragon of imperfect poise (a taken in lumping Elegies)—she wears earings so large that two are an excessive burden (12–22):

indita calos lapidem cunctas petros
et quaeque oras eam sese talibus duci.

You decorate necks with stones sought from eastern lands so large the ear finds more than one too much to bear.
Doubleness marred by lopsidedness is, likewise, the recipe required in lines 55–56, where two pounds of vetch, bulked up by ten eggs in the hexameter, now outweighs the same, unadulterated portion of barley in the pentameter:

pet evi omnara decem modulat ab evi
ceremintur libras hordeae sed duo

Take the same amount of vetch, add ten eggs to maintain
but let the desired barley weigh two pounds.

By lines 79–80, we are well accustomed to the measure rhythm (Ovid’s lesson in metrics is sinking in), and the schoolmaster poet predicts our interrogation (et quaeritis?). We both know what’s coming next: an instruction on calibration that doubles as a visualization of the crafting and splitting of prose (and poetic stuff) into two elegant couples. Like the singling-up of Ovid’s Rheia clone at lines 21–22, the pentameter in this couplet is labeled (for beginners, ladies), as number 1:

ponderis, si quaeritis, quae sim continuus in illis,
good rhymes in partes unius secta datur.

If you ask what measure of this I’m happy with,
I’d say one ounce, divided into two.

Along the way, our practical lessons in learning “right weights” (pondera tuta et, 76) are accompanied by frequent, varied exemplifications of the symmetry and counterpoise required, all appealing to the visual imagination of the reader keen to perfect appearance. Lines 71–73 mark the equilibrium of roasted lupins and fried beans on either pan of the scale (utropae, utropae discrimen, utropae), the shrinking of six into five feet drawn out by comminutum (“to be pounded small” 72). Similarly, partier at the center of line 75 is the fulcrum of a scale that will measure out one ounce, a tanta pondus, in line 76. If we join the dots in the perfectly proportioned couplet at lines 91–92, we get an artist’s impression of the pharmacist’s scales (as well as the vain woman’s smile), with scale balancing myth (five and nine scruples respectively) in both hexameter and pentameter:

profutus est maratuus benn olistes adduce mythrīs,
quinque partis et quater scrupula, myrbha novem)

I’d recommend you add found to the fragrant mythrīs,
you want five scruples of frument, nine of mythrīs.

Lines 93–96 establish a more complex pattern: a handful of rose leaves mixed with salt of Ammon is equal the amount of incense; a trickly balancing act that demands rereading the initial instruction on measuring incense (in lines 83–85), the combination of roses and salt in line 96 is somewhat confused by the twining of salt with incense in line 94, especially as the formula is repeated, visually, in line 96 (with salt and rose inverted):

scopiant in rosea quaeque saepe una praebent
comple Ammonico muscas terna sale

hordeae quae tenent, illis affine Coronae
aquae epinosae cum sale terna rosea.

Ad the rose leaves, as much as a hand can grasp,
and frankincense with salt of Ammon.

Then, to the mireno, pour in the juice that barley makes;
weight leaves and salt together to match the incense.

The ingredients for Ovid’s medicamina are spooned out in bullet-point distichs, leading readers by the hand through behind-the-scenes elements in putting together the facets of an aesthetically enticing opus.

For women, Ovidian self-fashioning, as Eric Dowling phrases it in his discussion of Ars i (1999), is explicitly a kind of artification: learning about cosmetics, here as in Ars 3, is not only facilitated by, but also implicitly equivalent to, an acquaintance with (even, an “imitative incorporation” into) Ovid’s libelli. Yet the Medicamina also foresees the possibility (and the erotic thrill) of metamorphosing the preda into a rival makeup artist, as well as—on the other hand—the raw material for alchemical sculpting. Ovidian narcissism, which tutors all boys and girls in the art of making up the themselves, threatens ultimately to put the poet out of business. Whichever way we look, the art of wielding mirrors seems destined never to have a happy ending.

And How for Your Close-up

The Medicamina raises the veil on what women do behind closed doors, breaks the spell of female masquerade. Ovid’s sly treadling on the secret ceremonies of putting on disguises straight into the kind of misogynistic sketches of aging women, or of perfectly powdered beauties caught just when their deceptive mask is slipping, that we encounter in Plautus, Horace, Martial, and Juvenal. For (male) fans of Ovid’s seduction campaigns, the poem is potentially a gross tarnish, a spoof toadstool caricaturing the reader as a reluctant papa who has to be
force-fed facts he'd really rather not know. In the *Remedia Amoris*, Ovid recommends that one of the fastest ways to become repulsed by your lover is to intercept her unexpectedly in the middle of her beauty routine (Rem. 351-56):

*tum quoque, compositis curas collinerti ore veternis,
ululat dominus valvae (non posito adhuc) et
pyxides inversae et revolu carufe coleores,
et foveae in tepidis ocella lapsa sinit.
illa tuas redolent, Phineae, medicamina manum:
non sensil hinc: sonando nuncus facta mero est.*

Then when your mistress is painting her cheeks with concoctions of dyes, don't be ashamed to go look at her face. Boxen you'll find, one thousand different hues, and juices that melt and drip onto sticky breasts. Such drugs smell of your table, Phineae; one whiff of them has turned my stomach more than once.

*Medicamina stink* women making up are foul harpies and, at the same time, as blind as Phineae (if they think their complexion look good midfacial). We might also read the Medicama along with Ovid's heartfelt advice in *Ars 3*, following his recommendation of this *libellus* (209-18, 225-30):

*non tamen exorbitat mentis deprecandat senecta
pyxidas: ac facien dissimulata inanis.
quam non offendat toto fato infama vulnera,
tum salutis in tepidis pudere lapsa sinit?
one pyxide seculoque quamvis minuter Athene*
dempta ab inimiculo vellere nunc avis.
nec carminis muscet coram suspensus medullis,
nec corum dentes deficiantibus probant,
sans dehans formam, et erant defœta voce:
*medicae, dum sunt, turpis, facta plebant;*

*tum quoque dura coloris, nem te domine putamus;
spirae sumus compassionis manus.
cur nihil autem car se cur懂事or in ore*

cauda femina thalamis quid rudo profite opus?
nulla virum nostrae desert par multa renos*
offendat, si non interiora tegas.

Similarly, when Ovid in *Amor 2.17* marvels at Cornelia's drop-dead looks, which rival those of Proserpine's Cynthia, he is careful to point out that she will use a mirror to appreciate her reflection only once it has been perfected (*"Curae ad summum nitidum solutum vestrum:*"
"Cynthia was the first to capture me, her victim, with her eyes," 1.1, and coming a little too close to parroting his disinformation of *Amor 1.10.20:* "nec facies occlus ian capit iusta moe,"
*"Those looks of yours no longer capture my eyes." We might compare lines 17-34 of the Medicamina ("Inclutus hominum volutus Jovis amat profuse*/*explicat,"
*"The bird of Juno spreads out feathers praised by men*",
*"The bird of Juno shows off her much-admired wings,*") which makes Juno, as more runner-up in the beauty contest judged by Paris, a prime example of the deleterious woman who stuns she's Venus.*

In both texts,
Ovid lets his readers play the hero and see the real her, warts and all (you can't miss those macular and tubera, subtly erased and scraped off in lines 78 and 85). Dismorphophobia gets provoked in Ovid by the uncanny and frequently mythologized realization that the mirror is always a flawed instrument by which to obtain self-knowledge, and that another person will always be able to see you more clearly, and more truthfully, than you can see yourself. Mirrors lend women the power to know and control appearances, yet in so doing, we are reminded, they expose the limits of female individuation: they are the snare she has set herself. 14 Similarly, Ovid's recipe in the Medicamina for reviving the femme fatale consists of applying a miraculous mask that recalls the Gorgon's viper-like ugliness, a lethal cataplectic power that will always potentially be the death of her. 15

Yet like the Remedia, the Medicamina functions as the Ars Amatoria's mirror text, 16 performing an anti-admission that cannot but seduce. 17 The more we are told that the "unformed," Medusa puella is better left unseen, the more we long to see her, just as in the Remedia, the man who declares "I'm not in love" is inevitably head-over-heels. In direct contrast to the Medicamina, which casts an unforgiving spotlight on the female visage, magnifying those wrinkles, close-up, till they resemble gorged-out furrows (45-50), Ars 2 instructs men never to highlight or reproach a woman for her faults, particularly if she is past her prime or has a blemished complexion. (Ovidian rhetoric has a cosmetic effect—be airbrushes flaws with inventive language alone: nomineus multelet flet mulie, 657.) In Ars 2, Ovid also goes out of his way to recommend the older woman ("utilos, o iuvates, at haec, aut senior actas, "This age, or even older, is a profitable one, lads," 667); his readers are to keep on plowing away at this field (668) that bears many unforeseen advantages (experience, elegance, imagination, unlimnedness). Yet although we subtly avoid seeing the mature puella face-on in Ars 2, her superficially veiled visi infect the imagination all the more and become cumulatively grotesque once aligned with their politically correct surrogates ("Hisca vocetus, nigris Illyrica cui piae sanguis erit/si paeta est, Venere similis, si rava, Minerva," "If her blood is blacker than Illyrian pitch, then call her darkly; if she's got a squirt, compare her to Venus, if grey-haired, to Minerva," 657-59). Despite (and because of) Ovid's rhetoric, this woman is both seductive and repellant, both full of initiative and ultimately passive, both an easy lay and the girlfriend from hell.

The misogyny that surrounds the sexually mature woman and invests her with castrating, paralyzing (stiffening) powers has its mythical incarnation in the figure of the Gorgon, 18 and she is the trump card Ovid plays in Ars 2 as he concludes his defense of the older woman with one final, dazzling exemplum (699-702):

solicite Hesionei Helenae preponere posse,
et melior Gorgae, quam sua mater, carat
et venerent quasinque voles adstringere serum,
is modo datur, praecita digna feras.

Could you honestly rank Hesione over Helen,
and the Gorgon better looking than her mother?
Whoever you are, if you fancy trying older women,
just stick it out, you won't be disappointed.

The Gorgon's mother may be a pushover for a Perseus accustomed to younger, deadlier women like her daughter (crucially, he'll see her eyes conferring defeat: "aspician dominae viceros amentis ocello," 691), yet the hint at her continued fertility in line 668 ("iste feret segretis, iste serundis agev, "That field will bear crops, that field must be sown") harbors the threat of Medusa's (re)birth. This anti-Venus, at once irresistible and (or, because) repulsive, is more trouble than she looks: Ovid's appeal, far from reassuring his male readers, whips up the paranoid fear of Medusa's gaze that runs throughout his instruction in Ars 1 and 2, books primarily geared, of course, toward hooking the daughters, not the mothers.

The possibility (or the promise) of encountering a Medusa is both scary and tantalizing, and the Ovidian lover is schooled to tread a fine line between exciting competition and enmasculating threat. The trick, Ovid tells his readers in Ars 2.287ff., is to let her play the queen, to let her think she is in control of the acts of seeing and being seen ("perdo nihil, partas illa potestis agat," "Waste nothing, let her play the powerful role," 294). Let her believe you are spellbound by her beauty, a victim of her Gorgon's gaze ("atontum forma fac puet esse sua," 295). In reality, he goes on to reveal, she is probably more violent than Medusa, but she, too, will play down her powers and be mild and gentle to her lover ("ut fuerit turva violenter illa Medusa, /fier aristot lenis et /acqua sua," 309-10). The idea that the lover pretende to be atontum by his girl's face is undermined by the ensuing revelation that she really is a Medusa. To claim that your paralysis is a put-on is one way of defending yourself (or at least your reputation) against a woman's Gorgon-like powers. The lover with a black belt in amatory arts must always wield a mask-like face that is as impenetrable as Perseus's shield ("office, nec
In Ars 3, the same instructions are given to women (513-14):

spectam spectas spectat spectatula ride;

innuit, inspicet a quoque reedi notas.

Look at him who looks at you; send back his charming smile;

if he beckons, acknowledge and return his nod.

She must look at the object of her desire with gentle eyes (cornibus oculis, 513), yet although she is actively looking, her gaze is secondary, for she is the mirror image of the man looking at her (pretension). In Ars 3.419-21, similarly, the beautiful woman who offers herself to be seen is like a wolf on the attack.22 Thus while the blueprint of Ars 3.513-14 (one already stolen, or faked, by men in Ars 2) might exact what Lucan foreground famously dubbed patriarchy’s “specular logic,” in which women are denied the pleasure of self-representation and permitted only the hysterics of mimicry,23 the syntax here renders woman both object and subject paradoxically, being looked at can itself be combative, as the figure of Medusa proves. Moreover, both sexes in Ovid have sanctioned access to the magic of the mirror, the device that notoriously confounds the distinction between self and other.24

Mirror, Myrrha. . . . Who’s the Fairest Now?

Traditionally, of course, mirrors were exclusively female accessories. They lay, literally and symbolically, at the center of the mundus muliebris and were frequently associated with effeminacy and general moral decay.25 As William McCarty notes, Aristophanes’ Thesmophorion (440) uses a mirror to represent woman (alongside a male sword), and there is some evidence that mirrors were thought to be essentially female because of their connection to the maenad (which is consistently a goddess) and hence also to monthly rhythmics (see McCarty 1989, 178). In Ovid, too, all women are narcissists26 whose self-appreciation is fully contingent on the use of a mirror. When giving out style advice to women in Ars 3, Ovid reminds his readers that a looking glass is essential: “ nec genus ornatus sumus ut quod quisque decent iauratur et spectum consuetus sit uram.”27 There is no one form of adornment; each woman should choose what suits her and check her appearance in her own mirror (513-56). Yet at the same time, as we have seen, Ovidian men are given carte blanche to steal women’s mirrors. In Ars 3.415-16, Just when Ovid has instructed his lovers to reflect their girl’s every move, he reassures them “ nec tibi turpe putat (quaevia sit turpe,
placebit / ingenia speculum sustinuisse manu, "And don't think it shameful (it may be shameful, but it's so much fun) to hold a mirror in your freeborn hand." Just as in the Medeimina, women are told that there is no shame in taking pleasure in the self (an indulgence that naturally demands looking in mirrors), since these days men are equally obsessed with their looks ("nee tamen indigimus: sit vobis cura placendi, / cum compositus haecet secula vestra viri, "But there's no shame in it: you should be anxious to please, since men these days are so well groomed, 23–24). The Medeimina lampoons the cultural "progress" of Augustus's gold-plated Rome as a self-interested scrabbling for control of the mirror (as ultimate, effeminate luxury as well as a device to display the goodly of empire). This internalization of an imperialist project that has nowhere left to go is read in Ovid as an eroticized battle for the subject position, a civil war for which the Medusa-Persseus conflict, as well as Narcissus's death-by-self, become the core mythic subtexts.

A Perseus-inspired exploitation of the mirror as a weapon to deflect and destroy the specular female look is endemic in Ovidian poetry. In Ars Amoris 1.14, for example, when Corinna wrecks her tresses with curling tongs, she is pictured agonizing over her reflection in her mirror, which she then surrenders (35–38):

quid male disposito quereris perisse capillos?
quid speculum maesta ponis, inepta, manu?
non bene consuetis at spectaculis ocellis
ut placas, debes innominato esse tui

Why lament the ruin of your messed-up hair?
Why lay aside your mirror, silly girl, with hand so sad?
You're gazed upon by eyes not used to such a sight—in order to find pleasure there, forget who you once were.

In Ars 3.507–08, the poet holds up a looking glass to expose his reader's face mid-temper tantrum:

vos quoque si media speculum spectatis in ira,
cognoscat faciem vis satissima suam.

If only you could see yourselves mid-passion,
you'd hardly recognize the mirror image of your face.

Here, the control-freak moralist applies precepts very similar to Seneca's in de Ira, a text that advises the angry man to look at himself in a mirror so as to face a shocking, unexpected, inner reality ("velut in praesentem adducti non agnoverant eo, "Brought, as it were, face-to-face with reality, they did not recognize themselves," 2.36.1–3). A parallel passage in Ars 2 recommends that a frenzied woman be treated with medeimina (480, 493). Typically, Ovid has to create a monster before he heroically hacks off her head; passion transforms the average girl into a demon, her veins bulging black with bile, her eyes flashing fire "more savagely than the Gorgon" ("ilumina Gorgoneae comites igne montant," 3.504). Even (or especially) a stunningly attractive woman can be struck dumb by her own look: in Metamorphoses 15.232–33, during Pythagoras's speech about bodily change, Helen (who, in the example at Ars 2.695–700, is placed in parallel with the Gorgon's mother) weeps when she sees her wrinkles in the mirror ("Per quoque ut in speculo rages adspectis annis, / Tyndaris et succum, cur sit hae ranae, requiris," "Helen also weeps when she sees the wrinkles of old age in her looking glass, and tearfully asks herself why she should twice have been a lover's prey"). Legendary stunner Lais also laid down her mirror when faced with the prospect of decaying looks (Greek Anthology 6.1.18; cf. 11.54, 266). Medusa herself, once a beautiful young woman, dies when she sees her gruesome reflection in Perseus's shield.

The Medeimina, meanwhile, which begins by showing the mature woman what she really looks like in the mirror, replays Perseus's trick of stealing Medusa's petrifying gaze and turning it against her. Ovid has transformed his subject into stone, tacitly associating her with Augustus's marble Rome: just as women need to whiten their swarthiness complexities, to slap on a mask to hide and improve what lies beneath, so the cosmetic facades of Rome's public buildings disguise rough, black, earthware bricks (7–8). Romanization is specifically a libellus man's project. Ovid's preparations cleanse and mask darker skins, and the poem strives towards the racial ideal of the camilla ara (52).

In this visually epitomizing poem, Ovid's Medusan gaze both represents and stages the process of artistic creation. As Hazel E. Barnes points out, the link often made in Western literature between Medusa and art is reinforced by, if it does not directly derive from, the fact that her son by Poseidon is Pegasus, symbol of poetry. 12 The Gorgon's petrifying skill models artistic reproduction, and her finished statues are perfect realist artworks. In Metamorphoses 5.200ff., for example, Astyages thinks his metamorphosed enemy Acontus is alive and attempts to stab him with his sword; when it bounces off the stone, he is amazed (stupet) and paralyzed, as if merely looking at Medusa's work is as risky an act as meeting her eyes ("marmorique manet vultus mirantis in ore," "He stood there with a look of wonder on his marble face," 206). 13 The suc-
cessful artist commands Medusa’s gaze not only in the act of creation (purification) but also in his power to stun an audience. Elegiac portraits of marble-skinned *paulus* typically recur in a parallel—or reverse—Psyche

The Medusa figure that Elegias articulates representation: line 10 of the *Meditatio* (secule delicia India praebet eburna, “India offers ivory to be cut into distant figures”) suggestively evokes the uncultivated female body as an unknown chunk of ivory (both *Art. 3:219–20,* hinting at a Psyche

In the *Meditatio* (Psyche’s dream woman is sculpted from ivory). Studying in mirrors generally is often petrifying (this is especially true of the imperfect ancient mirror, natural or artificial, that worked best when the subject stood very still). Thus Medusa’s mythic “cosmic” Narcissus is also implicitly turned into stone by his own gaze (*scluptus ipse sibi cultque innotas eodem / barret, ut a Parno fornament marmore signans*). “He looks in speechless wonder at himself and stays there motionless in the same pose, like a statue carved from Parian marble,” *Nec 3.4:18–10.* In his grief at losing his beloved reflection in the disturbed surface of the pool, he beats his breast marmorei palmis (“with marble hands”), just as Hermaphroditus, struck by the mirror-like power of Salome’s eyes, is likened to painted ivory (both *Mert. 4:333.*

Ovid uses his mirror-text apotropaically in the *Meditatio*, predicting the threat of castration embodied in the woman, his ancestress, Medusa. Subjected to his hands, the mirror becomes an instrument of objectification, and the male artist’s gaze, with its Medusan ambitions, is overtly aligned with imperialist aggression. Cultivation is empire’s project, and in Ovid’s opening lines, a woman represents a colonized barbarian territory or one of many exotic imports to be processed by civilized artistry: the didactic *distra* (line 1) soon slips into steady-sounding reporting: “cultus humam sternam Cen Enid pendere insist / numeris, *Cultivation ordered the sterile earth to yield the gifts of wheat,* line 3–4.”

We don’t need to put a great deal of pressure on those lines to imagine that it is she that is to be plowed into shape, then dipped and dyed like a raw flax (necella stepe eodem *Tyrisa medicantur senio,* 93) and that her sterile “field” is to be violently weeded of devouring briers (morundae merretis rura, 43) or the bitter juices of her fruit are destined to be sweetened by massive farming. “Herighton, we are later told, will be violently despoled by age (formam populobitter actas, 45), calling for surgery at the hands of Rome’s craftsmen, who will carve her up into bite-sized tidbitments (civile deliciis . . . urbem, 16). After this magnificent opening, the comparison of Subete dauns of old (“They would have wished to cultivate their paternal acres rather than themselves”) with their “daughters,” the delicate *tegulae* of Augustan Rome (11–17) recalls how the rape of the Sabine women in Romulus’s theater in *Arx 3* marks the initiation of this process of imperial eunuch, marking the beginning of Ovid’s strategy of seduction in a text that commodifies the theater as an exemplary arena for the performance of spectacular erotica. Throughout the *Meditatio* (the woman who has read *Arx 3.* is reminded of how much work there is to be done after *Arx 3.* and, where women are warned about making asses of themselves when their faces get distorted by braying laughter (“inudifert a scabra turf vasta alma,” “As when the mean she-ass brays on the rough mulestone,” *200,* the scene at *Meditatio* 8 hints at her continued bestialization (“lenta iube scabra frangat asella mola.” Did the slow ore break it on the rough mulestone?”)—the “joke” for voyeuristic readers is always that the broader we catch breeding Ovid’s potions needs all the help she can get.

Ovid’s program for the cultivation of woman seeks to manitize and renders her sexual body, visualized as a thorny landscape ready to be pruned (or literally, to be slain: *interIce, 4*), a trunk to be split open (*femae, 6*), or a fleshily rot seeping sweet fruit. Lines 3–4, in particular, predict the pastoral woman’s specifically castrating power: those *mordax* rura, Ovid warns his male voyeurs, are bound to eat you alive—so be sure to get your retaliation in first. The simultaneous focus in the opening lines of the *Meditatio* on the taming of the *paulus* face and of her reproductive organs evokes Freud’s reading of Medusa’s head as female genitalia and the serpents of her pubic hair as a withering mass of castrating and castrated penis. For Freud, the terror of Medusa is a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something (specifically, one imagines, “the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother,” *1955.* 273) and her decapitation is thus a retaliatory or self-defensive neutering. Camille Paglia, whose analysis of the Gorgon in Western art frequently echoes the *Meditatio*’s opening metaphor, stresses that “Medusa’s hair is also the withering vegetable growth of nature.”

In line 39, Ovid denies the implication that the *Meditatio* are a miracle cure for fading beauty or that there is any such thing as snake-splitting sorcery (“nec mediae Marsia fabuntur cautelles augere,” “Snakes are not split in two by Martian spells”). Yet as Alison Sharratt discusses (1994, 56) and *86,* Ovid’s opposition between magic and love, and between magic and poetry, is always already collapsed into an identification: under the duplicitous sign of the pharmakon (or here, *medicamen*), the discourses of love, poetry, and magic blend into one.
Ovid’s Mediciamina through the Looking Glass

Ovid’s Lucullan tirade against religio, here as in Ars 1.62–79, 2.99–108, and Remedia Amoris 2.49–50, is complicated and undercut by the barely disguised interreconciliability of ancient science and magic, poetry and spells. Indeed medicamen, as it is used elsewhere in Ovid, is linked both with speculative magic and with the power to castrate (that is, to sever Medium snakes). The waters that androgynize Hermaphroditus, for example, are charged with a medicamentum in Metamorphoses 6.186.14 The same term is also used of Medea’s anti-aging drugs at Metamorphoses 7.266 (“curat aetatem postea medicamentum servat iure,” “Meanwhile, the strong potion is boiling in the bronze pot”) and of the remedy used by Apollo’s son to resuscitate the torn body of Hippolytus (Met. 15.533). And at Metamorphoses 14.285, Circe uses magic medicamina to turn Odysseus’s men into pigs.15 Ovid appropriates witch-like powers in the Medicamina to conduct parallel experiments on his puella, who may end up with a teenage glow or a face like a hog: his concoctions of barley, seeds, and other crops (themselves products, we might imagine, of his creed weeding to increase the productivity of women’s soil and to benefit her Medium looks in lines 2–3) are endowed with a specular magic of their own.16

Just as Ovid’s medicamenta can mean both curative potion and poison/magic drug, so the snake-like powers of his female subject in Ars 3 and the Medicamina are both unscrupled and boosted by his instruction. A predic lamentation in Ars Amatoria 4, Ovid claims, might be: “quis virsi in argum/i adicis, et ratiocris tradis ocile lupar?” “Why do you add venom to snakes, betray the sheep to the mad she-wolf?” (5–6). His first piece of advice to girls in this book is to make the most of youth and be mindful of encroaching old age; in a passage explicit to reinforce the necessity of reading the Medicamina, Ovid exclaims: “quando cito (in miserieta luxuriosa corpora rugis, / et petit in nitido qui fuit ante color,” “How quickly (ah, what agony!) is the body furrowed by wrinkles, how quickly the color fades, that once bloomed on that lovely face,” Ars 3.73–74 (compare Med. 51–52: “dic age ... candida quae potissim auris nata modo,” “Tell now, how your face can shine bright and fair,” and 97–98: “tempore sit nerva mollis licet illa: vult, / frequentato tenui in ore color,” “You only need smear it on your soft face for a short time and not a hint of redness will remain.”). Whereas snakes can slough off their age with their skins, and women are not aged by casting off their horns, women have no way of halting the decline.17 Those crinkly white hairs (57–58) bear no relation to serpents yet Ars 3 and the Medicamina both focus on how time can, after all, be tricked with makeup, hair dye, and face masks blended with stag horn (Med. 49), peeled off like a thin, dry snakeskin to reveal a brand new her. Creating a Venus-Media (an enemy: porre nuovo rami, “We have thrown open our gates to the enemy,” Ars 3.577) is a seductive project, as I’ve stressed, and the price to pay for a good fight, a drama worth watching. The masochistic elegiac lower cannot bear sweetness, in fact: suo renueram amores, “Let us be refreshed by bitter juices” (Ars 3.583). The opening lines of the Medicamina, which shave off her brambles and sugar her tart juices, risk producing a bland, mechanistic artwork that looks more dead than alive and is certainly no turn-on (again, the narcissism of Medium may well backfire). In theory, the ideal (voiced at Ars 3.609–10) is to mingle fear with “secure enjoyment” (“admissenda tamen versus est secure timori”); yet in practice, Ovidian elegy continuously performs an unstable balancing act in which each half of a coupling (and couplet) is alternately epicedized and elegized, fortified and castrated.18

Moreover, just as Ovid’s refutation of magic serves precisely to highlight his poetic wizardry, so the opening claim in the Medicamina that he will teach women how their looks might be preserved, not changed (“et quod sit virsi formas formas tenui modo,” it is undermined by various hints in his recipes of the (painful) process of metamorphosis. As well as the narcissists bullied threatening to take root in her soil at line 63, Halycon cream anticipates the fate of Alectore in Book 11 of the Metamorphoses, who loses her beloved Ceyx and becomes a bird doomed to a life of eternal (ellegiac) mourning (“addita de querulo volubere medicamina nido / ore fragrant sandal: alectore vocant,” Med. 77–78). The addition of myrrh to the heady mix in line 94 (“profunt et mirathos bene alentibus odore myrrhis”) is similarly ominous; in Metamorphoses 15, this fragrant substance is made from Myrrha’s tears when she has been transformed into a tree after committing incest with her father. At the start of her tale, Myrrha is not scared enough of the Furies’ gaze (”nec meratas elo crinitat aequo / quam testas sui meminisse olculo stipae ora petentis / noxia corda vidit”). “Have you no fear of the sisters with the black snakes in their hair, whom guilty souls see brandishing torches before their eyes and faces?” 390–51), and revels in the power of her beauty. That same youthful, beautiful face is covered by dry, wrinkled bark in line 498 (“noxiique cases in cortice vultus,” “She plunged her face into the bark”), and when she gives birth to baby Adonis, she becomes precisely the kind of ugly, aging woman whose tree must be split open at the beginning of the Medicamina (”Carbor agile ritum et fissa cortice vivum / redditis ornis, vagaleque poen,” “Then the tree cracked open, the bark was split asunder, and it gave forth its living burden, a wailing baby boy.” Med.
hounds as a punishment for spying Diana bathing naked in the woods ("et quae prima multa vivaci cornus cervo," and the first horns that fall from a long-lived stag"); cf. "det sparsus capitis vivaces cornus cervi." "On the head she had sprinkled with water, she made the horns of a long-lived stag grow." Met. 7.3.194.40

Here's Looking at You
In many ways, then, Ovid's Medea (especially when set against the other anatoly poems) aggressively asserts Igrigay's mirror tyranny, positing woman as object and symbolically sealing off her access to subjectivity by imagining the point at which her relationship with the mirror cracks. The Narcissus myth, churned up in her face pack ("adulescere suae sexae cornice balneum," "Add twelve nuchious balls without their skins," 63) shadows her metamorphosis, as the didactic poet in Laocoon mode revises the heartbreaking truth of her reflection, the ultimate destructiveness of self-love; while his act of looking (at her) is overdetermined as an act of knowing, the (self-knowledge) she acquires through the act of seeing is disempowering, depressing, even deadly. Yet at the same time, Ovid makes it difficult, even impossible, for his (male) audience to relish their appropriation of the mirror and of the Medusa gaze while online radio is caught in the Narcissus trap of dressing to please themselves and no one can be said to escape the mirror's pernicious, talismanic glare. The moral of Medea's tale is that there is no way to use the looking glass without also being vulnerable to its powers.

Lines 1-11 undercut the imperialist objectification of puella in the opening section of the poem; editor evokes the separation of genders, and in line 21, far from embodying the imported product of a landscape to be colonized and farmed, Roman ladies have become imperialists on a domestic scale who seek out and exhibit the trappings of empire ("indutas cello lapis colori oriente petito"). Freud's account of the development of sexual difference based on the fearful perception of lack (of a penis), hinted at in the anxious slashing of her nudes ruris nubent in line 4, is no longer applicable—or rather, what Igrigay characterizes as the narcissistic motivations of Freud's Medusa complex ("to castrate the woman is to invoke her in the law of the same desire, of desire for the same," 1977:46) are given free rein: men are to view the new, made-up Augustan girl as same, not other, as a rival in the pursuit of cultivated elegance. It is not clear who sees the trends and who copies whom in lines 23-25, women must keep up with male grooming ("cit volo eum placendi, / cum compitos habecur saccula vestra visus"); in line 15, the husbands are spreed
up according to *feminina art*, yet these days there is little for the bride to add to the *nua* displayed (first) by men ("et via ad culus nuptae, quo addit, habet"). In 27 (unfortunately corrupt), there's no distinguishing subject or lover on the basis of gender ("*pro se quaque parent, sce quos veniret amoris* / referint"). They all dress up to please themselves, no matter what kind of love they worship), and although 29-30 are gender specific (*filiis . . . cultus*), 31 opens the field once more ("et istum peacemque sita quaeque amphioparam*."). There is some pleasure, too, in self-satisfaction). These tips on beautification are for men, too, who are now oyagers eager to watch and learn. When it comes to cooking up *medicinae*, girls need a male accomplice or two (here's a handy opportunity to steal her recipe): at 64, she's to let a *venus duexum* ("strong right arm") pound up the narcissus bulbs on pure marble (in an image that comes close to suggesting masturbation); and at 75, she is to hand over the second mixture to the strong arm of young men ("di validis iuvanum pariter subgenia lactea").

Both male and female readers look at their mirror image in the *Medicinae*, an experience that惊叹s us all as boosters self-image. Men, like Narcissus, spy (seductively repulsive) other who, by process of metamorphosis that itself parallels the transformation of Narcissus, becomes and is revealed as same, as a version or reflection of himself. This is a poem that celebrates its own success as a didactic work by forcing all its readers, in different ways, to experience an epistemological revelation modelled on the tragedy of Narcissus, the icon of self-love who comes to know that his beloved other is, in fact, himself. Lines 67-68 ("quaeque amicae affictis tali medicinae vulnera / fugit et speciosa levis illa sua") are now celebrated by every self-lover who sees himself as Narcissus's parallel to his own mirror-image: the woman who, at the beginning of the poem, was a Medusa viewed in a mirror and stripped of her weapons will now (as she has been) embody the abiding mirror. Mirrored gazes exact, producing a baffling symmetry that reveals, in a moment, the specular modalities of Ovidian erotics.\(^{32}\)

Notes

1. In Lydgate 1987:145-16
2. Exactly how much of the poem is lost remains a mystery, but it seems likely that we have the first half (concerned with skin treatments) and that a section of similar length about cosmetics (illustrated by lines 99-100) followed.
3. In the best traditions of late twentieth-century cosmetics advertising.
4. As McCarthy notes (1989:170), the moral and working methods of antiquity prohibited large mirrors. To get around this problem, artisans often used a convex surface, so that a large scene could be made to fit into a small space. Also see Grabes (1984:45) and de Graffenried and Hoff 1981:32.
5. Harlif 2002a:11. See, especially, *Art. 3.12.12* (simplicius redit unto fas) ("In the old days, there was much simplicity"). ... *radd quis cultor ueste...* (Yet because we live in the era of culture...)."
22. "Ad inanitatem leps tendis oves, predaeque ut asinum, / et lovis in mutua devolat aedem aedes, / et quaque det populo mulier speciosa videndam." The wolf drawn near to many sheep so that she might prey on one, and Jupiter's eagle swoops down on many birds. So too, the beautiful woman should offer herself to the people to be used.

23. Higgin 1593 argues that woman is the negative required by the male subject's "speculation," and that Western philosophical discourse depends for its effect on its specificity, or self-reflexivity, and is incapable of representing femininity/"woman as anything other than a negative of its own reflection.

17. For discussion of Romanica feminiss as a point of reflection, see Sharrack 1988a:66-68; 1990a:66-68. Sharrack also suggests here that the close way in which the Romanica participates in the discourse of the Ars has contributed to the poor critical appraisal of it in much modern reading (it is "more of the same," and presents itself as "poetry pura dissimile"). This statement might equally apply to the Medusa.

18. Medusa causes death-by-erection: the state of being petrified is a kind of petrification (as well as, paradoxically, a state of impotence). Foremost in 1994 postulates, in addition to the idea that Medusa's snaky hair is a mass of cnemidai, petals, that "the fearful and staring eyes of the Medusa head also have the secondary meaning of erection."

19. "Armato" ("armed") is the adjective used to describe the effect of Medusa's snakey hair, worn as an image on Minerva's breast, in Met. 4.8.50 ("et attonitus parentem terrae hostes").

20. While it highlights some basic contrasts, Dowling's argument (1990:313) that, in the Ars Amatoria, men (in Ars 1 and 2) "mochanidas" and replace their inner lives, whereas women (in Ars 2) "mochanidas" and replace their superficial, surface appearance, oversimplifies the opposition of male and female in this text. Orwell's advice to men in the Ars is contradictory; at first (1.210), firmo vixit neglecta voce, "It's good for men not to be lost over looks," but at the same time, appearance, and the use of mirrors to attempt to control how one is seen, are just as crucial for men as they are for women.

21. In juvent. 2.7.12-22. Orwell compares the unequal partnering of host with hostess with his relationship to Cordena, which he then likens to Volcan's courtship of Venus (Volcan also incurs the uneven elegies couplet since he walks with a limp "terminat locum genus in impar, sed tanens aede / linguor heroe carmen brevis modo,"). "This kind of verse is itself unequal; and yet the heroic line is suitably joined to the shorter."
32. Homer 1757, 176. Peperus is born from drops of blood from Medusa’s severed head. Paglia 1990, 37 draws attention to the parallel birth of the Furies, who, according to Hesiod, spring from drops of blood falling to earth from Uranus’s castration by his son Cronos—“crueal chthonian emanations of the soil”—and suggests that this “motif of seminal splashes” that recurs in Pegasus’s birth hints at the Gorgon’s half-mortality.


34. Ap. 2.129–20: “quae nunc nova habent operosae signa Myronis/ porter invenit quam durasse massa fuit.” “The statues of industrious Myron, who are now famous, were once a hard mass and lifeless weight.” Downing 1999 reads Ovid’s role in Ap. 3 as an anti-Pyrgulian, turning real women into artifacts.

35. E.g., Met. 10.247 ff: “interea niveum mira feliciter situm / sculptus ex ubi formamque dedit.” “Meanwhile, with wondrous art, he successfully carves a figure out of snowy ivory.”

36. For further discussion of how “Narcissus’s erotic delusion merges into artistic illusion” in Ovid, see Hardie 2002a, especially 143–71.

37. As Rosati notes (1985 ad loc.), pinder suggests a political-administrative metaphor; see Pliny 16.1.

38. The metaphor that associates woman with earth and sex with plowing is as old as Homer. For a recent summary, see Keith 2000, 66–64 or Dougherty 1998, and du Bois 1988, 39–85. It is also the metaphor used of aging women in particular in Ap. 3 (e.g., constans necesse est; agey, “The field gets old with constant harvesting,” 3.85).

39. Compare the passage at Ap. 2.485 ff, when Ovid advises men to treat an angry woman with medicamina that “surpass the juices of Machaon” (“illa Machaonicus operantes medicamina suos”). Ovid’s (poisonous, medicinal) juices are added to, or in competition with, hers. The warning not to trust mixtures of juices in Med. 37 (“nee vos ganimelius nec cnosco crede suco”) might well read as a tip not to trust medicamina generally.

40. Acheulias Eumenides (53–54) pictures the eyes of the Gorgon dripping a foul oozc that Jane Harrison identifies with the Gorgon’s petrifying power. Wilk 2000 argues that this element of Medusa’s image (along with the protruding tongue, blunted round face, and separating hair) suggests a stylized representation of a newly decaying body. The Gorgon, in other words, provokes and embodies the fear of death—and of good looks gone to rot.

41. As Camille Paglia suggests (1990, 47): “The Greek Gorgon was a kind of vagina dentata in Archaic art, she is a grinning head with beard, tusks and out-thrust tongue.”

42. Paglia 1990, 14; see also 48: “Woman’s genital wound is a farrow in female earth. She is the earthly embodiment of nature’s relentless fertility.” As Downing 1999 on Ap. 3 says it: “It is the natural woman who especially repulse” (44).

43. See also Ap. 3–59 and the advice that follows: women are to be mindful of uncrossing old age and five life today, for the years pass like flowing water and cannot be called back (cf. Med. 40: “nee recidit in fonte unda stipita sors,” “Nor does the water stream backwards to its first.”). Yet later on in the book, they are told that old age can be cheated: Ovid works his magic, doing the equivalent of precisely that which he denies can be done—turning back rivers to their sources.

44. Motus uterque parum nati rata verba biforum / fecit et incaato fontem medicamina tinctum.” “His parents heard the prayer of their two-formed son and charged the waters with that uncanny power,” Met. 4, 435–50.

45. Cf. Medea in Her. 357: “inus ego, quae declaras medicamina,” “I myself, who had given the charmed drug.”

46. The Gorgon herself, in her pearly death, may be said to incarnate or produce a pharmaco-medicament, which begets her double, contradictory identity as a beautiful, ugly, creative/deadly creature. Apollodorus 3.10.3 narrates how Asclepius took blood from one of her veins to revive the dead, and from another to cause harm. Compare Zenobius Cent. 1.14. According to Erasides (Aen. 990 ff.), Pallas gave Erichthonius two drops of the Gorgon’s blood one a deadly poison, the other a powerful medicine for the healing of diseases.

47. “Anguish constricts vital can pelle vernum, / nec fixum nervos communia sibi seno,” “Serpents shunt off their age with their frail skin, nor are stags aged by casting off their horns,” Ap. 3, 377–78.

48. This is, of course, spelled out in Ap. 1.1.17–18 (“sunt bene surrexit versus nova pagina praeclara et atroceros prope dominat illus nos,” “My new page of song now well with the first verse in lofty mood, when the next one unmems my vigor”).

49. Note that part of Arctous’s punishment is having to look at himself in the mirror when he has been metamorphosed (“ut vero visus omnis visus in uno ...” “But when he saw his features and his horns in a clear pool ...” 300), and the transformation is triggered when Diana throws water in his face, disturbing the reflective stillness of her pool.

50. Ovid’s obsessive return to Narcissus performs a Medleyan critique of the male gaze, turning it back upon itself, making it visible, and, at that moment, disturbing it. See, e.g., Mulvey 1984.

51. See Parnass 4.35–36 for the use of balsi to mean “balsam” and Adams 1985, 195 on the use of fern to infer masturbation (see, especially, Priapea 3, 34).

52. I’d like to thank Emily Gowar for offering extremely helpful comments on a draft of this essay.