MEDEA REACHES MATURITY:
ON OVIDIAN INTERTEXTUALITY IN SEN. *MED.* 905–15[*]

libenter enim Ovidii Medea novem Senecae tragoedias venderemus (F. Leo)

Abstract: This article offers some thoughts on Seneca's Medea *and especially on lines 905–15 near the end of the play, which are key to understanding the construction of the protagonist's identity throughout the text. They bring to the fore the joint presence of anger and love in the character's psychology and, recurring to elegy as a point of entry, attempt to delineate an intertextual relationship with Ov.* Am. *2.18, aiming at evoking the 'ghostly' presence of Ovid's lost* Medea. *The article falls into two major sections: the first part focuses on distinctive features of Seneca's portrayal of his heroine, like the representation of her intense emotions, the* maius-*motif, the sophisticated and complex interplay between previous models and the character's poignant self-awareness. The second part revolves around the issue of intertextuality, whereof one specific moment is spotted at a microexegetical level in the epilogue of the play.*

T‍he character of Medea is often associated, in the collective imagination of modern readers, with the representation of irrational anger, which, leading her to the horrific act of infanticide, becomes one of the most recognizable features of her dramatic persona. Combining fight with flight, so to speak, she is able to take bloody revenge on her husband and then quickly escape in the chariot of the Sun. Her psychological depictions across time and texts in antiquity, however, have fuelled much debate, especially owing to the significant variations offered by Seneca in his rewriting of the Greek model, Euripides' *Medea*.[1]

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[1] Author's variations are key to the open nature of dramaturgy, which aims at creating new plots out of well-known mythological stories: cf. Paduano (2005) 5; Genette (1997) 262–3.

Becoming Medea

Euripides' representation of this heroine, who is likely to intentionally murder her children for the first time in his play,[2] has long fascinated and puzzled scholars, in that she is portrayed throughout the tragedy as a semi-divine creature confident that the gods are on her side.[3] By contrast, the close of Seneca's *Medea*, instead of suggesting the complicity of the gods, poignantly stages their loss of power or, at least, the heroine's "superpower," which outstrips any sense of moral decorum.

In literature repetition usually comes with variation, which can be regarded, through Kierkegaardian lenses, as a progressive, forward-looking movement generating a sense of expectancy for the future.[4] If one agrees with the so-called "myth fallacy," which states that even traditional and canonical tales may offer elements of suspense or surprise,[5] Seneca's variation comes mainly in the representation of his characters, along with the suppression of the Aegeus-episode. The fact that Medea kills her children onstage, breaking theatre conventions, underscores the character's extraordinarily dominant role in the play and calls attention to the theme of excess (the so-called *maius*-motif), which is a constant running through Seneca's *corpus* and is effectively epitomized in Seidensticker's formula *comparativus Senecanus*: Medea looks greater and appears to accomplish greater actions than her Euripidean predecessor (cf. lines 50; 674; below, pp. 459-60).[6]

The issue of Medea's identity is central to Seneca's play: after being forced to lose her role of *coniunx* because of Jason's betrayal,[7] she will also give up her function of *mater* and relentlessly pursue the dream of recovering her pristine *uirginitas*. The text posits a *Ringkomposition* of sorts by having *uirgo* at line 49, *haec uirgo feci* ("I did those things as a

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[2] Knox (1977) 194.

[3] Knox (1977). On this phenomenon cf. Lucarini (2013) 186, n. 58; Cleasby (1907) 64–5 who believes that Seneca drew on Ovid in this respect.

[4] On this cf. Brooks (1984) 124.

[5] Taplin (1978) 162–4. As is pointed out by Fusillo (1997) 10, the idea of absolute originality is a romantic myth.

[6] Seidensticker (2005) 421. Even when Medea's anger in Euripides is μέγας (590), it still cannot vie with that of Seneca's Medea. Cf. also Segal (1986) 9–11 on Seneca's use of excess to shift the focus from emotional content *per se* to the resources in the language of emotional portrayal.

[7] On this cf. especially Guastella (2001).

girl") and *uirginitas* at 984, *rapta uirginitas redit* ("my raped virginity is restored"), which in a provocative way suggests that, by effacing the present, Medea can bring her past back (at the cost of several murders, of course). Medea becomes Medea, declaring the firm intention to establish her ultimate identity, just before deciding that she will kill her own flesh and blood: *Medea nunc sum; creuit ingenium malis* ("Now I am Medea; evils have increased my talent" 910). This line contains a powerful self-presentation and fulfils Medea's promise in the stichomythic exchange with the nurse in 171 (Nu.) *Medea* — (Me.) *Fiam* ([Nu.] "Medea…" [Me.] "… yes, I'll become Medea"),[8] allowing us a glimpse into the development of her inner life. She succeeds in "becoming Medea" thanks to a hard won process, in which, struggling to find consistency, she both spurs herself on to action and commands her passions to subside until the very end of the drama (893–976 and 982–94).[9] Seneca seems to push to extremes the variety of "human" roles this character can take on in comparison to her Euripidean counterpart: his Medea can play the wife, the mother, the witch and the virgin, depending on which function will be more beneficial for her to satisfy her goal of revenge.[10] As is pointed out by Fitch and McElduff, the process Seneca's Medea goes through in becoming Medea is reductionist: it involves simplification, in that only one of her multiple identities will prevail (that of murderer)[11] and, accordingly, only anger amongst her other passions.

However, with respect to Euripides' *Medea*, Sanders has recently argued that her character is extremely complex and her emotional state is more nuanced than has usually been thought. He convincingly argues that the revenge of the Euripidean Medea is marked by strong sexual jealousy: she does not act exclusively out of anger[12] and heroic pride; she is also driven by a perilous combination of frustrated love, jealousy

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[8] Galimberti Biffino (2000) 91 speaks of a perverted *Bildung* of the character's personality, who turns into a *monstrum*; cf. also Martina (2000) 24.

[9] Self-command and imperatival language in the play are investigated by Star (2006) 232–42. In Classical Studies, following in the footsteps of the Stoic theory of emotions, the term "passions" indicates problematic, intense and disruptive emotions, as is indeed the case with Seneca's plays (cf. Braund and Gill (1997) 1 and 5). Graver (2012) 258, n. 2 prefers the more neutral word "emotions;" cf. also Kaster (2005) 319–21.

[10] The issue of character identity is enhanced by the recurrence of self-naming, which is also key to other Senecan characters deeply concerned with the construction of their *dramatis personae* (there are eight occurrences of self-naming in Seneca's *Medea* as against one in Euripides: cf. Bartsch (2006) 258).

[11] Fitch and McElduff (2002) 26.

[12] On women's anger in tragedy cf. Allen (2004) 84–7.

and envy.[13] To put it in other words, her anger is a reaction to the jealousy she feels about Jason. Such a combination is crucial to the interpretation of the cultural and emotional background of this tragedy and should not be dismissed in favor of prioritizing motifs such as Medea's supernatural revenge and her assimilation to male heroes.[14] Erotic love is mentioned in the prologue by the nurse as the reason for her mistress' voyage to Greece (8); besides the nurse, the Chorus, Jason and Medea too grapple with this theme, each from an individual perspective. The Chorus is well aware of the intensity of Medea's passion (433), and Jason describes Medea's love, not as a human emotion, but as a powerful lust brought upon her directly by the gods (Eros and Cypris, 526–31). His statements align him with an archaic conception of *eros*, which is normally considered an external and hardly controllable force, traditionally stemming from the gods.[15] Medea, however, refers very rarely, and in a rather oblique or abstract manner, to her passion for Jason (330; 485 πρόθυμος), thus remaining by and large significantly reticent about it.[16]

Seneca's Medea is no less susceptible to love[17] and her experience is described as a totalizing one, more in line with the viewpoint of Roman elegy. The erotic motif appears tightly intertwined with that of anger in Seneca's play and all the more so since its presence, as will be shown below, becomes symptomatic of a generic tension that is alien to the Greek model.[18] Anger, which is generally regarded as the chief characteristic of Seneca's Medea,[19] acts in fact in concert with the

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[13] Sanders (2013).

[14] On which cf. e.g. Maddalena (1963); Foley (1989) 64–6.

[15] E.g. Fusillo (1997) 7–8 and (2007) 117 (127 on love as a heteronomous force).

[16] On jealousy as an underdeveloped or imperfectly articulated emotion in ancient literature cf. Caston (2012) 15–16.

[17] Paduano (2005) 334–5 who believes that the motif of love was already strongly present in Euripides, although it appears to be obscured there by some kind of censorship applied to erotic language.

[18] Love must have been central to Ovid's *Medea* as well: cf. Ov. *Tr.* 2.381–2 *omne genus scripti grauitate tragoedia uincit: / haec quoque materiam semper amoris habet* "tragedy conquers every kind of writing in seriousness: this too always has the theme of love;" 387–8 *tingueret ut ferrum natorum sanguine mater, / concitus a laeso fecit amore dolor* "that a mother could dye her sword with the blood of her children, pain aroused by hurt love brought it about."

[19] Even so, such an emotion remains emblematic of her ethos, almost a permanent affective condition, as suggested by 903–4 *penitusque ueteres pectore ex imo impetus /*

similarly destructive desire of love, as the Chorus itself acknowledges (866–7): *frenare nescit iras / Medea, non amores* ("Medea does not know how to rein in anger, nor love"). Although love and anger are posited as competing emotions further on in the play, they clearly share an intensity and lack of limits. Two moments are particularly suggestive of Seneca's variations in readapting the theme of love to his play: lines 135–6 … *nullum scelus / irata feci: saeuit infelix amor* ("and yet I committed no crime in anger: it was unhappy love that raged"), where Medea admits she committed her first crimes while in love with Jason, and lines 896–8 *pars ultionis ista, qua gaudes, quota est? / amas adhuc, furiose* [scil. *anime*]*, si satis est tibi / celebs Iason* ("how small a part of your revenge is this you are enjoying now! You are still in love, mad soul, if you are satisfied now that Jason is unmarried"), in which, right after Creon' and Creusa's deaths and before the infanticide, she poignantly observes that she must still be in love with Jason, if she is happy with such a petty revenge. There may be irony in this last claim, but the love motif continues to be noticeably present also at the end of the tragedy. Analogously, it is remarkable that Medea's accusation in 143 that *culpa est Creontis tota* ("the fault is entirely Creon's") reverses the situation of the Greek model, when she declares to Creon her exclusive hatred for Jason (310–11). In Seneca it will take her almost 800 lines to be set free from her love for Jason,[20] not to mention that in 524, halfway through the play, she is still busy trying to persuade him to flee with her: … *innocens fuge mecum* ("escape with me, and be free from guilt").

Trinacty has demonstrated to what extent Seneca's *Medea* is indebted to the Roman literary discourse of love, that is elegy, and above all to Ovid's *Heroides* 6 and 12.[21] The latter, Medea's epistle to Jason, is especially interested in foregrounding the depiction of a sentimental heroine who, straddling the generic boundaries of elegy and tragedy, underestimates the potential of her revenge (*nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit* "something portentous, surely, is working in my soul," *Her.* 12.212). Seneca's text represents one of the possible poetic spaces in which such potential turns into reality and lets Medea reappropriate the true essence of her tragic nature,[22] but not before having shown

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uiolentus hauri "and savagely draw up old impulses from deep in the well of your breast" (scil. her *animus*) and earlier by 394 *irae nouimus ueteris notas* "I recognise the signs of her old rage" (the nurse speaking).

[20] Boyle (2014) *ad loc.*: this move "shows Medea's love for Jason driving her to deny the reality of his betrayal."

[21] Trinacty (2007) 71–3 and *passim*, but cf. already Martina (2000).

[22] Trinacty (2007) 73–4.

throughout the play the consequences of *eros* upon her. Seneca crafts a character fully aware of the potential of her passion and makes her recur to love precisely as a yardstick for measuring hate (*si quaeris odio, misera, quem statuas modum, / imitare amorem* "if you asked what limit you should impose on hatred, wretched woman, take your cue from love," 397–8):[23] love is thematized, so to speak, in this play by the protagonist herself, not concealed as in Euripides. Also, love is represented as an entirely "secularized" emotion,[24] upon which the divine element (love embodied by Eros) has left no traces, unlike in Euripides' *Medea*, Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7, where young Medea, inhabiting an ambiguous generic space, is puzzled by Love/love coming upon her.[25]

The elegiac background, delineated by Trinacty and against which Seneca shapes his character, highlights generic differences and continuities between Seneca's play and the Ovidian text (cf. Ov. *Her.* 12.208 and Sen. *Med.* 23–8; *Her.* 12.137–40 and *Med.* 116–7; *Her.* 6.149–51 and *Med.* 168–71 and 910–14; *Her.* 12.209 and *Med.* 953).[26] The play's end eventually establishes the triumph of anger, effectively signalled by line 953 … *ira, qua ducis, sequor* ("anger, where you lead, I follow"), which also demarcates the frontier of tragedy in relation to the elegiac genre, especially if read productively with Trinacty[27] against Ov. *Her.* 12.209 *quo feret ira, sequar. facti fortasse pigebit* "where anger leads, I will follow. But perhaps my action will displease me." As is sharply

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[23] See Boyle (2014) *ad loc.* on limitless *amor* as a trope of Roman elegiac poetry.

[24] As in Ov. *Her.* 12.31–8 and 61. In the elegiac space such a secularization usually aims at overshadowing the role of epic gods.

[25] This ambiguity clearly emerges from Ov. *Met.* 7.11–13 "*frustra, Medea, repugnas: / nescio quis deus obstat,*" […] "*mirumque, nisi hoc est, / aut aliquid certe simile huic, quod amare uocatur*" "Medea, you struggle in vain: some god, I do not know which, opposes you. I wonder if this, or something like this, is what people indeed call love;" 19 *trahit inuitam noua uis* "a strange power draws me;" 55 *maximus intra me deus est* "the greatest god is within me;" 73 *uicta dabat iam terga Cupido* "and now Cupid, defeated, was turning away;" 82–3 *sic iam lenis amor … / … inarsit* "thus her passion, now conquered, […] was relit;" 92–3 *non me ignorantia ueri / decipiet, sed amor* "it is not ignorance of the truth that ensnares me, but love." Cf. Bessone (1997) 101 who observes that the problem of responsibility (the god's or Medea's?) remains open, and Verg. *Ecl.* 8.47–8 *saeuus Amor docuit natorum sanguine matrem / commaculare manus* "cruel Love taught a mother to soil her hands with her children's blood."

[26] Trinacty (2007) 76.

[27] Trinacty (2007) 72 and 74.

suggested by the temporal variation in the verb form "to follow," Seneca's Medea can carry on with her plan of revenge, whereas her Ovidian counterpart, owing to the elegiac constraints, is only allowed to warm up.

Interestingly, *amor* is also used for maternal love in Seneca's play.[28] The following passage offers a snapshot of how maternal affection and anger torment Medea's soul as competing passions before her final resolve (937–44):

> quid, anime, titubas? ora quid lacrimae rigant
> uariamque nunc huc ira, nunc illuc amor
> diducit? anceps aestus incertam rapit;
> ut saeua rapidi bella cum uenti gerunt,   940
> utrimque fluctus maria discordes agunt
> dubiumque feruet pelagus, haut aliter meum
> cor fluctuatur: ira pietatem fugat
> iramque pietas — cede pietati, dolor.

> Why, soul, do you vacillate? Why do tears water my cheeks and, as I waver, why does anger now drag me off in one direction, love now in another? An undecided tide sweeps me along in my uncertainty; just as, when violent winds wage cruel war, the quarrelling billows drive the sea-water in two directions at once, and the swell seethes indecisively, just so my heart is surging: anger banishes love, love anger — anguish, surrender to love.

Strikingly, Seneca not only borrows the term *amor* from amatory language, he also heavily draws for Medea's self-representation on topical imagery of psychological depictions of heroines in distress arising after abandonment such as the case of Ariadne in Cat. 64.62 *prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis* "she looks forth, heaving with great waves of grief" and Dido in Verg. *Aen.* 4.532 *saeuit amor, magnoque irarum fluctuat aestu* "her love surges afresh, as she heaves with a mighty tide of passion." Medea's love, even when it identifies with motherly affection, ends up imbued with erotic overtones,[29] which recall elegiac (or pre-elegiac) models. This feature represents a major difference from

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[28] Boyle (2014) 361–2.

[29] According to Pichon (1991) 151 "*fluctuare est calamitatibus ac doloribus amatoriis, velut turbido mari, huc illuc ferri*" ("to fluctuate is to wander about here and there, as on a stormy sea, owing to calamities and amatory sufferings").

the corresponding monologues in Euripides' play,[30] in which Medea's dilemma and the conflict between her maternal and avenging impulses are staged (cf. 1019–80[31] and 1236–50).

A further intertextual strand, however, may be delineated to complement the elegiac landscape of Seneca's *Medea*: this will strengthen the connection with Ovid's elegy as a pervasive intertext and allow an even greater distance from the Greek model to emerge,[32] one which, despite the usual exaggeration and emotionalism common to Greek tragedies,[33] depicts Medea's psychology in a more unadorned manner (a sort of zero degree of style) than Seneca's version. Broadly speaking, Medea properly fits into the Senecan paradigm towards tragic subjects that constantly makes his characters reflect upon their literary stories and comment with poignant self-awareness upon themselves.[34] Euripides' Medea leaves the stage[35] and kills her children in silence (the audience only hears their screams offstage, 1273-9), by contrast Seneca's character never steps off the stage.[36] She unremittingly dominates the scene, accompanying her actions with words in a telling nexus between physical and verbal violence, as if she were indeed

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[30] Gill (1987) with further bibliography; on 1236–50 cf. also Di Benedetto (1975) 46.

[31] On the thorny textual problems of these lines cf. lately Lucarini 2013 who convincingly accounts for bracketing 1056–80 as stemming from a different *Medea* by Euripides. They appear to be inconsistent with the previous lines and 1078–80 especially have long forced scholars to excogitate far-fetched explanations in their defense.

[32] Boyle (1997) 131 effectively comments on the different representation of the final act in the two authors: in Seneca, before the messenger "can launch into the predictable Euripidean narrative, Medea's entrance drives him from the stage (891), and instead of a messenger's speech the audience receives the longest soliloquy in Senecan tragedy."

[33] Cf. Stanford (1983) 21.

[34] Cf. Pratt (1963) 234 on Seneca's dramaturgy as a system of commentary upon the traditional themes of Greek drama. Cf. also Schiesaro (2003) 13 and *passim* on the actions of certain characters triggering a reflection of the text on itself. On the solipsism of Senecan characters who have control over the scene and are specifically focused on themselves and on their own passions, cf. Fantham (2005) 126–7.

[35] On this highly dramatic moment cf. Ohlander (1989) 174; cf. also Page (1976) 167.

[36] She seems to outstrip even Horace's precept in *AP* 123 *sit Medea ferox inuictaque* "let Medea be fierce and unyielding," ignoring the rule not to kill onstage (185). On this cf. Brink (1971) 201 and 247; Gualandri (2009); Degl'Innocenti Pierini (2013). On the possibility that Seneca might have been influenced by pantomimic performances, cf. Zanobi (2014) 137.

offering a close reading of them thanks to her acute psychological self-knowledge (991-4; 1016; 1018-20).[37]

Lines 905–15 represent the entry point for this further intertextual strand, as will be demonstrated below. Afraid as she is that she might still be in love with Jason (897–8 *amas adhuc, furiose, si satis est tibi / caelebs Iason* "you are still in love, mad soul, if you are satisfied now that Jason is unmarried"), Medea opts a peculiar method of removing such a passion, replacing it with another one, that appalling *furor* Seneca has memorably injected into some of his tragic characters and with which his readers are certainly well acquainted:[38] she will thus keep riding the wave of the *felix impetus* ("successful impulse," 895) that has been her driving force so far.[39] Her *animus* is commanded to search for … *poenarum genus / haut usitatum* … ("a form of punishment out of the ordinary," 898–9) and to bend toward anger (*incumbe in iras*, 902). Therefore, following in the footsteps of her literary predecessors, she will go so far as to commit an "unaccustomed" crime (899), but one which comes as no surprise to the audience, certainly familiar with the ending of her story. What indeed looks unexpected, along with her sadistic attitude, is the chain of argumentation leading to her ultimate murder, which also partly exhibits a Stoic flavor. In her view, all that she has done up to the present moment should be hyperbolically ascribed to piety (*quidquid admissum est adhuc, / pietas uocetur* "whatever you have perpetrated up till now should be called love," 904–5), since the killings of Absyrtus, Pelias, Creon and Creusa have simply been *leuia scelera* and *uulgaris notae* ("trifling," "commonplace," 906–7): through them her *dolor*, that is her actual resentment, the source of her desire for revenge, has just been practicing (*prolusit*, 907–9):

> prolusit dolor
> per ista noster: quid manus poterant *rudes*

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[37] Star (2006) 233.

[38] *Furor* features prominently in Seneca's discourse of emotions (cf. e.g. Schiesaro (2003) 26–36). Self-addresses or rather self-commands are the way in which Medea removes any lingering traces of remorse and love for Jason: cf. Star (2006) 235.

[39] *Impetus* is key to the manifestation of *ira* for the Stoics, cf. *De Ira* 2.3.4 *ira non moueri tantum debet sed excurrere; est enim impetus; numquam autem impetus sine adsensu mentis est, neque enim fieri potest ut de ultione et poena agatur animo nesciente* "anger must not only be aroused, but it must rush forth, for it is an active impulse; but an active impulse never comes without the consent of the will, for it is impossible for a man to aim at revenge and punishment without the cognizance of his mind;" 5 *numquam dubium est quin timor fugam habeat, ira impetum* "there can never be any doubt that as fear involves flight, anger involves assault."

audere magnum, quid *puellaris* furor?

my anguish has been practicing on those crimes: what
mighty deed could unskilled hands, could the madness of
a girl dare to achieve?

Proludere means literally "to rehearse"[40] and is a term much beloved by
Seneca, who recurs to it elsewhere in his tragic *corpus* (*HF* 222; *Pha.*
1061; *Tro.* 182). Medea has been diligently practicing to get ready for
her grand finale. The word carries a military overtone, but it also occurs
in philosophical contexts, especially if one recalls the famous *principia
proludentia adfectibus*, "symptoms that prelude to passions," of *De Ira*
2.2.5, through which Seneca refers to the so-called pre-emotions,
affective conditions that precede real emotions and do not coincide
with them, as they are beyond the realm of assent.[41] *Prolusit dolor* is a
powerful expression, ironically hinting at the alleged "lightness" of
Medea's previous murderous life (*leuia … scelera*, "trifling crimes," 906–
7). The *dolor* she has been feeling earlier is a prelude to the greater
resentment she is experiencing in the present moment and that will lead
her to a greater crime. As has been shown by Bartsch and Star,[42] the
murder of the children is for Medea the endpoint of a process of
"becoming herself" conceived in a similar way as Stoic self-
development. This is not the place to grapple with the intriguing and
problematic reuse of Stoic principles in Seneca's tragedies, but it is
evident that some of his tragic characters are palpably modeled on the
figure of the Stoic sage and the representation of vice strikingly reminds
us of that of virtue.[43]

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[40] *OLD* 1632.b; Boyle (2014) *ad loc.*: "to practise."

[41] For the distinction between emotions and pre-emotions within Stoic doctrine cf.
Graver (2007) 144–5 and (2013) 263-72 and Sen. *De Ira* 2.2–3. Full-blown emotions
always involve the cognitive process and assent to a content.

[42] Cf. Bartsch (2006) 259-62; Star (2006) 232-5.

[43] Whether or not Seneca's tragedies were meant to propagate his Stoic creed in the
audience has long been object of contention. Ethical issues are presented in a
problematic way in the *Medea*, in which the protagonist seems to resist any possible
Stoic reading of the play. On Stoicism and Seneca's tragedies cf. Mayer (1994)
especially 173 on the circulation of the tragedies in antiquity: "they came down to the
Middle Ages unencumbered with the learning or interpretation of antiquity itself […]
In due course Stoicism presented itself as the best clue to the interpretation of the plays."
Cf. also Mazzoli (1997) and Torre (2009). It should also be born in mind that Seneca's

Seneca's Medea openly confesses that her hands have proved to be
rudes ("untrained") and her frenzy *puellaris* ("girlish") so far, both
inadequate to dare something great (*audere magnum*). Although she has
already killed on multiple occasions, she expects her last *scelus* to outdo
her previous "dilettantism," now characterized by inexperience and
girlish emotionality. Costa (1973) *ad loc.* duly recalls line 49 *haec uirgo
feci* ("I did those things as a girl"), but the choice of the adjective *puellaris*
appears to be quite pointed (*puella* as an elegiac marker) and to imply
more than *uirgo* does (cf. below, p. 462).[44] Through the character's
distorted viewpoint the author portrays a Medea fallen prey, as it were,
to an attack of perfectionism. The time has finally come for her to claim
maturity and unequivocally exhibit her "ultimate" identity[45] in the most
unnatural of crimes (910): *Medea nunc sum*; *creuit ingenium malis* ("Now
I am Medea; evils have increased my talent").

    As already mentioned above, this line may be construed as a response
to her prediction at 171 *fiam*[46] ("I will become Medea"), but it also
brings to the fore further issues. Her *ingenium*, both her inborn nature
and the power of her mind, has been growing through the exercise of
her *mala*,[47] precisely those aforementioned *leuia scelera* that will be listed
in the following lines (cf. below and already in the prologue *leuia
memoraui nimis* "but what I have spoken of is too feeble," 48).

Stoicism was eclectic and open to ideas from different philosophical schools and, thus,
much less fundamentalist than interpreters sometimes acknowledge (cf. Ahl (1986) 11
and ff.).

    [44] Ohlander (1989) 277 construes these and the following lines "as a display of
bravado." Cf. also Guastella (2001) 148–9.

    [45] Henry and Walker (1967) 174 interpret the "attitudinizing lines" 42–3 *pelle
femineos metus / et inhospitalem Caucasum mente indue* ("drive out womanly fears / and
clothe your mind with the inhospitable Caucasus") as "Medea's search to establish an
identity;" her identity development focuses more on internal process than on dramatic
action (175). Also, in contrast to Euripides' Medea, whose emotional states represent,
almost in Aristotelian terms, her response to a complex social interaction (she is terrified
by her enemies' laughter, cf. e.g. Eur. *Med.* 797 and Maddalena (1963)), Seneca's Medea
offers an inner, more private representation of her feelings. On this cf. Fitch and
McElduff (2002).

    [46] Costa (1973) 153; cf. also Németi (2003) 177–8. Staley (2010) 33 interprets line
910 against the backdrop of Eur. *Med.* 1078–80 and with an eye to Chrysippus' Stoic
analysis of that passage ("Seneca is in one sense acknowledging that Euripides'
protagonist has evolved into a new figure. It is typical of Seneca's sense of *aemulatio* that
he does not translate Medea's famous lines […], but he does develop their Stoic
implications").

    [47] On *ingenium*, cf. Boyle (2014) *ad loc.* On the verbal connection between *mala* and
Medea cf. Bessone (1997) 89–90.

Given that the name of Medea is often associated with a bilingual etymological wordplay combining the potential of Greek μῆτις with that of Latin *mens*, the growth of her *ingenium* seems to imply here that she has finally reached the acme of both her inventive skills and her deceptive activities (μῆτις).[48] This is said to be happening right now, but it may be assumed that *nunc* ends up encompassing the broader meaning of *hic et nunc* "right now in this text," thus merging time and space. Ontologically speaking, Medea as a character cannot exist without her *mala*, which I prefer to interpret here as "crimes" rather than as "sufferings," unlike Costa and Hine *ad loc.*, for whom there is ambiguity in the term.[49] Both Euripides' and Seneca's characters are well acquainted with the notion of κακά/*mala*;[50] notwithstanding, Euripides' Medea seems to be engulfed by them (cf. 1077), so that her ethical motivations and sense of justice[51] eventually submit to her desire to take revenge upon Jason, while her awareness of suffering and her maternal love partly obscure the cruelty of her act.[52] Seneca's Medea, on

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[48] On the name of Medea cf. Traina (1991); Segal (1982); Fitch and McElduff (2002) 26: Medea is "the woman who μήδεται, who has μῆτις." Cf. also n. 24 and Pind. *P.* 4.27; Eur. *Med.* 402; AR 3.826. Torrance (2013) 225 shows that the extraordinarily powerful role of Medea's mind in Euripides' plot might represent an element of novelty with respect to previous mythological accounts.

[49] The sense of "crimes" seems to be confirmed by the catalogue that immediately follows, in which an active role is assigned to Medea who literally gloats over the acts she has committed (cf. the repetition of *iuuat*). Cf. also Gill (1987) 32, n. 31 and Boyle (2014) *ad loc.* Note incidentally that the medieval grammarian Geoffrey of Vinsauf, to explain the rhetorical device of *emphasis*, occurring when the name of a person or a thing stands for a character trait, gives the following paradigm case (*Doc.* 2.2.34): *Medea est ipsum scelus, quod sic est exponendum: Medea est ita scelerosa, quod in ea nihil inuenitur nisi scelus* ("Medea is the embodiment of evil itself, which is to be thus explained: Medea is so full of crimes that nothing but crime may be found in her").

[50] Cf. Eur. *Med.* 407–9 "and furthermore we are women, unable to perform noble deeds, but most skilful architects of every sort of harm" (κακῶν πάντων). In Euripides evil is represented as a real and pervasive aspect of nature, whereas in Seneca's plays the Stoic view of evil as a consequence of human actions or attitudes is predominant. For the Stoics nature cannot be evil in itself: evil is the direct consequence of weakness of character, which exposes one to the danger of emotions. On this cf. Pratt (1948).

[51] Cf. e.g. 578, 580, 582.

[52] Pucci (1980) 152; Ohlander (1989) 170 ("the idea of the necessity of killing her children is mentioned by Medea four times in seven lines so that one must feel that neither her emotions nor her fury are causing her to perpetrate the deed") and 171. Cf. also Hall (2010) 18–19 on the ambiguous morality of the play; Foley (1989) 65–6 on the interconnection of justice and defense of honor. On Medea's display of suffering cf.

the other hand, is irresistibly attracted by the possibility of establishing her identity by piling up evils. In the play she is even depicted by the Chorus at 362 as *maiusque mari Medea malum* ("and an evil worse than the sea — Medea"), which might also remind us of Cicero's anagram on her name *eadem Medea* "the same Medea" (*ND* 3.67), pointedly hinting, according to Ahl's interpretation, at the immutability of her character:[53] she remains unchanged, a powerful combination of crime and rationality (*scelus* and *ratio*), and fully cognizant that evil will destroy the life of her children, who must pay the penalty for having Jason and Medea as parents: … *quod scelus miseri luent? / scelus est Iason genitor et maius scelus / Medea mater* ("for what crime will the poor boys atone? Their crime is having Jason for father, and a greater crime is having Medea for mother," 932–4). The identification of her character with the notion of *scelus* or *malum* secures her literary existence, as is evident from line 55 *quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus* "the home that was born through wickedness, through wickedness must be abandoned" (if one reads this line against 397–8 *si quaeris odio, misera, quem statuas modum, / imitare amorem* "if you ask what limit you should impose on hatred, wretched woman, take your cue from love," it becomes clear that Medea's love has an incredibly destructive and criminal potential).

An Intertextual Moment
The following lines (911–15) offer a catalogue of those *scelera* that took place earlier in her saga (similar, though less expansive, catalogues of misdeeds occur also at 130–6, 451–3 and 473–6):

> *iuuat, iuuat* rapuisse fraternum caput,
> artus *iuuat* secuisse et arcano patrem
> spoliasse sacro, *iuuat* in exitium senis
> armasse natas. quaere *materiam*, dolor:
> ad omne facinus non *rudem* dextram afferes   915

> I'm glad, I'm glad I tore off my brother's head. I'm glad I
> cut up his limbs, and robbed my father of his secret relic,
> I'm glad I armed the daughters to destroy the old man.
> Look for your opportunity, anguish: for every crime you
> will have hands that are well trained.

Foley (1989) 64, n. 12 and 66 who notes that Medea's revenge, rather than being a product of irrationality, must be understood within the Greek heroic code; cf. also 76.
    [53] Ahl (2000) 167.

Her approval of her previous crimes is articulated by the repetition of *iuuat*: what she did in the past has been of great benefit to her in improving the activity of her *dextra*;[54] thereby, her resentment is encouraged to look for further "material" (*quaere materiam*) so that she may keep her hands in practice, although, unlike her Euripidean counterpart who reveals her plan early in the text (at 792–3, somewhat after the first half of the play), she will overtly declare her intent only at 924–5 … *liberi quondam mei, / uos pro paternis sceleribus poenas date* "children, once mine, you must pay the penalty for your father's crimes," thus granting the epilogue, despite the readers' pre-knowledge, a higher effect of horror through suspenseful anticipation.[55]

In such a context, line 910 *Medea nunc sum; creuit ingenium malis* ("now I am Medea; evils have increased my talent") is loaded with meaning and its literary implications deserve, I believe, special attention. It should always be born in mind that Seneca engages in this play with a very popular myth which has risen to the status of "canon" in both Greek and Latin literature:[56] consequently, the character of Medea and her story have been growing across texts and genres, in that they have been adapted to drama (Euripides, Ennius, Ovid, Seneca), epic (Apollonius Rhodius, Ovid *Met.* 7) and elegy (Ovid *Her.* 6 and 12); as a result, Seneca's rewriting positions itself as a palimpsestic product.[57] If we look at the manner in which the infanticide is acted out in Seneca's play and in his Greek model, the impression that in the former the character's *ingenium* must have grown is bolstered by the two-phase murder of the children performed onstage (986–7; 1019): this innovation expands the Euripidean scene and makes a spectacle of the violence by having Medea kill the second child under Jason's eyes (993 *spectator iste*, a grotesque witticism).[58] Seneca's heroine contributes a

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[54] On the metadramatic sense of *dextra* cf. Boyle (2014) *ad loc.* (= "the writing hand").

[55] Ohlander (1989) 277–8.

[56] Manuwald (2013). Cf. also Dupont (1985) 452.

[57] Senecan tragedy is palimpsestic by definition because of its manifold relationships with prior texts. On this cf. Boyle (1997) *passim*.

[58] Violence and macabre scenes prominently featured in the audience's tastes under Nero (cf. Coleman (1990)) and this may explain the aesthetic values Seneca's tragedies display. On Jason as captive *spectator* cf. Mowbray (2012) 399–402. Cf. also Dinter (2012) 41: "… although many of Seneca's tragedies might well have been written under the reign of Claudius to while away years of exile in Corsica, they are firmly counted amongst Neronian literature" (cf. also Ahl (1986) 14).

higher effect of *Pathetisierung* to her Greek antecedent, which is consistent with the general tendency of various genres of Roman literature to intensify the *pathos* of their Greek models[59] and privilege the emotive component over the referential one: she murders *coram populo*, in front of the people, whose presence she needs in order to seek validation for her actions. The key to their success, from her standpoint, thus hinges on a combination of self-assertion and acknowledgement on the part of the other characters (cf. 976–7 *nunc hoc age, anime: non in occulto tibi est / perdenda uirtus; approba populo manum* "come on, now, my soul: you must not waste your courage in secret; have your handiwork applauded by the people;" cf. also 1021 … *coniugem agnoscis tuam?* "do you recognise your wife?"), without which her dramatic role would be diminished.

Unfortunately, Ovid's tragedy, which was much praised by Quintilian and Tacitus, has not survived, but its influence on Seneca's play must have been very strong.[60] I think the connection may be, if not confirmed, at least reinforced precisely by line 910. I find it tempting to read in the name of Medea the very title of the tragedy and in *ingenium* an allusion to Seneca's literary achievement in line with the poetics of *maius* which permeates his tragic *corpus*:[61] his heroine's *ingenium* has increased thanks to his own poetic talent, therefore his "full-fledged" Medea hints both at the character proper on the brink of committing the ultimate crime and metapoetically at the play as Seneca's "artefact" that overcomes its models. If this is the case, we do not, however, deal with a general claim of the superiority of Seneca's *Medea* against unspecified models; on the contrary, it appears to be engaged in a privileged intertextual dialogue with Ovid.

It is generally assumed that the resemblance of a passage in Seneca's play to extant Ovidian verses, especially to *Her.* 12, may point to an origin for this passage in Ovid' lost tragedy *Medea*.[62] The focus will be

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[59] On this cf. e.g. Biondi (1980) 127, n. 7.

[60] E.g. Tarrant (1978) 220 and 261. Cf. also Knox (1986) 211–15 and Lucarini (2013) 178 and 184.

[61] On *maius* as a feature of Senecan drama cf. above, p. 447 and Schiesaro (2003) 34 n. 23 and 130.

[62] Cleasby (1907) 45ff.; Pratt (1983) 26; cf. also Trinacty (2007). On Ovid as a crucial and pervasive intertext in Seneca *tragicus* cf. Jacobi (1988) and Hinds (2011). Billerbeck (1988) 17ff. shows Ovid's strong influence on Seneca's tragic diction. Cf. also Martina (2000) 29; Bartsch (2006) 270.

here on *Amores* 2.18 instead, a programmatic poem,[63] in which generic issues are tackled by the author in light of his literary activity and the *Heroides*, his new elegiac experiment, are introduced (21–6). He gives up epic and chooses to sing his own wars (*mea bella*, 12), that is to devote himself to love elegy and leave aside loftier endeavours (*arma*, 11). Yet, he also refers to another poetic commitment falling outside the field of elegy, the writing of an unnamed tragedy, which is most likely to be identified with his only known play, the *Medea*:[64]

> uincor, et *ingenium* sumptis reuocatur ab armis,
>   resque domi gestas et mea bella cano.
> sceptra tamen sumpsi, curaque *tragoedia* nostra
>   *creuit*, et huic operi quamlibet aptus eram.
> risit Amor pallamque meam pictosque cothurnos   15
>   sceptraque priuata tam cito sumpta manu

> I am vanquished, and summon back my genius from the taking up of arms to sing of exploits at home and of my own campaigns. Nonetheless I did begin to sing of sceptres, and through my effort a tragedy grew, and for that task no one more fit than I. But Love laughed at my pall and painted buskins, and at the sceptre I had so promptly grasped in my private hand.

His self-complacency, though tendentious, appears to match Quintilian's enthusiastic judgement on the play (*Inst.* 10.1.98): *Ouidii Medea uidetur mihi ostendere quantum ille uir praestare potuerit si ingenio suo imperare quam indulgere maluisset* "the Medea of Ovid shows, in my opinion, to what heights that poet might have risen if he had been ready to curb his talents instead of indulging them."[65] This suggests that Ovid was endowed with an *ingenium* versatile enough to cope with different

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[63] McKeown (1998) 382: "this elegy provides several glimpses, each as fascinating as it is frustrating, into Ovid's artistic career."

[64] Sen. *Suas.* 3.7 *in tragoedia eius* (the play is not named either). More details in McKeown (1998) 384–5. Booth (1991) 3 and 185 is also inclined to identify this tragedy with the lost *Medea*; *contra* Holzberg (1997) 44–5. If the intertextuality here delineated is convincing, Seneca's lines might reinforce the possibility that *Am.* 2.18.13–16 alludes to the same play, whose title is never mentioned by Ovid.

[65] Cf. also Tac. *Dial.* 12.

literary experiments and well suited to the tragic genre too.[66] It is striking that the word *ingenium* is also in the text of *Am.* 2.18 (11). If we read Sen. *Med.* 910 *Medea nunc sum; creuit ingenium malis* against the backdrop of Ovid's programmatic statements in *Am.* 2.18.13–14 *curaque tragoedia nostra / creuit* ("and under my care a tragedy grew"), Seneca's play thus seems to engage in an intertextual "agon" to establish its superiority.[67] Moreover, further Ovidian presences crop up in lines preceding and following 910, which are packed with a conspicuously elegiac vocabulary.

Lines 907–9 posit a constellation of elements which may be easily traced back to Ovid's love poetry. Terms such as *rudis, puellaris* and *leuis* frequently occur in elegy and are key to its poetics: *leuis*, for example, is one of the distinctive features of the genre, as opposed to *grauis* embodied by loftier genres like epic (cf. Ov. *Am.* 2.1.21 *blanditias elegosque leuis, mea tela, resumpsi* "I have taken up my weapons again: coaxings and light elegies" and 3.1.41 *sum leuis, et mecum leuis est, mea cura, Cupido* "I am light, and Cupid, my heart's fond care, is light as well," Elegy's self-presentation). Both *leuis* and *grauis* are value-laden terms and point to structural and thematic differences between competing genres.[68]

Analogously, the adjective *puellaris*, first attested in Ov. *Her.* 10.20 *alta puellares tardat harena pedes* "the deep sand slows down my girlish feet" (of Ariadne), is inseparable from the *persona* of the *puella* around which elegy in all its manifestations revolves.[69] As to *rudis*, it is usually applied to those who are inexperienced and lack the art of love, as Helen claims to be in Ov. *Her.* 17.141–2 *sum rudis ad Veneris furtum nullaque fidelem /*

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[66] Cf. also Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.88 *lasciuus quidem in herois quoque Ouidius et nimium amator ingenii sui, laudandus tamen partibus* "Ovid is, even in his heroic poetry, frivolous and too much in love with his own talent, but he still deserves to be praised in some parts." On poetic *ingenium* cf. Prop. 3.9.52 *crescet et ingenium sub tua iussa meum* "and my talent will grow to meet your commands," in which the poet, after the *recusatio*, declares his purpose to embrace epic to please Maecenas (*sub tua iussa*); cf. also Prop. 4.1.66, in which Rome's growth hinges on the poet's *ingenium*. Ovid's *ingenium* is also praised by Seneca in *NQ* 3.27.13 *ille poetarum ingeniosissimus* "that most ingenious of poets."

[67] On the possible meanings of *creuit* cf. McKeown (1998) 394: "was increased, gained in esteem, swelled with pride, grew larger." Since *cothurni* are mentioned at line 15, McKeown explains that "Tragedy has her buskins to boost her size."

[68] On this cf. Trinacty (2007) 67–9.

[69] For *puellaris* as a generic marker cf. Battistella (2010) 5-6 and 54–5. The *puella* maintains her central function both in traditional elegy, where the speaker is male and she is the object of his all-encompassing love, and in the *Heroides*, where gender roles are reversed and the *puella* becomes the forlorn lover.

[…] *lusimus arte urum!* "I am inexperienced in the theft of love and I have never […] artfully deceived my faithful husband."[70]

Lines 911–15 offer a few other elements to complement this elegiac landscape. Love poets prove to be keen on the phrase *iuuat*/*iuuet* + infinitive, which they seem to borrow from or, at least, share with didactic style[71] and through which they usually express their willingness to adhere to the poetic creed of elegy, as for example in Prop. 2.13.11 *me iuuet in gremio doctae legisse puellae* "let me delight in reading in the lap of a learned girl" (with Fedeli (2005) *ad loc.*) or Ov. *Am.* 1.13.5 *nunc iuuat in teneris dominae iacuisse lacertis* "now it is pleasant to lie in the tender arms of my mistress." The impersonal form *iuuat* normally implies joy or pleasure on the interlocutor's part ("I am happy to"), but the original meaning of "to help, to be helpful" (cf. ital. "giova") may also be operative.[72] Although the *iuuat* + infinitive phrase is also common in philosophical self-review and is often employed by Seneca in his Stoic writings as a formulation of self-preparation,[73] I believe the text here offers an ideal mixture of literary and philosophical elements. The elegiac components should not, however, be overlooked in favor of strictly philosophical construals.

Medea's "creed" in Seneca looks as distorted as that of the elegiac poets committed to a totalizing *reductio ad amorem.* Similarly, the only possible world for Medea is that of crime, which provides her with the *materia* (914) necessary to her literary existence.[74] *Materia* too conjures up elegy and goes beyond the basic meaning of "fresh matter, the raw material for further crime."[75] The term may be classified as an Ovidian buzzword, in that one comes across dozens of examples in his poetry:

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[70] Pichon (1991) 255. It is perhaps worth noticing that in Ov. *Ars* 3.515–16 the god of Love too engages in the activity of *proludere,* for which cf. line 907 *prolusit dolor* "my anguish has been practising" in our play (cf. also above, p. 455): *sic ubi prolusit, rudibus puer ille relictis / spicula de pharetra promit acuta sua* "thus the boy, when he is practised, leaves the foils and takes his sharp arrows from the quiver" with Gibson (2003) *ad loc.* on the rarity of this term in elegiac contexts.

[71] Cf. e.g. Lucr. 1.927ff. … *iuuat integros accedere fontis* "I am happy to come to undefiled fountains;" Verg. *G.* 3.22–3 … *iam nunc sollemnis ducere pompas / ad delubra iuuat caesosque uidere iuuencos* "even now I long to escort the stately procession to the shrine and witness the slaughter of steers."

[72] Ernout-Meillet (1967) 331.

[73] Cf. Bartsch (2006) 264.

[74] Cf. Trinacty (2007) 75 and n. 37.

[75] Costa (1973) *ad loc.*

the quest for poetic *materia* is in fact a motif dear to the poet to refer to his creative endeavors, as for example in *Am.* 1.1.19 *nec mihi materia est numeris leuioribus apta* "nor do I have subject-matter fitting lighter metre" or *Tr.* 2.381–2 *omne genus scripti grauitate tragoedia uincit: / haec quoque materiam semper amoris habet* "tragedy conquers every kind of writing in seriousness: this too always has the theme of love," in which he discusses the *materia* suitable to tragic genre[76] and gives love the usual prominence (cf. also n. 18 above and Ingleheart (2010) *ad loc.*).

Let us return to Sen. *Med.* 905–15 in order to present some concluding thoughts after delineating the lexical impact elegy has on that passage. It is noticeable that Medea's persona appears to assume an authorial pose (cf. *ingenium*), as she does in the prologic section, in which she depicts herself in search of a *uia* (40) — clearly a metapoetic device to refer to the development of the plot —, and shows herself to be all too aware of her literary nature (cf. *narrentur* "[your divorce] will be told" at line 52;[77] *peperi* "I have given birth" at 26, which may hint at the act of creation of the poetic word; cf. also *sceleris auctorem* "the perpetrator of the crime" at 979). Furthermore, by repeatedly engineering *morae* "delays", "obstacles" throughout the play (173; 281; 288), she gives shape to her character and takes control of the tragic plot in a way that might remind the reader of another authorial Medea, the Ovidian heroine of *Metamorphoses* 7. There she emerges as a figure of narrative control and metaliterary competence by providing her non-metamorphic mythical saga with a content capable of fitting in a poem of multiple transformations.[78] Medea's quest for *materia*, therefore, mirrors both her need of further "stuff" to keep practicing (further crimes) and, at a metaliterary level (the character as the author's embodiment), the search of the poetic *materia* itself in all the manifold versions of the tradition.[79]

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[76] Cf. also *Am.* 3.1.25 *materia premis ingenium* "you stifle your talent with such a subject:" Tragedy invites the poet to give up Elegy for good. Cf. also Trinacty (2007) 75 and n. 37. On the chronology of *Am.* 2.18 and 3.1 see Booth (1991) 3–4: 2.18 is likely to belong to the second edition of the *Amores* and to have been composed after 3.1, in which Ovid's commitment to tragedy is presented as yet to come (cf. line 29 *nunc habeam per te Romana Tragoedia nomen* "now let me, Roman Tragedy, have a name through your efforts").

[77] With Schiesaro (2003) 18; cf. also Németi (2003) 151 who points to the complicity between the author and his character.

[78] As recently shown by Gildenhard and Zissos (2013).

[79] Boyle (2014) *ad loc.*: "here the word unites the metadramatic and the existential, as Medea seeks material for her crimes and her play." Interestingly, a later replay of the Medea myth, Hosidius Geta's cento, also seems to point to the character's self-

Drawing on a remarkably elegiac vocabulary, Seneca's Medea classifies her actions prior to the infanticide as signs of an alleged weakness or inexperience: she has been acting out of girlish frenzy, as a *puella* (and the reader's memory will certainly go to her elegiac counterpart in Ov. *Her.* 12), still unaware of the art of … murder! Hence the accomplishment of her last crime also coincides with the attainment of literary maturity. Her character grows throughout the play, so that it ends up being something different from its models: she has already warned her interlocutors (407) that her *furor* "madness" will never cease to grow; moreover, near the close of the play, she confesses that the *uoluptas* "pleasure" she derives from the murder of the children is also growing (*ecce crescit* "see, it is increasing," 992). Generic ascent (910) and an exponential growth of evil go hand in hand in her character. It is my belief that the elegiac and Ovidian moments serve a double purpose in the passage under investigation, as if two strands of intertextuality were operating: on the one hand, they bring closer the monomaniacal worlds of the compulsive lover[80] and the compulsive murderer (cf. *puellaris, iuuat* and *materia*). Significantly, Seneca portrays his grown-up Medea as giving up any trace of girlishness in a pointedly elegiac language: her *puellaris furor* is gone, yet she has gained advantage from it (*iuuat*). On the other hand, line 910 is the key moment in the intertextual dialogue. This line cannot be fully understood without stressing the link between it and Ov. *Am.* 2.18, which brings to the fore the role of Ovid's lost tragedy: line 910 is Seneca's response to Ovid's utterance in that elegy. We cannot say how different or similar these two tragic "Medeas" may have been; however, if my reading of line 910 is correct, Ovid may appear to have represented a cumbersome model,

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awareness, who is capable of controlling the plot in a way which can hardly be defined as human: the words uttered by Medea in 393 *auctor ego audendi. fecundum concute pectus* "I am the venture's author, beat your fertile chest" right before committing the infanticide might work as a meaningful signpost, in that they are the effective conflation of two Vergilian half-lines both related in the *Aeneid* to Juno, whose manoeuvring notoriously is to a certain extent the driving force of the poem (*Aen.* 12.159 *auctor ego audiendi* … + 7.338 … *fecundum concute pectus*; the *fecundum pectus* of the second hemistich is referred to Allecto spurred by Juno). I follow Salanitro (1981) in attributing this line to Medea (cf. also McGill (2005) 129), unlike Rondholz (2012), who assigns it to Absyrtus' ghost (cf. 135–6; cf. also Lamacchia (1981) *ad loc.* and Lamacchia (1958) 315).

[80] In the second edition of the *Amores*, the only surviving, elegy theorizes the need of *puellae*, but of no girl in particular: this represents a major difference between Ovidian elegy and previous incarnations. Cf. Cameron (1968) 321.

admittedly steeped in innovation and rhetoric,[81] against which Seneca's Medea tries to find its place within the literary tradition. As long as Medea remains stuck in her *puella*-role, she dares not achieve great things (*audere magnum*, 909): that inhibition powerfully recalls once more our intertextual *point de départ*, Ov. *Am.* 2.18, where the poet complains that Love impedes him from pursuing lofty ventures, *nos … ausuros grandia* (3–4).[82] Seneca's Medea, behind whom the poet himself lurks, and Ovid have in common a rather similar attitude towards literary ambition, but she intends to surpass him too. Hence amplification,[83] suggested by Seneca's re-use of *creuit*, might point to an operation of *auxesis* not only of the Euripidean model, but also of Ovid's lost play. The degree of his success in this necessarily remains terrain for speculation.[84]

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[81] "Ovid boasts that he has increased its grandeur" (McKeown (1998) 394). Likewise, Ovid himself is likely to have engaged in a literary contest with his Greek and Roman predecessors in shaping his own *Medea*. On this cf. lately Curley (2013) 29 and *passim* (but the whole of chapter 2 is well worth reading). Incidentally, Seneca's *Medea* was even confused with Ovid's play and attributed to the latter (cf. Heinze (1997) 234; Curley (2013) 2).

[82] According to Booth (1991) 184 "a deliberately imprecise expression, intended to cover both attempts at high-flown poetry described in vv. 5–18," namely epic and tragedy.

[83] On this cf. e.g. Russell (1970) 107–8. For a definition of amplification, one of the basic resources of classical drama, cf. also Genette (1997) 262–3.

[84] Whether the nature of this "agon" was serious or facetious is impossible to tell. Cf. also Cleasby (1907) 41ff.; Pratt (1983) 26 ("the superficiality of the relationship between Seneca and Euripides increases the importance of possible links with other Latin drama;" source-hunting is, however, destined to remain unachieved). Littlewood (2004) 259–301 deals with the notion of "deviant intertextuality" in analysing the way elegy enters the text of Seneca's *Phaedra*.

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