SENECA'S *HEROIDES*: ELEGY IN SENECA'S *MEDEA*[*]

Abstract: This paper analyzes the intertextual relationship between Seneca's Medea *and Ovid's* Heroides. *Seneca utilizes the* Heroides *not only to flesh out his characterization of Medea, but to examine the differences (and similarities) between the genres of elegy and tragedy. Seneca's Medea owes her elegiac background to Ovid, but her actions in the play reveal a self-conscious character striving to surpass previous representations.*

Over ten years ago, Tarrant wrote, "Analyzing Seneca's strong rereading of the Augustans is one of the most promising ways of further defining the themes and outlook of Senecan drama, but focusing on Seneca's generic *contaminatio* may also enhance understanding of his dramaturgy."[1] Seneca's tragedies resound with the language and imagery of previous Greek and Roman authors, and his works respond creatively to this poetic tradition to carve out a place for his own unique voice and view. Recent work on Senecan tragedy has explored aspects of Seneca's intertextual relationship with Ovid and Virgil, as well as suggested how intertextuality can enrich the interpretation of the plays.[2] Schiesaro, for example, shows how Seneca's Atreus models his behavior on Ovid's Tereus and Procne (*Met.* 6.412–674), and suggests that the immoral cycle of revenge in that tale permeates *Thyestes*: "the pointed and systematic connection between the *Metamorphoses* and *Thyestes* reinforces precisely this precarious and destabilizing morality."[3] In addition to thematic emphasis, intertextuality evokes larger questions of genre, as references to epic or elegy are woven into the fabric of Senecan tragedy. Littlewood finds that Hippolytus' hunting song, rife with

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[1] Tarrant (1995) 225.

[2] For verbal parallels, see e.g. Jakobi (1988); Putnam (1995); Schiesaro (2003); Littlewood (2004). Conte (1986), Wills (1996), Hinds (1998) and Edmunds (2001) have informed my use of the term "intertextuality."

[3] Schiesaro (2003) 82. Both Tereus and Procne are morally culpable: "To Tereus' responsibility Ovid opposes a monstrous revenge with intractable moral implications. If Tereus' tyrannical cruelty is neither lessened nor justified by the terrible punishment his wife prepares for him, neither does Procne personify a fully endorsable moral option."

allusions to elegiac poetry, undermines the chaste *persona* he struggles to embody throughout the play.[4] Intertextuality allows for the incorporation of diverse voices into Seneca's tragedies, and when he incorporates elegy and epic, the reader must decide how the genre of the source material alters the meaning of the line in its new tragic context.[5] Seneca thus reveals himself as an author concerned with generic *contaminatio*, and his tragedies become arenas in which the assumptions and conventions of different genres are contested.[6]

This paper focuses on the intertextual relationship between Seneca's *Medea* and Ovid's *Heroides*.[7] Seneca utilizes the *Heroides* extensively in the creation of his characters, most notably Medea and Phaedra.[8] *Heroides* 6 (Hypsipyle to Jason) and *Heroides* 12 (Medea to Jason) offer Seneca a view of Medea that differs drastically from her representation in Greek tragedy or Roman epic.[9] Ovid's heroines (Hypsipyle and Medea) subscribe to the generic rules of the elegiac *Heroides* and detail their love for Jason, although the different internal authors offer distinctive perspectives on their relationships with him.[10] Both heroines specify the misery love causes them, while placing a new "spin" on the traditional literary tales. Ovid imagines Medea moments after the wedding procession for Creusa and Jason has passed her door, while his Hypsipyle has heard rumors of Jason's new mistress, Medea. Ovid's portrayals of Medea respond to previous representations in Euripides and Apollonius, but add new

[4] Cf. Littlewood (2004) 263, discussing "deviant intertextuality."

[5] Cf. Barchiesi (2001) 142: "The relation that joins a text to a model involves the interpretation not of one text but two. Both these interpretations are ever on trial, in process, and continually influencing one another. The new text rereads its model, while the model in turn influences the reading of the new text—indeed when recognized, it often has the power to do so."

[6] Cf. Conte (1994) 36: "A means of signification incorporated into the text to give form and meaning to the discourse and instructions to its reader, the genre is in fact the horizon marking the boundaries of its meaning and delimiting its real possibilities within the system of literary codification."

[7] Leo (1878) and Cleasby (1907) first pointed out many of these parallels.

[8] I will not examine the character of Phaedra, although Seneca certainly had *Her.* 4 in mind in his *Phaedra*. See DeVito (1994) and Casali (1995) for readings of *Her.* 4 that are influenced by Seneca's *Phaedra*, and the edition of Coffey and Meyer (1990), which points out the multiple parallels.

[9] Ovid also writes of Medea at *Met.* 7.1–424. I am convinced that Ovid's lost tragedy, *Medea*, also influenced Seneca's version, but, due to the fragmentary nature of that play, I have chosen to focus on the *Heroides*. Although Knox (1986) doubts the authenticity of *Her.* 12, I feel that Hinds (1993) successfully counters many of Knox's arguments and believe that *Her.* 12 is the work of Ovid. See Heinze (1997) 237–52 for text, testimonia and commentary on Ovid's *Medea*.

[10] For *Her.* 12, see Bessone (1997); Heinze (1997). For *Her.* 6, see Knox (1995). For discussion of the relationship between *Her.* 12 and *Her.* 6, see Verducci (1985); Lindheim (2003). Recent work on the *Heroides* has stressed the individual voices of the internal authors within the larger group of heroines; see Fulkerson (2005).

perspectives commensurate with their position in the epistolary and elegiac genre.[11] The *Heroides* show elegy's ability to reshape epic and tragic material, and Seneca offers a corresponding transformation as he reclaims Medea for his tragedy.[12] As Hinds comments on Medea's characterization in the *Heroides*, "Medea, the tragic heroine *par excellence*, enters a collection of elegiac epistles, but she does not come quietly: her tragic identity is not suppressed, but rather is set in productive tension with her new epistolary environment."[13] Ovid's *Heroides* provide ways of viewing the literary tradition, focalized through the letters of the heroines. Seneca's response advances the story to a concrete future and shows the results of the elegiac Medea's return to the tragic stage. As Ovid's characters define themselves within the genre and *vis-à-vis* previous literary material, so Seneca writes his *Medea* in response to these new figurations of Medea. His tragedy relies on Ovid's Medeas to provide a ready-made "elegiac" role for his own Medea.[14]

Seneca's decision to utilize the *Heroides* in the construction of his Medea is an inspired one. In the *Heroides*, Medea's elegiac characteristics are emphasized along with her control of the literary tradition; she is, after all, crafting the letter of *Heroides* 12. A reading of Seneca's *Medea* that takes into account the intertextual echoes of the *Heroides* helps clarify how and why Seneca's Medea is as self-conscious as she appears to be.[15] I will trace examples of the intertextual relationship between Ovid and Seneca to show how the elegiac characteristics of Seneca's Medea derive from the elegiac works of Ovid, and how these characteristics renegotiate aspects of *persona* and genre. The Ovidian intertext serves as the background for the love Seneca's Medea once felt for Jason. When Seneca alludes to this material,

[11] For more on the epistolarity of the *Heroides*, see Kennedy (2002). Farrell (1998) stresses the female authorship of the *Heroides* and their rhetorical strategies.

[12] See Barchiesi (1993) 346: "Ovid's heroines ... are conditioned by an intertextuality which is not simply mythological, but is specifically literary." Fulkerson (2005) 14: "Because these heroines exist prior to the *Heroides* in various textual incarnations, it is impossible to avoid comparing the characters in the poems to their predecessors, even when those predecessors exist only in fragments."

[13] Hinds (1993) 39.

[14] I do not believe that every allusion carries such generic resonance, but I hope to show that certain allusions should be read in this manner and that Seneca was aware of the generic tension between different forms of poetry and his tragedies. Harrison (2002) discusses "generic ascent" in Ovid's works.

[15] In *Her.* 12, Medea refers to herself in the third person in her self-conscious appeal to Jason (5, 25, 182). This self-address sets a precedent for Seneca's Medea and leads, in part, to her sense of herself as an archetype, into which she grows as the play progresses. For more on the use of Medea's name in the play, see Segal (1982). Her self-conscious nature has been a topic of discussion since Wilamowitz's (1919) 3:162 famous comment that Seneca's Medea must have read Euripides' play.

he forges significant continuities between his vision of Medea and Ovid's. Seneca's Medea, however, fulfills the threats of Ovid's heroine, and, in doing so, points out how quickly and completely love can turn to hate and thus how her story can be transformed from an elegy to a tragedy.

Seneca's Literary Imitatio

Seneca's use of Ovidian material has not gone unnoticed, and Seneca himself claims that appropriation of such material provides authors with additional avenues to approach a subject. In *Ep.* 79, Seneca encourages Lucilius to write a poetic account of Aetna, despite the fact that Virgil, Ovid and Cornelius Severus have already written about the mountain. Seneca claims that previous poets have not had the last word on the topic, and that it can even benefit a writer to be the latest in a long line of authors (79.6):

Multum interest utrum ad consumptam materiam an ad subactam accedes: crescit in dies, et inventuris inventa non obstant. Praeterea condicio optima est ultimi: parata verba invenit, quae aliter instructa novam faciem habent. Nec illis manus inicit tamquam alienis; sunt enim publica.

It makes a great deal of difference whether you take up a subject already exhausted, or one where there is still work to be done; in the latter case, the topic grows day by day, and what is already discovered does not stand in the way of new discoveries. Besides, he who writes last is in the best position; he finds already at hand words which, when arrayed in a different way, show a new face. Nor is he stealing them, as though they belonged to someone else, when he uses them, for they are public property.

The idea that "words ... when arrayed in a different way, show a new face" defines Seneca's intertextual project in his tragedies. Seneca creates characters who explore their intertextual lives through allusion to authors such as Ovid, and this intertextual relationship allows him both to flesh out his characters' feelings and motivations, and to investigate literary issues such as generic difference. Likewise, in *Epistle* 84, Seneca develops the metaphor of the good writer as a bee who sifts and blends varied flavors into "one delicious compound" (*unum saporem*).[16] Through a process of distillation, the honey reveals its origins, while simultaneously becoming "different than that from which it came" (*aliud tamen esse quam unde sumptum est*). This metaphor mirrors Seneca's literary production as he combines themes, imagery and language from the existing poetic tradition and

[16] *Ep.* 84.5, encompassing the following quotation, as well. For an attempt to summarize Seneca's literary criticism, see Merchant (1905).

creates something new from its diverse parts. Clearly Seneca felt that the tragic tales of characters such as Medea, Atreus and Phaedra were not exhausted and that his accounts, in part because of their intertextual play with previous material, could offer a fresh view of the story.

A Heavier Medea

In the first act of Seneca's play, Medea emerges angrily from the house, planning revenge, even if she is unsure what it will entail. She appears to be taking up where Ovid's Medea left off in the *Heroides*: at the conclusion of *Heroides* 12, Medea claims *nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit* ("my mind surely plans something greater," 12.214) foreshadowing the tragedy that will result from her feelings of desertion and anger.[17] Here Seneca also recalls *Amores* 3.1, in which a personified Elegy and Tragedy fight over Ovid's services as poet, and Tragedy urges Ovid: *incipe maius opus* ("begin a greater work," 3.1.24). Seneca evokes this language of generic ascent in his tragedy.[18] His Medea strives throughout the play to perform "greater" crimes and claims that her youthful love of Jason has curdled into black hate. At the start of the play, she states (48–50):

> *levia* memoravi nimis;
> haec virgo feci. *gravior* exsurgat dolor:
> *maiora* iam me scelera post *partus* decent.[19]
>
> I have remembered evils too light;
> I did these things as a girl. A heavier pain grows:
> now, having given birth, greater crimes suit me.

From a thematic standpoint, these lines highlight the maternal imagery of the first act, and reveal a Medea concerned with her reputation and her ability to outdo her previous actions. From a literary perspective, the words signify that Seneca is bringing forth a plot "greater" (*maiora*) than the "light" (*levia*) deeds of elegy. A quick glance back at *Amores* 3.1 reveals that Elegia calls herself "light" (41–2):

[17] Both Barchiesi (1993) and Hinds (1993) cite this line as an indication of the tragedy that will follow, but neither critic points out how Seneca responds to this claim in his *Medea*. For similar programmatic formulations, see Prop. 2.34.65–6: *nescio quid maius nascitur Iliade*. In Seneca's works, see *Thy.* 267: *nescioquid animus maius … tumet*; and *Oed.* 925: *secum ipse saevus grande nescioquid parat*. Schiesaro (2003) 81 n. 25 comments on these parallels.

[18] "Generic ascent" signifies the way poets such as Ovid represent their transitions from "lower" genres like elegy or pastoral to "higher" ones like tragedy or epic; see Harrison (2002).

[19] I use Zwierlein's (1986) Oxford Classical Text throughout.

sum *levis*, et mecum *levis* est, mea cura, Cupido;
non sum materia fortior ipsa mea.

I am light, and my care, Cupid, is light with me;
I myself am not stronger than my material.[20]

Seneca's Medea defines herself as someone who has transcended her elegiac representation, and the "heaviness" of her grief (*gravior dolor*) hints at the tragedy to follow.[21]

Furthering this representation of her as a woman who has outgrown elegy, Seneca's Medea claims that she will not bluster in vain (23–8):

me coniugem optet, quoque non aliud queam
peius precari, liberos similes patri
similesque matri. *parta* iam, *parta* ultio *est*:
peperi. querelas verbaque in cassum sero?
non ibo in hostes? manibus excutiam faces
caeloque lucem...

May he long for me as his wife, and—I can think of no
worse curse—for children who resemble their father
and their mother. My revenge is born, it is now born:
I have given birth. Do I compose complaints and words in vain?
Shall I not attack my enemies? I will shake the wedding torches
from their hands
and the light from the sky!

Here we are reminded of the *querelae* that appear to be programmatic shorthand for elegy from Propertius 1.18 (*et quodcumque meae possunt narrare querelae*, "and whatever my complaints are able to tell," 29) to the *Heroides*.[22] Seneca is shaping his Medea into a figure who moves beyond the genre of elegy and no longer carries a romantic torch for Jason. In addition, in these lines Seneca comments on the close of *Heroides* 12, where Ovid's Medea threatens, *ingentis parturit ira minas*

[20] On the traditional "lightness" of love poetry, cf. Ov. *Rem.* 379–80; *Am.* 1.1.19; Hor. *Carm.* 1.6.20. See James (2003) 112–13 for the elegiac beloved's *levitas*.

[21] Cf. Ovid's claim in the *Tristia*: *omne genus scripti gravitate tragoedia vincit / haec quoque materiam semper amoris habet* ("Tragedy defeats every genre in the weight of its writing / but even this always has the subject-matter of love," 2.381). For Tragedy's *gravitas*, see Kelly (1993) 8–10.

[22] Cf. *Her.* 1.69–70: *scirem ubi pugnares, et tantum bella timerem / et mea cum multis iuncta querela foret* ("I would know where you were fighting, and I would only fear war / and my complaint would be joined with many others"); *Her.* 3.5–6: *si mihi pauca queri de te dominoque viroque / fas est, de domino pauca viroque querar* ("If it is permitted for me to complain briefly about you, my master and lover, / I shall complain briefly about you, my master and lover"). For *querela* and *lacrimae* in the *Heroides*, see Baca (1971). For the connection between elegy and lament, see Knox (1995) *ad ES* = *Her.* 15.

("my anger is toiling with mighty threats," 208). Seneca's Medea utilizes the imagery of pregnancy both to foreshadow the role of her children in her revenge against Jason, and to point out the generic differences between tragedy and elegy.[23] If tragedy is a "heavier" (*gravior*) genre than elegy, greater crimes are necessary for her as a mother (*maiora iam me scelera post partus decent*, 50).[24] Words such as *pario* (25, 26, 50, 55) and *gravior* (49) emphasize the connection Medea draws between motherhood and revenge. Seneca highlights this correspondence further when his Medea states, *quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus* ("the home was procured by crime, it must be left by crime," 55). His Medea underscores the subject of the tragedy at hand, as well as the difference between the threats of Ovid's Medea and the actual power she possesses in his own play.[25]

A New Type of Wedding

Seneca's tragedy continues to develop material from *Heroides* 12 in the first choral song. *Heroides* 12.137–40 features a heart-rending description of Medea as she learns of Jason's new marriage when the wedding parade passes by her door:

> ut subito *nostras Hymen* cantatus ad *aures*
> venit, et accenso lampades igne micant,
> tibiaque effundit socialia carmina vobis,
> at mihi funerea flebiliora tuba...
>
> When suddenly the wedding hymn comes to
> my ears, and the torches sparkle with kindled flame,
> and the pipe pours out songs joyful to you,
> but to me more full of tears than a funeral horn.

Seneca focuses on this situation and makes it the subject of his first chorus, a polymetric song that responds to both Medea's opening speech and the situation in Ovid's poem.[26] Seneca "completes" Ovid's

[23] Cf. Schiesaro (2003) 89 on birthing imagery in Seneca's *Oedipus*: "Poetry comes to light through a painful birthing process which gives shape to the passions residing in the underworld, and is thus associated with the fear-inspiring secrets of the female body."

[24] See *OLD gravis* 2b for the word's association with pregnancy. Cf. *Her.* 12.188, where Medea worries, *saeviet in partus dira noverca meos* ("a savage stepmother will rage against my children").

[25] Medea's power is expressed in universal terms in her incantation (670–844), and the results of her revenge will stretch throughout the world (as seen in the Argonautic odes). For a reading of the play that stresses the danger of bringing Medea to the civilized world, see Benton (2003).

[26] Hinds (1998) 104–22 discusses a similar phenomena in Ov. *Met.* 12.623–14.582, where the poet reimagines Virgil's *Aeneid* by foregrounding "Virgilian stories of

work and gives a poetic account of the hymn mentioned there (*Her.* 12.135–58). This is a fine example of an intertextual moment that is not (merely) a verbal allusion, in that Seneca adds dramatic touches to the scene to indicate his supplementation of Ovid's material.[27] Signaling a metaliterary response to Ovid, Seneca's Medea reappears on stage and comments on the chorus she has just heard (116–17):

> occidimus: *aures* pepulit *hymen*aeus *meas*.
> vix ipsa tantum, vix adhuc credo malum.
>
> I am done for: the wedding song has struck my ears.
> Scarcely, scarcely can I believe so great an evil has occurred.

These lines hearken back to the *Heroides* passage and force the reader to acknowledge Seneca's appropriation of the Ovidian subject matter. Seneca's choral ode highlights the differences in perspective between the Chorus and Medea, and reveals that one aspect of the play's conflict is a dispute over language.[28] While the Chorus praises the power of marriage, Medea attempts to free herself from her previous roles as wife and mother and will soon configure her revenge as a new type of wedding (*nuptias specto novas*, 894), thereby identifying the connection between her past love for Jason and the revenge she will enact.

Becoming and Being Medea

Near the close of the play, Medea describes how far she has come in her conception of crime and of self. At this point, she has realized that Jason will not leave his new bride, and has displayed her magical powers through an incantation (indebted heavily to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) that consumes much of the fourth act. She claims that

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metamorphosis" (p. 105). Seneca's move here is slightly different, as he stages a song in lyric meters (Minor Asclepiadean and Glyconics) that cannot be accommodated to the elegiac distich. Cat. 61 is also in Glyconic strophes.

[27] The Chorus desires that Bacchus' son, Hymen, be present and that a Fescennine verse be sung. While both are typical for weddings, Fescennine verses are thought to be the predecessor of Roman drama; cf. Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.145–6; Livy 7.2.6–7. For a similar development of Greek drama, cf. Arist. *Po.* 1449^{a}9–31.

[28] See Fyfe (1983) 79: "[The Chorus'] fear of Medea seems characterized by a desire that she remain silent, as if whatever threat there might be in her presence would be realized if she were allowed to talk." On the contest between Medea and the Chorus, see Hine (1989) *passim*. Star (2006) 232–40 points out that Medea's self-address leads to her actions, so the Chorus is right to fear her language. Seneca's Medea exercises her control of the play through her language as shown in her interactions with Creon (179–300) and Jason (435–578), as well as her incantation (740–844), and her language teems with threatening irony and grim foreboding throughout.

the crimes she performed earlier in life were mere trifles and that she has become "Medea" (910–14):

> *Medea nunc sum*: crevit ingenium malis.
> iuvat, iuvat rapuisse fraternum caput,
> artus iuvat secuisse et arcano patrem
> spoliasse sacro, iuvat in exitium senis
> armasse natas.
>
> Now I am Medea, my genius has grown by crimes.
> I am glad, glad that I tore away my brother's head,
> glad that I diced his limbs and plundered
> the sacred treasure from my father, glad that I armed
> daughters to kill their elderly father.

What does Medea mean when she says that she is now Medea?[29] In part, this passage picks up an earlier allusion to *Heroides* 6, where Hypsipyle writes to Jason about the pain and anger she feels because he deserted her for another woman, i.e. Medea herself. In that letter, Hypsipyle wishes that she could punish Medea for stealing her man (149–51):

> paelicis ipsa meos implessem sanguine vultus,
> quosque veneficiis abstulit illa tuos.
> Medeae *Medea forem*.
>
> I would have filled my eyes with the sight of your mistress' blood,
> and your eyes too, which she stole away by magic.
> I would have been a veritable Medea to Medea.[30]

Hypsipyle's bloodthirsty wish to murder Medea is recalled in Seneca's play when Medea debates with the Nurse what action she should take against Jason (168–71):

> (Nu.) Rex est timendus. (Me.) Rex meus fuerat pater.
> (Nu.) Non metuis arma? (Me.) Sint licet terra edita.

[29] Bartsch (2006) 261 points out the Stoic overtones of much of Medea's language, but also recognizes the literary nature of her conception of self: "The result of the drama's attention to the question of recognition is that *personal* self-recognition and *literary* recognition necessarily coalesce here." For Medea's literary self-consciousness, see Littlewood (2004) 103–5; for the metatheatrical features of this self-consciousness, see Boyle (1997) 130–3. For the *Epistulae Morales* as an illustration of Seneca's notion of self, see Edwards (1997).

[30] On Hypsipyle's desire to become Medea, see Lindheim (2003) 114–35. Hypsipyle wants to become the "Medea" she has learned about, a sorceress who has the power to charm Jason, while hinting at the cruelty that Medea embodies; cf. Knox (1995) ad loc.; Tarrant (1995) 222–3.

(Nu.) Moriere. (Me.) Cupio. (Nu.) Profuge. (Me.) Paenituit fugae.
(Nu.) *Medea*— (Me.) *Fiam.*

(Nurse) The king must be feared. (Medea) My father was a king.
(Nurse) You do not fear arms? (Medea) Not even if sprung from the earth.
(Nurse) You will die. (Medea) I desire it. (Nurse) Flee! (Medea) I regret my flight.
(Nurse) Medea— (Medea) is who I shall become.

The move from the subjunctive (*forem*) to the future indicative (*fiam*), and the similarity in language mark the thematic parallelism between these passages. While Hypsipyle will be unable to fulfill her desired revenge (note the subjunctive in a contrary-to-fact condition), Medea can and will requite Jason for his desertion. In the course of the play she will become "Medea," as she herself recognizes (*Medea nunc sum*, 910). Seneca's play emphasizes Medea's struggle between her love for Jason and her anger at being deserted. These passages show the transition from a possible revenge in the future (*fiam*) to the present revenge being enacted (*sum*). Seneca alludes to Ovid's *Heroides* in order to point to the characterization of Medea in Ovid's elegiac poetry, while exploring the tragic ramifications of such a characterization. While Ovid introduced the tragic Medea to the elegiac world of the *Heroides*, Seneca re-introduces her to her "proper" genre, tragedy, and marks that transferal through metaliterary language.[31]

A similar moment of generic ascent occurs in the fifth act, when Medea again appropriates language found in *Heroides* 12. One of the final comments by Ovid's Medea concerns her anger: *quo feret ira, sequar. facti fortasse pigebit...* ("where anger leads, I will follow. But perhaps my action will displease me...," 209). Within the generic constraints of elegy, Medea can only hint at violence, but at the close of Seneca's tragedy she recasts the language of the *Heroides* in the present indicative: *ira, qua ducis, sequor* ("anger, where you lead, I follow," 953). Seneca's Medea has just burned down the royal palace, and killed the king and Creusa, and now roams the stage with her sons and a sword in hand. In Seneca's tragedy, she certainly *follows* and acts out her anger.[32]

[31] Schiesaro (2003) 213 discusses how Atreus' and Medea's self-recognition "is predicated on the immutability of fundamental characteristics which define them as what they are." I believe that these fundamental characteristics are found in earlier literary accounts.

[32] Cf. Ovid's comments on the appropriateness of *ira* in tragedy at *Rem.* 376 *grande sonant tragici: tragicos decet ira cothurnos* ("Tragic poets bellow powerfully: anger befits the tragic boots").

The relationship between the texts is marked by shared language, and the change in tense captures the present situation of Seneca's tragedy, which revolves around Medea's love and anger. Is Seneca equating the emotions or showing the similarities between them? Throughout the play, his Medea posits love as the cause for her previous crimes (135–6):

> nullum scelus
> irata feci: saevit infelix amor.
>
> I have committed no crime
> out of anger: unlucky love raged.[33]

The Chorus likewise understands that the connection between love and anger defines Medea. Their comment before the beginning of the fifth act encapsulates her conflict (862–5):

> frenare nescit iras
> Medea, non amores;
> nunc ira amorque causam
> iunxere: quid *sequetur*?
>
> Medea is incapable of reining
> in her anger or her love.
> Now love and anger have joined
> forces. What will follow?

Love and anger combine in the final act of the play, as Medea gives in to her anger (*ira ... sequor*), answering the Chorus' question (*quid sequetur*?). Seneca points to the love Medea once showed to Jason (and her children) by alluding to the elegiac genre of the *Heroides* and to the representation of Medea there. He shows the struggle Medea undergoes between these emotions in the course of the play, and only in the final act does she give in to her anger.[34]

This descent into anger and hatred defines the tragic Medea. Whereas Ovid's Medea worries that she may rue her future actions, *facti fortasse pigebit* ("But perhaps my action will displease me," 12.209), Seneca's Medea takes pleasure in her crimes. She comments on her new-found joy (990–2):

> quid, misera, *feci*? misera? *paeniteat* licet,
> *feci*. voluptas magna me invitam subiit
> et ecce crescit.

[33] Cf. 397–8, where Medea draws a parallel between her love and hate (*si quaeris odio, misera, quem statuas modum, / imitare amorem*).

[34] Gill (1987) analyzes Medea's self-division in Seneca's and Euripides' plays. If my reading is correct, such a self-division can have metaliterary consequences (i.e. in the opposition between elegy and tragedy).

> Miserable woman, what have I done? Miserable? Although I may regret it,
> I have acted. Great pleasure arises in me, against my will,
> and, lo! [she sees Jason] it increases.

The forms of *facio* and the impersonal verbs of displeasure and regret (*pigebit—paeniteat*) used in both descriptions suggest the connection between the passages, and the transformation that has occurred. Seneca's Medea has become greater than the elegiac Medea of Ovid's *Heroides*, but these allusions also point back to the motivation for her actions. Her anger springs from her past love for Jason. Medea states that she is "following" her anger, which recalls previous pointed uses of the verb *sequor* in the play. The Chorus wondered what would follow the union of Medea's love and anger (*quid sequetur?*, 869), and Medea earlier postulated that she would leave her husband in the same way that she followed him (*quo virum linquis modo? / hoc quo secuta es*, 53–4). Seneca utilizes this verb to signpost Medea's transformation into an agent of vengeance, and the final allusion to Ovid's *Heroides* 12 specifies that she is developing the *persona* created there. Although there is continuity in Medea's thought, Seneca shows the process behind her transformation and the alternative *personae* she could have chosen to embody. In the end, however, he reveals how the destruction of Medea's previous love for Jason impelled her acts of revenge.[35]

Medea as Author

Seneca is a self-conscious writer whose tragedies revel in self-conscious characters. His Medea recognizes that she must act like "herself" in pursuing her revenge against Jason. She constructs the plot accordingly, and Seneca stresses that his Medea outstrips previous representations, in particular noting the transformation of the Medea of the *Heroides* into a "new" tragic figure. Seneca's intertextual relationship with Ovid allows him to carefully delineate and interrogate Medea's actions and motivation, while simultaneously providing a metaliterary comment on the poetry of his tragedy. The language he employs to describe Medea's possible revenge can also be interpreted as a critique of his own version of the story. At the close of the play, Medea herself becomes a representative of the author, as she remarks upon her new manifestation. She addresses her grief (914–15):

[35] Note Medea's language after she learns of Creusa's and Creon's fiery demise (*quid, anime, cessas? sequere felicem impetum*, 895).

quaere *materiam*, dolor:
ad omne facinus non *rudem dextram* afferes.[36]

Seek new material, grief!
You will bring a practiced right hand to every crime.

The use of *materiam* points to both the means of revenge and the way this telling of the Medea story will be rendered.[37] Medea acts like a skilled (*non rudem dextram*) poet who creates her work in a sophisticated manner.[38] She claimed earlier that a girl's hands could not cause sufficient damage (908–9):

quid *manus* poterant *rudes*
audere magnum, quid puellaris furor?

What great deed were unpracticed hands
able to dare? What could a girl's fury accomplish?

Now, at the conclusion of the play, her hands will compose a suitable revenge against Jason, one that takes into consideration her growth from a younger figure of a weaker genre to the tragic Medea.[39] Seneca's language emphasizes Medea's role in creating the action, and she comes to resemble an artist who expresses herself through her work. When Jason enters the scene, he urges his men (988–9):

ipsam sceleris *auctorem* horridi
capiamus.

Let us capture the very author of this
fearful crime.[40]

[36] In this scene, Medea addresses her *dolor* (914, 944), *ira* (916, 953) and *furor* (930). These emotions attest to her pain and anger at Jason's actions. See *Her.* 12.115 for Ovid's emphasis on Medea's right hand as a synonym for both authorship and crime: *quod facere ausa mea est, non audet scribere dextra* ("What my right hand dared to do, it does not dare to write"). Bessone (1997) 5 and *passim* stresses the ways in which Ovid's Medea, as author, rewrites herself as an elegiac figure in *Her.* 12.

[37] Cf. *OLD materia* 6, 7. *Materia* can be used to describe the subject-matter of a speech or poetry; cf. Ov. *Am.* 3.1.42 (*supra*); *Tr.* 2.382 (*supra*); Sen. *Ep.* 79.6 (*supra*); Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.3; Tac. *Dial.* 35.4. For *materia* in Seneca's *Phaedra* and its resonances with *Her.* 4, cf. Littlewood (2004) 277–8.

[38] Cf. *Troades* 67 for *non rude* used in a similar manner.

[39] Ovid's Medea also defines herself as "a simple girl" (*puellae / simplicis*, *Her.* 12.90–1) when she first met Jason. Cf. Casali (1995) 2 for *puella* as "an index of the elegiac code."

[40] Cf. 734, where Medea is "an artist of crimes" (*scelerum artifex*). *Auctor* appears at *Thy.* 639; *Oed.* 394; and Ov. *Her.* 7.105 with similar metaliterary potential, although the word is not, of course, always imbued with this potential.

His words ring true for the reader who recognizes Medea's control of events on stage after she has become the author of the revenge plot against Jason.

The intertextual relationship between Seneca's *Medea* and Ovid's *Heroides* reveals Seneca's interest in exploring the affinities and differences between the elegiac and tragic genres. He both follows Ovid's epistolary narrative and elaborates episodes that Ovid only sketches briefly. These points of connection also act as metaliterary comments on generic distinctions, as Seneca asserts that his Medea will transcend Ovid's and, in effect, realize a hypothetical projection of her Ovidian self.[41] Seneca marks many of these points of continuation and elaboration with a shift in tense and mood from the subjunctive to the future or the present indicative (*forem—fiam—sum*), or from the future to the present indicative (*sequar—sequor*). Medea develops in the course of Seneca's play, becoming a more threatening and palpable presence who delights in causing pain and destruction. She is not a monolithic figure who hates uniformly, and the allusions to the *Heroides* help delineate her character and her rationale. At times, the more "elegiac" Medea surfaces in Seneca's text, both when she oscillates between her love for Jason and her anger at being spurned, and, more subtly, through allusions to the *Heroides*. Strong linguistic parallels between the texts provide background material for Seneca's figure as she takes on the frustrated anger of Ovid's Medea. When Seneca's Medea claims, "Anger, where you lead, I follow," the reader remembers the final words of Ovid's poem, and recognizes that Medea has chosen to follow one of two alternatives. As the Chorus asked, "Now anger and love have joined causes, what will follow?". The answer is Seneca's play, and the reader can see how the author investigates the differences and similarities between these emotions and the genres of elegy and tragedy in his *Medea*. The background to Medea's love is built on intertextual links with Ovid's *Heroides*, but the concrete results of spurned love have been staged in the course of Seneca's drama.

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[41] See Hardie (1993) 36 "There is even the possibility of characters attempting to live up to their own roles—in earlier literary treatments of their own stories—in a displacement on to his characters of the poet's attempt to rival *his* predecessor." Fitch and McElduff (2002) discuss similar self-recognition in Seneca's tragedies.

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