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RECOGNITION AND THE CHARACTER OF SENECA'S MEDEA

Erica Bexley, Swansea University

Abstract: This article examines the character and identity of Seneca's Medea. Focusing on the recognition scene at the end of the play, I investigate how Medea constructs herself as both a literary figure and as an implied human personality. The concluding scene of Seneca's *Medea* raises crucial questions about self-coherence and recognizability: in contrast to other moments of ἀναγνώρισις in Greco-Roman drama, it confirms the pre-existing facets of Medea's identity, rather than revealing new ones. This concept of recognition as self-confirmation is also integral to Seneca's Stoic view of human selfhood, and Medea's use of Stoic principles in this play reinforces her dual status as textual entity and quasi-person.

Character and identity are acute issues in Senecan drama. As scholars have often remarked, Seneca's *dramatis personae* behave in a profoundly self-conscious manner, invoking their own names, evaluating their own roles, and seeming to know in advance the stories and deeds they are about to perform.[1] This self-reflexive conduct is typically interpreted as an instance of meta-poetry, or more specifically, meta-theatre, a device by which Seneca's characters draw attention to previous versions of their theatrical roles.[2] This popular and enduring theory centres, above all, on Seneca's Medea, of whom Wilamowitz-Moellendorf quipped, nearly a century ago, that she had read Euripides.[3] Thus, Seneca's characters are said to be self-aware primarily because they are latecomers in a long tradition of dramatic literature.

This paper takes a different approach. It evaluates the self-conscious behaviour of Seneca's Medea with reference not only to meta-theatre and literary precedent, but

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[1] Fitch and McElduff (2002) provide a comprehensive overview.
[2] Meta-poetic and meta-theatrical interpretations of Senecan tragedy include: Boyle (1997), 112-37; Schiesaro (2003) 70-85; Littlewood (2004) 172-258; Erasmo (2004) 122-39; Kirichenko (2013) 17-165; Trinacty (2014).
[3] Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1919 III) 62: "diese Medea hat Euripides gelesen".

also to Stoic ideals of personal constancy.[4] Focusing on the recognition scene that

occurs at the end of this play, I examine how Seneca's Medea constructs herself both

as a literary entity and as an implied human personality. I propose that her self-

awareness, besides alluding to past versions of her role, indicates a standard of human

behaviour described by Stoic ethics. Further, these two aspects of Medea's identity –

the meta-theatrical and the quasi-Stoic – do not compete but rather coalesce, since

both treat the business of self-construction in fundamentally similar ways. For

Seneca's Medea, literary character and human identity tend to overlap.

RECOGNITION

As a means of evaluating Medea's character, this paper also explores the close

relationship that Seneca envisages between performance, identity, and recognition. I

have chosen to concentrate on recognition scenes because these moments provide

crucial insight into how Seneca's characters construct their own and others' sense of

self. Recognition in dramatic texts is an event that draws attention to issues of

characterization, motivation, psychology, and typology; it is a moment when

questions of identity are brought to the fore.

Moreover, this connection between ἀναγνώρισις and character is part of

recognition's status as "a peculiarly dramatic device".[5] Recognition belongs to drama

more than to any other literary genre, the reason being that it implicates a character's

identity in precisely the same way that theatrical performance implicates an actor's.

When performers assume a role, they not only destabilize their own identity – at least

in the eyes of others – but they also raise the far more troubling possibility that all

human selfhood is precariously fluid. This possibility arises from the actor's skill in

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[4] The possibility of combining meta-theatre and Stoicism, with reference to Medea's recognition scene, is raised by Bartsch (2006) 255-62.
[5] Goldman (2000) 8.

editing, rehearsing, and developing behaviour so that it appears seamless and convincing.[6] Such self-fashioning belies to some extent the idea of naturally unified identity, and when skilled theatrical performers portray an image of unified selfhood, they paradoxically reveal that selfhood to be a construct and its image to be an illusion. The issue, therefore, is not merely that actors engage in contrived conduct, but that their professional activity blends the categories of 'natural' and 'contrived', and prevents any simple distinction between 'reality' and 'fiction', 'person' and 'character'.

It follows that the anxiety attendant upon ἀναγνώρισις in ancient drama reflects the ontological anxiety surrounding actors themselves. Recognition in dramatic performance typically attempts to dispel the threat of problematic selfhood by generating a sense of resolution and declaring the newly revealed or more fully apprehended identity to be true and correct. Ion is restored to himself when Creusa recognises his birth tokens; Oedipus is likewise restored to himself, albeit unhappily, when he uncovers the truth about Laius' killer; Sophocles' Orestes reveals himself to Electra at the conclusion of an elaborate performance in which he has earlier gone so far as to announce his own death.[7] In every case, the formerly deceptive or mistaken identity is pronounced a momentary aberration rejected in favour of a more fundamental, and presumably natural, kind of selfhood. Against the actor's protean qualities, recognition scenes champion the claims of birth, family ties, and inherent characteristics. Even when they occur in the middle of a play's action, such scenes

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[6] The notion of seamless performance or 'flow', on stage and in life, is explored by Goldman (2000) 63-73 and Turner (1982) 55-6.

[7] This final example, the recognition scene in Sophocles' *Electra*, achieves resolution not just by stabilizing identity and re-establishing a family relationship, but also by likening Orestes to a tragic messenger (*El.* 1098-1114), thus evoking the penultimate scene of a tragedy, and by association, the concluding function of ἀναγνώρισις. On Orestes as a messenger, see Ringer (1998) 185-6.

constitute moments of resolution and stability,[8] so much so that they feature increasingly as a denouement in ancient drama; it is no coincidence that all of Seneca's recognition scenes take place at the ends of his plays.

Thus, the traditional recognition scene in Greek and Roman drama is a moment that pivots upon revelation, as characters either uncover a previously misapprehended identity, or realize more fully the capacities of an individual they have hitherto underestimated. As Aristotle defines it, the central principle of recognition scenes is change (μεταβολή, *Poetics* 1542a), whether that change applies to largely external circumstances, like social status and family relationship, or internal ones, such as a character's *ethos* and sense of self. The act of ἀναγνώρισις is, typically, a turning point that resolves uncertainties, reveals secrets, and clarifies misunderstandings.[9] Seneca, however, handles the recognition scene of his *Medea* in a unique way, treating it as a moment in which identity, far from being altered or rediscovered, is instead amplified and thereby validated. Genuine and constructed selfhood are not incompatible in Seneca's view, with the result that his characters engage in performance as a means of self-realization. They approach recognition as the final stage in a steady and inherently theatrical process of moral and psychological development, which they pursue over the course of an entire play. In the words of Brian Hook: "Senecan self-presentation does not operate as self-revelation as much as self-confirmation."[10]

Consequent to its focus on identity, ἀναγνώρισις may be said to delineate character in two main ways: as an implied human personality and as a textual

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[8] Thus Cave (2008) 122: "The typical recognition plot deals in closure".

[9] Such clarification may, however, be only temporary. Duckworth (1952) 151-60 discusses examples from *palliata* in which recognition complicates later action. On recognition and disclosure, see Kennedy and Lawrence (2008) 2.

[10] Hook (2000) 58.

construct.[11] The duality is confirmed by the act of recognition itself, which draws

attention on the one hand to a character's selfhood, and to the confluence of actor and

character (as we have seen), and on the other hand, emphasizes a character's status as

a fabricated dramatic entity. While the mimetic or representational aspect of

recognition deals with a character's *ethos* – and behind it, a performer's *ethos* – the

semiotics of recognition treat that *ethos* as an assemblage of textual information. In

semiotic terms, the act of recognizing means interpreting correctly the signs that

indicate a given character's identity: the marks on Oedipus' body; the tokens kept in

Ion's box. Terence Cave notes that scenes of recognition become "a focus for

reflection on the way fictions as such are constituted."[12] They can resemble processes

of reading and writing, as characters and audience alike are called upon to analyze the

symbols displayed before them and to organize those symbols into some kind of

coherent whole. Such 'textual recognition' (as I shall call it) often occurs at the

expense of 'ethical recognition' and vice versa, since highlighting one requires us to

dismiss or minimize the other. We may read a character either as a quasi-human or as

a literary entity; the two rarely coincide. But Seneca's recognition scenes *are* one

example of this rare coincidence: the figures involved in them construct their

identities in terms that are simultaneously meta-poetic and moral, literary and

personal.

MEDEA'S META-THEATRE

The final exchange between Jason and Medea begins with Medea standing on the roof

of her house, accompanied by one child and carrying the body of the other in her

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[11] My categories derive from Phelan (1989) 2-14, who defines these two major elements of literary character as 'mimetic' (implied human personality) and 'synthetic' (textual construct). Woloch (2003) 15-17 presents a similarly balanced view of literary character, declaring it a divided entity "always emerging at the juncture of structure and reference."

[12] Cave (1988) 46. Likewise, Kennedy and Lawrence (2008) 2: "recognition becomes key to the way we make meaning and the way we read."

arms. In defiance of Jason's pleas, she kills the second son, climbs into an airborne

chariot and throws the children's bodies down to their father, declaring: "do you

recognize your wife? / This is how I usually escape" (*coniugem agnoscis tuam? / sic*

fugere soleo, *Med.* 1021-2).[13] At first glance, the request seems meta-theatrical, and

this is how it has most often been interpreted.[14] By asking Jason whether he

recognizes her, Seneca's Medea highlights her status as a dramatic character that has

performed the same story in Euripides' and Ennius' dramas, probably in Ovid's lost

tragedy as well.[15] Seneca's use of *agnoscere* supports this meta-theatrical

interpretation, not only because of its self-reflexive presence in a recognition scene,

but also because, as Stephen Hinds has shown, Latin poets often used the verb to

signify their allusions to earlier writers.[16] *agnoscere* denotes an open practice of

poetic appropriation, as in Seneca the Elder's remark that Ovid lifted phrases from

Vergil *non subripiendi causa, sed palam mutuandi, hoc animo ut vellet agnosci* ("not

for the sake of stealing, but of borrowing openly, with the intent that it be recognized"

Suas. 3.7).[17] If we grant that Seneca too employs the verb in this way, then Medea's

question to Jason doubles as the playwright's question to his audience members,

prompting them to recall other literary versions of Medea and to judge how the

current one compares. With the phrase *sic fugere soleo*, Seneca's Medea may also be

referring to her departure from the scene in an airborne chariot, an act that likewise

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[13] All English translations in this article are my own, and all references to Senecan tragedy are based on Zwierlein's 1986 edition, unless otherwise noted.

[14] See, for instance, Boyle (1997) 132 and (2014) cxv-cxvii and *ad Med.* 1019-22; Littlewood (2004) 192; Trinacty (2014) 125-6; Winterbottom (1976) 39.

[15] On the traceable parallels between Euripides' and Seneca's Medeas, see Costa (1973) 8; Gill (1987); and Lefèvre (1997). Arcellashi (1990) examines Medea's role in Roman drama, and Manuwald (2013) presents a deft survey of the heroine's changing representation in Latin literature. Too little of Ovid's *Medea* survives for scholars to gauge its influence on Seneca's version. There are, however, demonstrable links between Ovid's depiction of Medea in *Heroides* 12 and *Metamorphoses* 7, and the figure portrayed in Seneca's tragedy: see Leo (1878) 166-70, and for more recent discussion, Boyle (2014) lxxiii-lxxvi; Hinds (1993) 34-43; and Trinacty (2007) and (2014) 93-126.

[16] Hinds (1998) 9.

[17] A possible connection suggested by Bartsch (2006) 262.

occurs at the end of Euripides.[18] Like *agnoscis*, *soleo* can function as an 'Alexandrian footnote', signalling the literary tradition that informs Medea's current behaviour.[19] The overall effect of Medea's question, on this reading, is to widen as much as possible the gap between intra- and extra-dramatic levels of recognition: the audience comprehends who Medea is because the audience has read Euripides, Ennius, and Ovid, while Jason, presumably, has not.

It is also tempting to infer from Medea's combination of *soleo* and *agnoscis* a reference to the visual dimension of theatre, whereby any given scene may reproduce aspects of other, preceding performances. This argument must remain speculative, given the lack of evidence for Seneca's plays ever being staged during his lifetime. Yet, even if Seneca's *Medea* was not performed in front of a first-century AD Roman audience, the visual qualities of its final scene – Medea above in a chariot; Jason below on the ground – could still be understood as replicating the visual qualities of Euripides' version. And, in the unknowable event that Seneca's tragedy was actually performed during his lifetime, Medea's *agnoscis* would surely encourage the audience to recognize this visual parallel.[20] Such 'optical allusion' – as Robert Cowan has dubbed the technique – is not uncommon in ancient drama, a famous example being Aristophanes' use of the *mechane* in the *Peace* (80-179) to parody Euripides' *Bellerophon* (fr. 306-308 Kannicht).[21] It would, of course, be even more meta-

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[18] Medea's airborne departure also occurs habitually in Ovid *Met.* 7 (220-3; 350-1; 398), another of Seneca's major sources.

[19] The term 'Alexandrian footnote' derives from Ross (1975) 78, where it describes Roman writers' methods of appealing to literary tradition. On Seneca's *soleo* as an Alexandrian footnote, see Boyle (1997) 132 and Cowan (2011) 363.

[20] As Boyle (2014) cxvi points out, there is also the opportunity for Jason (and the audience) to recognize, visually, the correspondence between Medea's character and her mask.

[21] Cowan (2013).

theatrical to evoke such visual recollection in the context of an actual recognition scene.[22]

PERFORMANCE AND RECOGNITION IN SENECA'S STOICISM

Seneca's Medea emerges from the preceding interpretation as a self-consciously theatrical construct, a literary entity assembled from earlier texts and a dramatic role embodied by earlier performers. Yet her status as a *dramatis persona* does not preclude her occupying equal status as an implied human personality. In fact, her 'textual' and 'ethical' identity overlap in this scene, because by drawing attention to previous dramatic versions of herself, Medea invites the audience to see in her current behaviour the degree of self-coherence necessary for creating a stable, recognizable *ethos*.[23] Medea is who she is because she behaves in keeping with the requirements of her role and thereby enables others to perceive a link between her deeds and her nature.[24] Seneca discusses precisely this idea at the end of *Epistle* 120; he does so, moreover, in terms that cannot fail to evoke the dramatic tradition of recognition scenes:

Magnam rem puta unum hominem agere. Praeter sapientem autem nemo unum agit, ceteri multiformes sumus. Modo frugi tibi videbimur et graves, modo prodigi et vani; mutamus subinde personam et contrariam ei sumimus quam exuimus. Hoc ergo a te exige, ut qualem institueris praestare te, talem usque ad exitum serves; effice ut possis laudari, si minus, ut adgnosci.

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[22] Thus, Easterling (1997) 168-9 argues for visual similarity between the Aeschylean, Sophoclean, and Euripidean versions of Electra's reunion with Orestes: in Aeschylus, Electra carries an urn of funeral offerings (*Ch.* 84-151); in Sophocles, Orestes presents Electra with an empty urn (*El.* 1113-1219); in Euripides, Electra carries a water jar (*El.* 54-149). The latter two versions evoke aspects of the Aeschylean "stage picture" partly in order to summon recognition from the audience.

[23] Bartsch (2006) 261 makes a similar observation: "The result of the drama's attention to the question of recognition is that *personal* self-recognition and *literary* recognition necessarily coalesce here." See also Boyle (2014) cxvi.

[24] A point raised by Sissa (2006) 41-2, in relation to tragic ἀναγνώρισις: "Tell me how you act and I will tell you what kind of person you are...recognition of agency implies recognition of moral identity, because the nature of an act...exposes the character of the agent." See also Aristotle *Poetics* 1452a35.

Consider it a great thing to play the part of one man. Besides the sage, however, no one plays the part of one man; the rest of us are multiform. Now we seem to you sober and serious, now wasteful and vain; we keep changing our mask and we put on the opposite of what we have taken off. Therefore, demand this of yourself: that you maintain right to the end the character you have resolved to present. Bring it about that you may be praised, or if not, at least recognized.

(*Ep.* 120.22)

The central idea in this passage concerns self-coherence: Seneca advises Lucilius that he must behave in a consistent manner if he wishes to render himself recognizable to others.[25] Coming at the end of Seneca's extended theatrical analogy, the word *adgnosci* suggests the concluding function of many recognition scenes. Yet, contrary to most dramatic practice, Lucilius' true identity is established not through revelation, but through steady confirmation. The recognition that Seneca envisages in *Epistle* 120 involves no unveiling of a previously unsuspected identity; rather, Lucilius is understood and acknowledged as the person he has always, consistently been. Likewise, when Seneca declares at the beginning of *Epistle* 31, *agnosco Lucilium meum* ("I recognize my Lucilius"), he means that Lucilius is now fulfilling the promise he had previously displayed (*incipit, quem promiserat, exhibere, Ep.* 31.1). Lucilius has not suddenly altered his character, but has simply come closer to perfecting a disposition to which he aspires.[26] The same may be said of Seneca's Medea, who seeks recognition for an identity she has been developing, steadily and cold-bloodedly, over the entire course of her play. Medea has not changed her personality in the tragedy's final few lines, nor has she revealed a new aspect of herself; she has merely amplified and perfected a role she has long desired to play.

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[25] Fuller discussion of this letter and its implications for Senecan tragedy can be found in Star (2012) 65-9. See also the comments of Brunt (1975) 13 on *constantia* and dramatic analogies in Stoic ethics.

[26] An issue treated by Bartsch (2006) 260-2.

Medea's self-fashioning is most apparent in the way she cites her own name at critical points in the tragedy. Although her illeism has already attracted considerable scholarly attention,[27] it is worth reviewing briefly here, in order to show how Medea uses it to ensure her self-coherence. Compared to Euripides' heroine, who utters her own name on only one occasion (Eur. *Med.* 402), Seneca's does so seven times: "Medea remains" (*Medea superest*, 166); "Medea is a greater fear" (*est et his maior metus / Medea*, 516-17); "Medea does not compel you" (*nec…te… / Medea cogit*, 523-4); "undertake whatever Medea can do" (*incipe / quidquid Medea potest*, 566-7); "now I am Medea" (*Medea nunc sum*, 910). She even begins the play by invoking deities *quosque Medeae magis / fas est precari* ("whom it is more right / for Medea to call upon", 8-9); later, she rationalizes that her children's crime is having Medea for a mother (*et maius scelus / Medea mater*, 933-4); when the Nurse uses Medea's name to command her attention, the heroine famously replies, "I shall become" (Nut: *Medea*— Med: *Fiam*, 171). The cumulative effect of all this self-naming is that Medea's conduct becomes a process of self-construction in which the protagonist knows her role and strives to live up to it.[28] Like Lucilius in *Epistle* 120, Seneca's Medea tries as much as possible to remain 'in character'. She performs herself both in the literal sense of acting a dramatic part and in the figurative sense of developing a stable, recognizable identity. Her behaviour throughout the play is simultaneously meta-theatrical and quasi-Stoic; her self-citation alludes to her previous appearances in drama, and in literature more generally, at the same time as it emphasizes continuity between her past, present, and future actions.

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[27] See in particular the important studies by Traina (1979) 273-5; Segal (1982) 241-2; and Petrone (1988) 61-2. Fitch and McElduff (2002) 24-7 make some pertinent, general comments on self-naming in Senecan tragedy.

[28] So Fitch and McElduff (2002) 25: "self-naming is often a way of defining who one *should* be, an index of the gap between one's present performance and one's ideal role."

Medea's *fiam* at line 171 is a particularly telling example of this overlap between meta-theatrical and Stoic versions of her identity. On the one hand, the word conveys Medea's awareness of her own literary past and presents her behaviour as a model derived from earlier poetry. In fact, it confirms Medea's already paradigmatic status via allusion to Hypsipyle's remark in *Heroides* 6.151, *Medeae Medea forem* ("I would have been a Medea to Medea").[29] On the other hand, *fiam* evokes not just textual identity, but a slow and deliberate process of ethical self-construction. Medea will 'become' Medea because she will 'be made' into Medea: the verb's passive force connotes a quintessentially Senecan Stoic project of self-reform, one that splits the individual into moral agent and malleable object. Seneca uses the verb in a similar manner at *De Ira* 2.10.6, when he declares, *neminem nasci sapientem sed fieri* ("the wise man is not born but made"). Interpreted alongside such evidence, Medea's promise to work upon and thereby achieve an ideal version of herself begins to sound like a distinctly Stoic goal. Her ethical identity is no less consciously constructed, and no less paradigmatic than her textual one.

Medea's self-citation is also quasi-Stoic in the way it leads her to resemble an actor. Just as a theatrical performer adopts a part and endeavours subsequently to maintain it, so does Medea strive to bridge the gap between her current self and her ideal role. In this regard, too, her behaviour relates to Seneca's advice in *Epistle* 120, where the main point of the theatrical analogy is to associate people with stage performers.[30] According to Seneca, most individuals change their masks frequently (*mutamus subinde personam*), but the wise man plays just a single role, that of himself (*unum hominem agere*). Thus, far from claiming that all acting is inherently

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[29] A connection explored by Trinacty (2007) 71-2.

[30] Frede (2007) 160 discusses the ways in which Stoic theatrical metaphors establish a link between actors and human beings; see also Gibson (2007) 125. Sources – mostly philosophical – that use the 'dramatic simile of life' have been collected by Kokolakis (1969).

deceptive, Seneca allows the possibility that consistent performance will in fact establish and enhance genuine selfhood. His idea most likely rests on Stoic *persona*-theory, in which people are understood to perform roles that merge with and thereby display normative aspects of their identity.[31] The main proponents of this theory, Panaetius and Cicero,[32] hold that human selfhood comprises four distinct facets or *personae*, each of which must be observed according to what befits it.[33] Tailoring one's conduct to one's *persona* is the ethical equivalent of achieving a seamless performance: both activities require an outwardly directed display of self-coherence intended to guarantee recognizable identity; actor and character are assumed ultimately to coalesce. Further, the theatrical metaphor of Stoic *persona*-theory shares with actual dramatic performance an interest in the conscious construction of identity, emphasizing choice and deliberate self-fashioning over any notion of unalterably in-born character. In all of these respects Stoic *persona*-theory maps neatly onto the behaviour of Seneca's Medea: she understands in advance the crucial aspects of her character and develops her conduct accordingly; she aims at self-coherence; she presents herself simultaneously as *dramatis persona* and actor; and she fashions her identity at a pitch of self-consciousness unsurpassed by any other Senecan protagonist. The *persona* resulting from Medea's actions may not be the slightest bit Stoic, but the means used to create it are.

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[31] On the relationship between performance and identity in Stoic *persona*-theory, see Burchell (1998), and Bartsch (2006) 220-9. Gill (1988) explores how the theory engages with concepts of personhood and personality. Nédoncelle (1948) provides useful background by discussing the semantic range of the term *persona*.

[32] Although Panaetius' work has been lost, it is widely regarded as the basis for Cicero's account of *persona*-theory in the *De Officiis* (1.107-21). Cicero himself (*Att.* 16.11.4) acknowledges Panaetius as his source. For more detail on Cicero's Panaetian background, see the introductory summary in Dyck 1996, 17-29, and fuller treatments in Pohlenz 1934, and Gärtner 1974. De Lacy (1977) 169 demurs – against Cicero's own statement – that nothing specifically identifies Panaetius as the author of Cicero's fourfold *persona*-theory, but admits that there are very few alternatives.

[33] The role of 'fitting behaviour' (τὸ πρέπον, *decorum*) in Stoic *persona*-theory is discussed by Brunt (1975) 13-16; Gill (1988); Dyck (1996) *ad Off.* 1.93-9; Gibson (2007) 122-6.

SELF-COHERENCE

One does not have to look far in Seneca's tragedy to find evidence of Medea's

consummate ability to 'play one person' (*unum hominem agere*). So unvarying are the

traits she exhibits throughout the play that many of her final deeds are alluded to as

early as her opening monologue. To some extent, this is a standard Senecan

technique, whereby the tragedies' initial scenes hint obliquely and ironically at events

the audience knows will occur by the plays' end.[34] Yet the parallels between Medea's

first speech and final actions are so close that they suggest a greater than usual effort

on Seneca's part to link the two scenes. For instance, Medea proclaims darkly that she

has "given birth to her revenge" (*parta iam, parta ultio est: / peperi*, 25-6), and

resumes the metaphor when she remarks, "a home created through crime must be

abandoned through crime" (*quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus*, 55).

Further hints of infanticide lurk in Medea's exhortation to "seek a path to revenge

through the vitals themselves" (*per viscera ipsa quaere supplicio viam*, 40), referring

in this instance to the entrails of a sacrificial animal, but also anticipating the murder

of her offspring, and perhaps even evoking her later claim to search out with a sword

any child still hiding in her *viscera* (*in matre si quo pignus etiamnunc latet / scrutabor

ense viscera et ferro extraham*, 1112-13).[35] The Medea of the opening monologue

even asserts that greater crimes befit her after becoming a mother (*maiora iam me

scelera post partus decent*, 50), a remark that foreshadows both her infanticide and

the source of her perfected identity. Thus, the character Medea envisages for herself at

the tragedy's outset is the same one that she exhibits at its end. If recognition of her

capacities comes as no surprise that is not just because the audience already knows

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[34] Pratt (1983) 34.

[35] Medea's reference to sacrifice in lines 38-40 is, in the words of Costa (1973) *ad loc.*, "enigmatic and sinister": besides indicating actual, sacrificial animals, the *victimae* Medea mentions may be variously interpreted as Jason and Creusa or Medea's children, while, as Zwierlein (1986b) proposes, the *viscera* could be regarded as belonging to Medea herself.

her story, but also because she has pursued the kind of coherent self-presentation designed to ensure other people's acknowledgement of her identity. Medea, like the Stoic sage, does not change her mask.

Just as Medea's eventual infanticide is apparent from her opening monologue, so too is her flight from the stage in an airborne chariot, since as part of her initial complaint, Medea appeals to her ancestor, the Sun, to "entrust her with the reins, and allow her to guide the fiery steeds with blazing straps" (*committe habenas, genitor, et flagrantibus / ignifera loris tribue moderari iuga*, 33-4). It is a standard feature of recognition scenes that they connect the past with the present, usually by recalling events that happened offstage in a time prior to the drama's beginning: Aeschylus' Electra recognizes the cloth she wove for baby Orestes; Oedipus discovers himself by tracing his origins back to the moment his parents exposed him.[36] In Seneca's *Medea*, however, the past recalled most strongly in the recognition scene is the protagonist's initial monologue; this opening speech glances forward to the drama's end where it is fully reified. The result, again, is that Medea's assertion of selfhood involves no act of revelation: past and present have been joined seamlessly, with no intervening period in which Medea's character has deviated – or been seen to deviate – from its true form.

Medea's relentless pursuit of a behavioural ideal also emerges from her use of the word *decent* in line 50 (*maiora iam me scelera post partus decent*). Deliberately or not, this verb evokes the Stoic concept of *decorum*, which describes the beauty and harmony resulting from appropriate, self-coherent conduct.[37] Significantly, *decorum* is closely related to notions of self-performance, as the following passage from Cicero's *De Officiis* demonstrates:

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[36] On recognition scenes linking the past to the present, see Zeitlin (2012).

[37] On Stoic *decorum*, see above n. 33.

expendere oportebit quid quisque habeat sui eaque moderari, nec velle experiri quam se aliena deceant; id enim maxime quemque decet quod est cuiusque maxime. Suum quisque igitur noscat ingenium, acremque se et bonorum et vitiorum suorum iudicem praebeat, ne scaenici plus quam nos videantur habere prudentiae. Illi enim non optimas sed sibi accommodatissimas fabulas eligunt

Each person ought to consider what characteristics belong to him, and to manage them, without wishing to test how someone else's characteristics might suit him; for what suits each person most of all is that which is most his own. Let each man therefore know his own natural disposition and show himself a sharp judge of his good morals and vices, so that actors may not seem to have more wisdom than us. For they select not the best plays, but the ones most appropriate for them

(*De Off.* 1.113-14)

Cicero's advice has much in common with the end of Seneca's 120th Epistle: both texts compare people to actors; both stress the need for individuals to remain consistent within their chosen roles. Where Seneca warns against changing masks, Cicero cautions people not to exchange their characteristics for others' that may not suit them (*nec velle experiri quam se aliena <u>deceant</u>; id enim maxime quemque <u>decet</u> quod est cuiusque maxime*). On this analysis, achieving *decorum* is the equivalent of 'playing one person'. Although Medea's actions are far from being examples of Stoic morality, it could hardly be said of her that she does not know her own nature and does not cleave to what befits her. In a phrase that resembles Cicero's injunction for each man to know his own natural disposition (*suum quisque noscat ingenium*), Seneca's Medea declares, "now I am Medea; my disposition has grown through evils" (*Medea nunc sum; crevit <u>ingenium</u> malis*, 910).[38] Too limited to signal a direct allusion, the parallel points instead to the fact that these two texts articulate similar sets of ideas. By citing the same concept as Cicero, Medea illustrates the extent of her self-knowledge and consciously monitored conduct: her *decorum* may be deeply disturbing, but it is *decorum* all the same.

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[38] Gibson (2007) 121-2 and Dyck (1996) *ad Off.* 114 both see in Cicero's *suum quisque...noscat ingenium* a submerged reference to Delphi's γνῶθι σεαυτόν. Seneca's Medea, likewise, seems to know herself very well, and this possible link to Delphi's motto is reinforced by Medea's ancestry: she is the daughter of the Sun, and Apollo is the sun god.

Furthermore, Medea's *decorum* is textual as well as ethical, because the term denotes not just appropriate behaviour, but also literary appropriateness.[39] Horace in the *Ars Poetica*, for instance, uses *decet* to describe the fit between style and genre (*singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decentem*; "let each individual thing, allotted, keep to its appropriate place" *AP* 92), or the way a character's words harmonize with his or her emotions (*tristia maestum / voltum verba decent, iratum plena minarum*; "sad words suit a sorrowful face, threating words an angry one" *AP* 105-6). Viewed against this background, Medea's aspiration to commit suitable crimes becomes a meta-literary and, more narrowly, meta-theatrical statement that draws attention to her conduct as a fabricated dramatic character. The link between textual and ethical identity is closer still, because meta-theatricality helps the audience comprehend Medea's self-consistency: only if we know Medea's story in advance can we truly appreciate the uniformity of her conduct.[40] The semantic range of *decet* is yet another indication of how Medea's quasi-Stoic identity blends into her literary one and vice versa.

MEDEA AND THE *SAPIENS*

It may seem odd, at first, to attribute quasi-Stoic behaviour to Seneca's Medea, a woman in the grip of passion and plotting a terrible revenge. It can and has been argued that Medea's identity actually disintegrates over the course of the play.[41] If one takes the Stoic position, broadly stated, that nature equals virtue, then Seneca's Medea can hardly be said to live in accordance with her own nature, let alone Nature with a capital 'N'. If, as Seneca asserts, nobody except the *sapiens* can succeed in

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[39] The overlap between aesthetic/literary and ethical appropriateness is discussed by Gibson (2007) 115-47.

[40] Similarly, Gill (1987) 32 remarks of Medea's final monologue: "Medea's self-reinforcement by her image of herself gains force by allusion to the literary tradition in which that image has come to be shaped."

[41] Henry and Walker (1967) 175-9 and (1985) 113-14; Gill (2006) 421-35.

'playing the role of one man', does Medea's submission to *ira* and *furor* mean that she fluctuates and must, by definition, be inconsistent?

There is no easy answer to this question. Recent work by Shadi Bartsch and Christopher Star has demonstrated how deeply Stoic notions of selfhood permeate Seneca's tragedies, to the extent that Seneca's *dramatis personae* employ Stoic methods of self-construction to vastly un-Stoic ends.[42] In a related vein, Roy Gibson has shown how Ovid spots and playfully slips through loopholes in Cicero's theory of appropriate behaviour.[43] The conduct of Seneca's Medea could likewise be regarded as illustrating potential contradictions at the heart of Cicero's and Seneca's ethical theory, since emphasis on self-consistency leaves open the slim possibility of people persevering in wickedness, and emphasis laid upon fitting behaviour – *quid decet* – can surely lead to individuals perpetrating further crimes on the basis that such action suits their moral makeup.[44] In addition, the theatrical metaphor of Stoic *persona*-theory leaves little if any room between the role and the person: if you are your *persona*, what happens when the most appropriate *persona* for you is Medea, or Atreus?[45] An approach to selfhood that relies so much on dramatic analogies inevitably runs into problems when placed in actual drama. Seneca's Medea does exhibit the irrational, passionate behaviour that brands her the antithesis of the

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[42] Bartsch (2006) 255-81; Star (2006) and (2012) 62-83. Johnson (1988) 93-7 also sees in Seneca's Medea a perverted image of the Stoic *proficiens*.

[43] Gibson (2007) 117-29.

[44] Although, as Gill (2006) 431-2 notes, a decision may be made in favour of the passions according to what is mistakenly perceived as appropriate, and this will not result in true, Stoic *decorum*. Cicero, too, circumvents the possibility of 'bad' *decorum* by declaring *admodum autem tenenda sunt sua cuique, non vitiosa, sed tamen propria, quo facilius decorum illud, quod quaerimus, retineatur* (*De Off.* 1.110) The difficulty in Senecan drama, however, is that a character's *decorum* is primarily literary – e.g. Medea cannot *not* commit infanticide – and therefore tends to warp the parameters of ethical self-development. Since Medea's dramatic *persona* is such that she must engage in criminal acts, pursuing ethical *decorum* requires her to decide in favour of destructive, irrational behavior.

[45] As Gibson (2007) 122-6 demonstrates, this issue troubles Cicero's treatment of *decorum* and *persona*-theory throughout *De Officiis* 1.92-151.

sapiens, yet she also displays a remarkable ability to monitor and fashion her conduct along Stoic lines.

Such an impasse need not imply that Seneca intended to criticize in his tragedies principles he had preached elsewhere;[46] the cause is subtler than that, and may well lie not (or not only) in the potential conflicts of philosophy, but in Seneca's vocabulary. Because Seneca conceives of identity and morality in Stoic terms, he uses his arsenal of distinctly Stoic language to describe people and their morals, regardless of whether those people are real or fictive. In the case of his Medea, acts of self-exhortation, her desire to achieve a goal and consequently, to arrive at a version of herself, must all be conveyed in broadly Stoic vocabulary because this, for Seneca, is the definitive way of portraying identity, judgement, and action. The uniformity of Seneca's style across his philosophical and dramatic oeuvre leads to friction between artistry and ethics, but that friction may not be entirely intentional on Seneca's part.

A clear example of this stylistic overlap is Seneca's Cato who, in the *De Providentia*, behaves in almost exactly the same manner as Seneca's Medea.[47] The Cato portrayed in this text cites his own name as a means of ensuring that his impending suicide fits the reputation he has so far assumed: "Cato has a way out" (*Cato qua exeat habet, De Prov.* 2.10); "this sword will grant Cato the freedom it was not able to grant the fatherland" (*ferrum istud...libertatem, quam patriae non potuit, Catoni dabit, De Prov.* 2.10); "for Cato, seeking death at another's hands is as disgraceful as seeking life" (*tam turpe est Catoni mortem ab ullo petere quam vitam, De Prov.* 2.10). Like Medea, Cato envisages his self as a role from which he should

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[46] As implied by Dingel (1974) 118, who argues that Seneca's tragedies contradict his philosophy at the most fundamental level. The majority of scholars dealing with this issue pursue a more moderate approach, asserting that Seneca's plays engage with his philosophy chiefly by providing negative *exempla* of the passions; a representative sample of such scholarship includes: Knoche (1941); Lefèvre (1969); Pratt (1983) 73-131; Henry and Walker (1985); Davis (2003) 69-74.

[47] Broad correspondence between these two figures is noted by Johnson (1988) 88.

not deviate; he treats his past identity as a paradigm for future conduct. He even refers

explicitly to the concept of *decorum* when he defines death by another's hand as "a

compact with fate that does not suit [his] greatness" (*fati conventio...quae non deceat*

magnitudinem nostram, *De Prov.* 2.10).[48] The evident parallels between Cato and

Medea generate difficulties for Seneca's ethical theory: while Cato puts his precepts

to a relatively innocuous purpose and ends up being applauded for his *constantia*,

Medea adopts the same attitudes as a means of accomplishing her revenge. The

outcome depends upon which character one chooses to maintain.

Another crucial point to emerge from Medea and Cato's resemblance is that

invoking one's own name does not have to be meta-theatrical. Although Cato's death

is certainly dramatic, and although Seneca frames the episode as a "spectacle worthy

for a god to gaze upon" (*spectaculum dignum ad quod respiciat…deus*, *De Prov.*

2.9),[49] Cato is performing himself as an ethical rather than intrinsically theatrical role,

as a person rather than as a character. It stands to reason that Seneca's Medea can be

doing precisely the same thing.

RECOGNITION WITHOUT REVELATION

Seneca's heroine fashions herself so consciously and consistently that the audience

ends up recognizing a figure it has known all along. Jason, we may assume, also

recognizes his wife's ethical identity, since it is difficult to imagine his responding to

her question with anything other than 'yes'.[50] Of course, Jason's knowledge is not

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[48] In a similar manner, Cicero in *De Officiis* 1.112 argues that suicide was an act suited to Cato's *persona*: *atque haec differentia naturarum tantam habet vim, ut non numquam mortem sibi ipse consciscere alius debeat, alius in eadem causa non debeat. Num enim alia in causa M. Cato fuit, alia ceteri, qui se in Africa Caesari tradiderunt?...Catoni cum incredibilem tribuisset natura gravitatem, eamque ipse perpetua constantia roboravisset semperque in proposito susceptoque consilio permansisset, moriendum potius quam tyranni vultus aspiciendus fuit.*

[49] On Cato's death as spectacle and Cato as actor, see Edwards (2002) 390-1; Solimano (1991) 70-1; Hijmans (1966) 237-8.

[50] As Bartsch (2006) 261 wryly observes.

quite the same as the audience's, because his recognition of Medea involves painful

realization of his own errors, a mild form of Aristotle's *peripeteia*. What Jason

experiences in the tragedy's final scene is a moment of re-appraising and re-knowing

(hence: ἀνα-γνωρίζω) a person he knew before, but whom he had seriously

underestimated.[51] Forcing Jason to this new level of comprehension is certainly one of

Medea's aims, but it is a less important one than having Jason contribute to her own

self-construction. Above all, Medea wants Jason to validate her achievement: when he

arrives to witness her final act of murder, Medea calls him a "spectator" (*spectator

iste*, 993) and declares that she has wasted any crimes committed outside his presence

(*quidquid sine isto fecimus sceleris perit*, 994).[52] Besides being meta-theatrical and

deeply sadistic,[53] this desire for an audience is a symptom of Medea's careful self-

fashioning, since, as Seneca and Cicero both imply, consistent conduct must be seen

in order to be recognized. If people are equated with actors, it follows that their deeds

are supposed to be on display. Thus, Medea expects acknowledgement from Jason;

her final exchange with him hinges on the authorizing rather than revelatory function

of recognition. ἀναγνώρισις in this instance does not involve unmasking or disclosure,

but continuity and thus, corroboration.

Likewise, when Medea declares, "this is how I usually escape" – *sic fugere

soleo* – she pushes Jason to acknowledge continuity between her past and present

conduct. We have seen already how the statement may refer specifically to Medea's

leaving the stage in a serpent-drawn chariot, but it can just as easily signify her habit

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[51] Thus, Cave (1988) 33: "'Ana-gnorisis', like 're-cognition'…implies a recovery of something once known rather than merely a shift from ignorance to knowledge."

[52] Braden (1985) 61 remarks on the Senecan tragic protagonist's desire to gain validation from his or her victims. Dupont (1995) 151 makes a similar point specifically in relation to Seneca's Medea.

[53] On sadistic spectatorship in Senecan tragedy more generally, see Littlewood (2004) 215-39.

of committing murders before she flees.[54] Slaughter and escape are two events that

recur, paired, throughout Medea's story: she dismembers her brother, Absyrtos, as she

sails from Colchis; she destroys Pelias before departing Thessaly; she leaves behind

in Corinth the bodies of Creon, Creusa, and her own two children. Seneca stresses

throughout the play this repetition inherent in Medea's story, and he draws particular

attention to the killing of Absyrtos because the act provides a precedent for Medea's

impending infanticide. Just as Medea will kill the second child in Jason's presence, so

she recalls Absyrtos' death being "thrust in his father's face" (*funus ingestum patri*,

132); similarly, she treats the slaughter of her own children as a warped form of

payment for her brother's murder (956-7; 969-71; 982). Imagery of dismemberment is

also used to connect the two events: when Medea in her final monologue urges her

own children to embrace her – *et infusos mihi / coniungite artus* ("and join with me

your poured out limbs", 946-47) – her stilted and sinister language evokes the several

references she has already made to Absyrtos' limbs (47-8; 912), while *infusos* recalls

the blood she has shed elsewhere (134-5: *funestum impie / quam saepe fudi*

sanguinem; 452-3: *quaeque fraternus cruor / perfudit arva*).[55] Pelias' death, too,

involves dismemberment and thus forms part of this nexus (133-4; 475-6). The

overall effect of these associations is to demonstrate that Medea has always

performed the kinds of actions she will perform again by the end of this play. Not just

the external audience, but Jason too, as Medea's internal audience, is called upon to

recognize the uniformity of her behaviour.

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[54] As Armstrong (1982) 239-40 maintains, arguing against exclusively meta-literary interpretations of this line. The more even-handed approach of Boyle (2014) *ad Med.* 1019-22 demonstrates that the line can be read both ways, as a meta-literary trope and as a claim about repeated personal conduct.

[55] Segal (1986) 9 remarks that the "depersonalized and abstract vocabulary" used by Seneca to describe Medea's embrace of her children (946-7) not only gives the passage a "self-consciously artificial" quality, but also sounds ominous in the context of the protagonist's impending crime.

Medea alludes to that uniformity even in Jason's presence; the first words she

speaks to him in the entire play are, "I have fled, Jason, I am fleeing. Changing

abodes is nothing new, but the reason for flight is new: I used to flee on your behalf"

(*fugimus, Iason, fugimus. hoc non est novum, / mutare sedes; causa fugiendi nova est:*

/ pro te solebam fugere, 447-9).[56] Her language here is almost identical to her

statement in the recognition scene – *sic fugere soleo* – which, notably, comprises her

final speech to Jason. Close correspondence between the two passages hints at an

equivalent correspondence between Medea's past and present action. Once again,

Medea prompts Jason to acknowledge the behavioural patterns that have long since

defined her character. Such is Medea's desire to stress continuity and self-coherence

that she does not ask Jason, "do you recognize me?" but instead phrases her question

so that it invites Jason to acknowledge in her precisely the woman he once married:

coniugem agnoscis tuam? Medea has not, will never, change.[57]

RECOGNITION WITHOUT REUNION

The self-construction that Medea pursues so relentlessly in this play comes at the

expense of everything else. Whereas conventional recognition scenes tend to involve

a renewal of family relationships,[58] Seneca's Medea achieves the opposite, namely,

she seeks acknowledgement for her ability to destroy interpersonal ties. Her request

that Jason recognize her as his wife plays ironically on the ideas of reunion and

legitimacy germane to ἀναγνώρισις in both tragic and comic plotlines. As Simon

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[56] I follow Boyle (2014) *ad Med.* 447 in construing the first *fugimus* as perfect tense, the second as present.

[57] The summation by Schiesaro (2003) 213 is worth quoting in full: "To be able to 'recognize' Medea as 'Medea', or Atreus as 'Atreus', is predicated on the immutability of fundamental characteristics which define them as what they are...They both guarantee that past patterns will prevail: they rise from the certainty of a model which their antagonists need to learn. Once they do, once they 'recognize', they admit the fallibility of their desire, or hope, for change."

[58] On the key role of family relationships in ἀναγνώρισις see Aristotle *Poetics* 1452b, as well as the structural study by Sissa (2006).

Goldhill remarks, recognitions typically reassert and also authorize relationships between people: Electra regains her brother; Ion reclaims his status as Creusa's child; Oedipus learns simultaneously his true parentage and the socio-sexual boundaries he has unwittingly crossed.[59] The results are even more pronounced in New Comedy and *palliata*, where long-lost children are recovered and status issues resolved so that long-term lovers are finally able to unite; ἀναγνώρισις brings with it the prospect of restoring order to previously incomplete, incorrect, or unbalanced collectivities.[60] Seneca's Medea, however, longs to cut all social ties, and the profusion of family terms used by Seneca throughout the tragedy only serves to emphasize his heroine's ruinous pursuit of isolation and autonomy.

One example is Medea's obsessive desire to be acknowledged as Jason's wife.[61] She begins her tragedy by invoking "the gods of marriage and Lucina guardian of the marriage-bed" (*di coniugales tuque genialis tori, / Lucina, custos* 1-2), and refers to herself as *coniunx* far more frequently than do other characters in the play.[62] Like the Medea of Ovid's *Heroides*, she focuses on her dowry and on the impossible process of restitution she feels that Jason ought to perform as a consequence of their 'divorce': *tibi patria cessit, tibi pater frater pudor / hac dote nupsi; redde fugienti sua* ("my fatherland fell to you, my brother, father, modesty. I married you with this dowry; give the fugitive back what is hers" 487-8).[63] Her opening speech even includes the bitter wish that Jason's future sufferings will make his marriage to her seem a blessing in retrospect: *me coniugem optet* ("let him long for me as his wife"

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[59] Goldhill (1986) 84.

[60] A point that emerges clearly from Konstan (1983).

[61] See in particular Abrahamsen (1999) and Guastella (2001). Frank (1995) also makes some pertinent observations about the rhetorical effects of kinship terms in Senecan tragedy.

[62] A tendency noted by Abrahamsen (1999) 110-13.

[63] Cf. Ovid *Her.* 12.199-203

22).[64] In fact, the wish verges on paradox, because having Jason long for her as his wife is precisely what Medea wants at this early point in the drama. Yet she also wants to achieve her identity by destroying family ties so that Jason no longer has any wife at all.

The same paradoxical tension underlies her final request for Jason's recognition: Medea wants Jason to claim her and no other in the role of his wife, but she also wants to confirm that she has abolished all of that role's actual, social requirements. The verb *agnoscere* itself articulates this conflict because it can refer specifically to legitimization and family reunion, as is often the case in descriptions of parents legally recognizing their offspring: *quem ille natum non agnoverat, eundem moriens suum esse dixerat* ("he had not acknowledged him as a son, but declared him so on his deathbed" Nep. *Ag.* 1.4); *expositum qui agnoverit, solutis alimentis recipiat* ("a father who recognizes a son exposed in infancy, will take him back only after having paid for his upbringing" Quint. *Inst.* 7.1.14). Placed alongside these examples, Medea's request for recognition evokes familial restoration and the resumption of social duties: Jason is called upon to recognize Medea's spousal status in a legal as well as emotional sense, even while Medea's vengeful acts have precluded the possibility of reunion.[65] Thus, Seneca's recognition scene hints at only to deny the renewal that ἀναγνώρισις typically brings. Confirmation of Medea's identity prevents rather than generates social reintegration.

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[64] Although Zwierlein (1986a) follows Axelson in emending *optet* to *opto*, I agree with Hine (2000) *ad loc*. that the MSS reading should be retained because the paradox expressed by *me coniugem optet* seems typically Senecan.

[65] It could be argued that Medea's marital status is inherently questionable, from both a social and legal perspective: her 'dowry' is far from a real dowry, and her father, Aeetes, never consented to the match. Moreover, as Abrahamsen (1999) asserts, Medea's non-citizen status invalidates her marriage to Jason in the eyes of Roman law. However, what matters is Seneca's final scene is not the reality of the law, but the traditions of legitimization and reunion that legal terms help to evoke. That Medea wants but cannot achieve legal acknowledgement only reinforces the unique style of this recognition scene, which simultaneously conjures and denies any hope of social renewal.

Such allusions to reunification haunt the final exchange between Jason and

Medea as if to remind the audience of other, happier versions of dramatic recognition.

For example, when Jason arrives on stage, Medea describes the culmination of her

revenge as a moment that reverses time and reinstates her as a virginal Colchian

princess:[66]

Iam iam recepi sceptra germanum patrem,
spoliumque Colchi pecudis auratae tenent;
rediere regna, rapta uirginitas redit.
o placida tandem numina, o festum diem,
o nuptialem!

Now, now I have regained sceptre, brother, father,
and the Colchians keep the golden animal's fleece;
the kingdom has been restored, my lost virginity restored.
O divine powers, finally favourable, O festive day,
O wedding day!

(*Med.* 982-6)

Medea's assertion is a hyperbolic reflection of the customary events of recognition

scenes, in which brothers really are united with sisters, and fathers with children.

Even Medea's perversely gleeful reminder that this is Jason's wedding day (*o

nuptialem!*) conjures, obliquely, the love matches that tend to conclude New Comic

and *palliata* plots.[67] Moreover, with Creusa now dead by Medea's hand, the heroine's

exultant *o nuptialem* articulates her own, sole claim to be Jason's wife; it hints,

bitterly, at the resumption of social relationships so often dependent on acts of

ἀναγνώρισις.

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[66] While Medea's claims make no sense if taken literally, several critics have proposed other, viable ways of reading them: Guastella (2001) 213-17 interprets Medea's revenge against Jason as symbolic repayment for the crimes she has previously committed against her father, Aeetes; Schiesaro (2009) 228-34 suggests that they are symptomatic of Medea's obsession not just with the past, but with her past self. As Kerrigan (1996) 277 points out, undoing the past is one of the avenger's main aspirations.

[67] Despite pioneering work by Tarrant (1978) and Grant (1999), Seneca's debt to New Comedy/*comoedia palliata* remains a relatively unexplored and potentially very rich topic.

In like manner, Jason's acceptance of his sons' bodies seems to build upon, almost to parody, the convention of parent-child recognition that pervades earlier drama. The event is facilitated by Medea herself, who differs from Euripides' heroine in her lack of concern for her children's burial (cf. Eur. *Med.* 1378-83).[68] Rather than carry the corpses with her, Seneca's Medea leaves them for Jason, declaring sarcastically, "now take back your sons, as their parent" (*recipe iam natos parens*, 1024). Comparable language of restitution and recovery is used to describe family reunions in *comoedia palliata*, as in Plautus' *Captivi*, when Hegio thanks the gods for "giving back and restoring" his son (*quom te redducem tuo patri reddiderunt*, 923),[69] or in Terence's *Hecyra*, when the courtesan Bacchis reveals Myrrina's background story and, as a direct consequence, restores to Pamphilus both his son and his spouse (*gnatum ei restituo.../uxorem...reddo*; "I return his son to him.../ I give back his wife" 818-19). The parallels in vocabulary suggest a further, structural similarity: like the fathers of Roman comedy, Jason takes part in a recognition scene in which he is granted the opportunity to acknowledge and reclaim his children. The verb *recipere* may even suggest the legitimizing function of ἀναγνώρισις since it, along with *agnoscere*, features in the legal maxim reported by Quintilian (*Inst.* 7.1.14: *expositum qui agnoverit, solutis alimentis recipiat*). Thus, Medea's language in this final exchange pushes Jason, however ironically, to assume an authorizing, paternal role in relation to the family he has disrupted. Seneca's handling of the scene draws attention to the reintegration and social harmony so often consequent upon acts of recognition, making their absence from his tragedy all the more acute. The paradox for Seneca's Medea is that self-coherence and consequent recognizability entail the kind of crimes

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[68] Noted by Hine (2000) *ad Med.* 1024

[69] It must, however, be noted, with Lacey (1978-79) 132, that Plautus rarely uses the father-son reconciliation motif to conclude his plays.

that will destroy any chance of a family reunion. Acting in the role of Jason's wife leads Medea, ultimately, to be a wife in name only. Likewise, she leaves Jason in the purely nominal position of *parens*.

CONCLUSION

Medea's pursuit of ideal selfhood happens at the expense of the self-in-relationship, and her solipsism stands in stark contrast to the conventionally social consequences of recognition. Like the Stoic sage, for whom she is a dark mirror image, Seneca's Medea achieves a radical form of independence – a kind of *autarkeia* – as a result of her conscious, careful self-realization.[70] Also like the Stoic sage, Medea is concerned to shape her identity, behave coherently, live up to her assigned role and ensure her actions suit it. Her recognition scene, besides being an example of meta-theatre, draws attention to the complex interplay of literary character and actual, human selfhood, as Medea employs Stoic principles to build her essentially textual *persona*. Her conduct throughout the tragedy is a blend of textual and ethical elements that has performance at its core: Seneca's Medea acts in accordance with her theatrical and personal past in order to be recognizable – and acknowledged – as a character in a play, as an actor, and as an implied human personality. It is this view of identity as performance that leads Seneca to adapt the dramatic tradition of ἀναγνώρισις so that it confirms rather than reveals Medea's essential nature. In Senecan tragedy, role-play enhances rather than denies fundamental aspects of characters' identities, consequently narrowing the gap between fabricated theatrical *persona* and actual, human selfhood. An equivalent situation prevails in Stoic ethical theory, where human beings are likened to actors and roles; where appropriateness is envisaged in terms of a seamless performance;

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[70] Both Braden (1985) 34 and 57, and Johnson (1988) 87 and 93-7 perceive traces of Stoic *autarkeia* in Medea's conduct.

where identity is simultaneously constructed and genuine. Of course, with so much overt self-posturing the tragedy's conclusion can hardly come as a surprise, but that very lack of surprise is precisely what Medea wants.

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