CrossMark

Greece & Rome, 68.1 76–96 © The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association
doi:10.1017/S001738352000025X

MONSTROUS EMOTIONS IN SENECA'S *MEDEA*[*]

This article explores the phenomenon of the monstrous in Seneca's *Medea* by focusing on the emotions of its main character, in particular demonstrating that they are not merely an expression of Medea's inner psychological sphere but are intrinsically connected with her existential search for recognition in her surrounding world, a world especially marked by its social, cosmic, and mythical dimensions. The monstrous nature of Medea's emotions should be understood in the light of the wider phenomenon of the monstrous in this play, where it is a pervasive phenomenon, in the sense that it transcends the emotions of the main character and is present throughout the play as a tragic, mythically encoded enactment of the dissolution of social, religious, and cosmic boundaries. Other manifestations of the monstrous will be referred to in passing.

Let me briefly call attention to a couple of interpretations of Senecan drama, which will serve as negative foils for a clearer definition of my purpose here. The first is that of Charles Segal, who claims that what is at stake in Seneca's tragedies are cases of the 'pathetic fallacy', of a 'projection of personal emotion into a cosmic frame'.[1] His reading, for all its insightfulness and contribution to understanding the relation between Senecan tragedy and modern times, is not entirely accurate in terms of what can be found in *Medea*. Medea's emotions are not expressions of a psychologically encapsulated human being, who colours the world according to her feelings, thus distorting the substance of reality. They are caused by, and act upon, the external world conceived in its social, religious, cosmic, and mythical dimensions.

[*] This article was written with the financial support of the Foundation for Science and Technology, Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, under the projects UID/FIL/00183/2019 and UIDB/00183/2020. I should like to add a word of thanks to Douglas Cairns, Ed Sanders, and the anonymous reviewer, for their suggestions and corrections, which helped to improve this article.

[1] C. Segal, 'Boundary Violation and the Landscape of the Self in Senecan Tragedy', in J. G. Fitch (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies. Seneca* (Oxford, 2008), 136–56 (here citing 138 and 137) (originally published in *A&A* 29 [1983], 172–87).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Segal's conception of Senecan tragedy has proved influential.[2] In an article entitled 'Construction of the Self in Senecan Drama', John Fitch and Siobhan McElduff 'accept Segal's view that drama can function as a dream-world in which repressed fears and fantasies are acted out'.[3] Inspired by Segal's account, they carry out a psychoanalytic reading of Seneca's plays. This reading makes the useful point that the monstrousness of Medea's emotions is connected with the lack of a place to be, its causes, and its consequences – though this place is not idealized or irrecoverable.[4] Throughout the play, Medea looks for a place to be whose nature is social and religious, but ends up finding a home in the realm of the mythical. Furthermore, Fitch and McElduff's claim that the construction of the self involves a 'misrepresentation' and is always a 'misconstruction' presupposes a normative conception of the self which, for all its validity as such, is absent from the text of *Medea*.[5] This play describes the monstrousness of Medea's emotions as partially having to do with the multiplication of her selves. Several attempts at self-identification are carried out and subsequently abandoned by her. However, such attempts should not be regarded as failures in terms of a normative constitution of the self she ought to attain. They should rather be conceived as alternating ways of finding social and religious acceptance and responding to social and religious humiliation.

In my analysis of *Medea*, I follow an existential approach instead of the influential psychological and psychoanalytic ones mentioned above.[6] According to my approach, Medea's emotions reflect her being-in-the-world. What is at stake in her being-in-the-world is her search for a place where she can feel at home, a place where she can exist as herself.[7] Her emotions express her being-in-the-world, the

[2] In addition to the article discussed below, see G. A. Staley, *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (Oxford, 2010), notably 160 n. 39, where he acknowledges his debt to Segal.

[3] J. G. Fitch and S. McElduff, 'Construction of the Self in Senecan Drama', in Fitch (n. 1), 162 (originally published in *Mnemosyne* 55 [2002], 18–40).

[4] *Ibid.*, 179–80.

[5] *Ibid.*, 170, 180.

[6] On the influential character of Fitch and McElduff's article, see W.-L. Liebermann, 'Senecas Tragödien: Forschungsüberblick und Methodik', in M. Billerbeck and E. A. Schmidt (eds.), *Sénèque le tragique* (Geneva, 2004), 36–7, who connects their article with Segal's book on the Senecan *Phaedra*; W.-L. Liebermann, 'Medea', in G. Damschen, A. Heil, and M. Waida (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Seneca. Philosopher and Dramatist* (Leiden, 2014), 471, where he disapprovingly refers to the article as a typical modern interpretation of *Medea*.

[7] For the concepts of being-in-the-world and being-at-home, see M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, ed. T. Rentsch (Tübingen, 2001), 52–9; M. Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt – Endlichkeit – Einsamkeit*, ed. F. W. von Hermann (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 5–10.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

success or failure of her recognition by those around her.[8] Medea's hesitations throughout the play regarding the decision on which identity to adopt for herself are the result of such an existential search and are intrinsically related to the inconstancy of her emotions. This means that her surrounding world is not an inner, merely imagined one, but rather an outer, real, and effective world in which she seeks to affirm her self and which determines her emotions to the point of making them monstrous. The characteristics and eccentricities of Medea's surrounding world stem from its fictional and mythical nature. Her being-in-the-world is therefore a being-in-the-world-of-fiction or a being-in-the-world-of-myth, whose understanding benefits from the borrowing of concepts and perspectives from philosophy, literary studies, and anthropology.[9]

In what follows, I intend to examine the monstrousness of Medea's emotions along the lines of interpretation just drawn.[10] I will explore the phenomenon of the monstrous beyond the mere occurrences of *monstrum*, taking into account also other terms of the same semantic field (such as *horridus*, *nefas*, *scelus*, *tremendus*, and the like). By 'monstrous' I mean the violation of human, natural, and divine laws, as well as its destructive and shocking effects, which these terms point to as they are employed in *Medea*. Especially with regard to Medea, such a violation is linked to the intensification and magnification of her emotions. When I speak of 'monstrous emotions', I refer to Medea's violation of the abovementioned laws under the influence of her intensified and magnified emotions. As we shall see, her oscillations between opposing emotional states and conflicting identities are also instantiations of the monstrous, insofar as they correspond to dissolutions of usually well-demarcated boundaries, with their corrosive effects on her state of mind and sense of self.

[8] On the link between the existential approach to literary texts and the issue of recognition, see R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris, 1957), 167–8. E. M. Bexley, 'Recognition and the Character of Seneca's *Medea*', *Cambridge Classical Journal* 62 (2016), 31–51, deals at length with the topic of recognition in *Medea*.

[9] F. Dupont's anthropological take on Senecan tragedy is extremely illuminating and her perspectives are crucial at decisive moments of my analysis, especially when the notion of mythical memory is at stake – see *Les monstres de Sénèque. Pour une dramaturgie de la tragédie romaine* (Paris, 1995). On the importance of theoretical perspectives from fields outside Classical Studies for understanding the figure of Medea and her emotions in ancient literature, see E. Sanders, 'The Emotions of Medea: An Introduction', *G&R* current issue.

[10] For the centrality of the monstrous in Senecan tragedy and the etymology of the Latin *monstrum*, see Staley (n. 2), 96–120, 155–60.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Seneca's *Medea* is an exemplary case in terms of describing the monstrousness of emotions. The figure of Medea represents one of the most extreme manifestations of this monstrousness, the moment when it leads to one of the most heinous crimes that Western literary imagination was able to conceive: a mother's murder of her own children. The way in which Seneca portrays Medea's situation in the world offers us an illuminating description of the mechanisms by which emotions can amplify themselves to monstrous proportions and act monstrously on the world. *Medea* shows in detail how emotions are linked to one's search for recognition in the world, in such a way that one's failure or success in obtaining it has proportional emotional reflexes. The amplification of Medea's emotions reaches monstrous proportions because of the degree of her failure in obtaining the others' recognition in the human world.

I will first demonstrate that Medea's emotions (notably family love, erotic love, anger, rage, and resentment) are social and religious emotions, whose causes and consequences are related to the external world in its social and religious nature. Second, I will show that Medea's monstrousness is placed by Seneca in a wider (cosmic, religious, and mythical) framework, her behaviour presented as a divine punishment for the audacity involved in the Argonauts' violation of the boundaries of the world. Furthermore, Medea's emotions kindle the memory of her past deeds, which emotionally connects her past and present monstrousness. Her emotions are responsible for the connection between her individual existence, human society, cosmic order, and mythical memory. Finally, I will indicate that Medea's emotional monstrousness is paradoxically unleashed by a desire to preserve her social and religious ties, which she partially fulfils by remaining present among human beings as a haunting, mythical memory of the irruption of the monstrous into human society.

Medea's structure and chain of events have a key connection with the emotions of its main character. The consideration of how Medea's emotions change over the course of the play is decisive for an understanding of what is at stake in it.[11] Throughout the play, Medea appears as an eminently emotional figure, as an excessive figure in terms of the manifestation of her emotions. From the analysis of the dynamics of her

[11] On the importance of considering the chain of events in *Medea* for its understanding, see L. Walsh, 'Murder, Interrupted: Seneca's *Medea* and the Case of the Second Child', *Helios* 45 (2018), 70–3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

emotions as Seneca presents them, we can understand the episodes of her individual story, as well as the events associated with her participation in the Argonautic adventure.

Medea's emotions are female emotions, stemming from her female being-in-the-world. She seeks recognition from others as a woman. Her hesitation about the identity to adopt in the world is a hesitation between being Jason's wife/the mother of his children and being a monster who violates the rules that the woman's role in society usually obeys. Likewise, her emotional inconsistency during the play corresponds to an alternation between, on the one hand, emotions deriving from the dreamed-of possibility of her returning to her role as a wife/mother and, on the other, emotions resulting from the final frustration of this possibility.

Seneca's *Medea* is an example of how the reflection on emotions in antiquity can be carried out through the use of myth and its recreation.[12] The story of Medea allows Seneca to present the superhuman dimension of emotions, both in terms of their origin as a divine punishment and in terms of their destructive and shocking effects on the human community. The Senecan portrait of Medea's monstrous emotions through myth and literature is an exercise in experimentation. As I shall indicate more clearly below, in *Medea* Seneca portrays aspects related to the emotions that he does not present in his philosophical treatise *On Anger*, notably the aspect that concerns the indecisiveness involved in anger. The narrative in *Medea*, insofar as it is a myth, runs parallel to history. Nevertheless, it interacts with history, in the sense that it depicts aspects of the emotions that are present in reality, taking them to the extreme, and in the sense that it haunts human existence through the representation of Medea's emotional excesses, with their most monstrous expression in her killings at the end of the play.

In her opening speech Medea starts off with a prayer to the gods of marriage (1), which immediately places the drama in a mythical framework.[13] She demands the presence of the Furies (13–17) and asks them to accomplish her revenge plans on the king, princess, and city of Corinth (17–18). Medea presents herself as a victim of crime who

[12] For the transformations of the figure of Medea in ancient literature, see E. Lefèvre, 'Die Transformation der griechischen durch die römische Tragödie am Beispiel von Senecas *Medea*', in H. Flashar (ed.), *Tragödie. Idee und Transformation* (Stuttgart, 1997), 65–83; G. Manuwald, 'Medea: Transformations of a Greek Figure in Latin Literature', *G&R* 60 (2013), 114–35.

[13] Text and translation of *Medea* are taken from J. G. Fitch (ed.), *Seneca. Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician Women, Medea, Phaedra* (Cambridge, MA, 2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

intends to carry out a revenge plan (13) as a result of her anger, and indeed a plan whose target also includes Jason and their children (19–25).[14] From the very beginning of the play, the target of her revenge is already determined in its entirety (25).[15]

Medea's words make clear that her revenge plans go against common sense and morality, and that the accomplishment of such plans will involve a rejection of common behaviour (26–8). Her feeling of injustice makes her suspect that the very laws of nature, which are equated with activities performed by the gods (in this case, the Sun), have been broken by Jason and the Corinthian royal family (28–31).[16] Medea's monstrousness, in terms of emotions and actions, will be a consequence of a monstrous deed perpetrated against her. Her anger and wish for revenge are intensified by an awareness of the might of her divine ancestry (32–4). Her wish to set Corinth on fire, with its geological consequences (35–6), does not result from a delusional mind deprived of a sense of reality but from her awareness that such a possibility is within her reach, given her divine origins and magical powers.

In lines 37–9 Medea envisions the accomplishment of her revenge through a perverted version of religious wedding rituals, thus indicating that the events related to her future deeds are clothed with a symbolic and religious meaning and connected with social and religious conventions. Among other things, she wants to free herself from her social and religious role and behaviour as a woman (42–3). She addresses her own spirit as a way of remembering her old deeds. Her former deeds are monstrous, and their monstrousness derives from their effect on the external, socially and religiously meaningful world (40–8). Medea addresses her spirit, indicates that her mind is disturbed, and suggests that the way her body is feeling is a manifestation of its memory of her past crimes (40–5), but the reference point of her self-address, psychological disturbance, and bodily memory is a set of external events, whose monstrousness has to do with the fact that they were crimes perpetrated against social and religious conventions (45–8). The conventions she violated in the past are the same as those she will violate in the future (44–5). Her invocation of mythical memory results in an

[14] See Arist. *Rh.* 2.2 for the connection between anger and revenge and 2.9 on indignation at acts of injustice.

[15] See C. D. N. Costa (ed.), *Seneca. Medea* (Oxford, 1973), 61.

[16] See *ibid.*, 66; H. M. Hine (ed.), *Seneca. Medea* (Warminster, 2000), 117; Sen. *Phaedra* 677–9, *Thyestes* 789–804.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

identification of the past and the future, in a confluence of the past and the future in the present that leads to a suspension of the natural, divinely sanctioned law of temporal succession, which is itself a monstrous event (52–5).

However, the sequence of Medea's speech shows that temporal succession is not completely suspended. Medea claims that she does not want to become a girl again or return to the past. In fact, she wants to stop being a girl, which means that in the future she intends to commit greater crimes than the ones she perpetrated in the past (48–50). She will no longer commit such crimes for the sake of a husband but rather for her own sake in terms of her social and mythical reputation (51–5). Medea reaches a high intensity of feeling (*dolor*, *ira*, *furor*) by means of rhetorical intensification.[17] Her feelings follow her words, trying to match them and live up to them. This rhetorical intensification is not a mere playing with words but reflects key contents in the play: Medea's social and mythical status, her revenge plans, and the progressive growth of her monstrous emotions. Medea wants to exceed herself in her crimes. She exhorts herself to attain that intensity of passion which will allow her to carry out the revenge she desires (40–2, 51–2). This does not amount to a merely inner psychological intensification: it mirrors her progressive isolation from social ties and conventions, as well as her attempt to respond to such isolation (53–5). Medea's former crimes were motivated by her love relation with Jason and resulted both in the loss of her social role in Colchis and in her exile. Her current situation is a consequence of her violation of basic social and religious rules (54–5), but her marriage to Jason, for all the monstrousness lying in its background, constitutes a relative integration of Medea into the context of a community.[18] However, the anticipation of her future crimes and their unheard-of monstrousness announces an eventual total break with social conventions.

In her second speech, Medea is angry as a consequence of her total social isolation (118–20). She feels disrespected and not recognized in her social and mythical identity, which is marked by her past deeds. The Medea whom Jason married is the doer of horrible

[17] On the dynamics among *dolor*, *furor*, and *nefas* in the metamorphosis of tragic heroes into monsters, see Dupont (n. 9), 55–90. She maintains that Seneca's theatrical rhetoric of passions is a means for these tragic heroes to leave their humanity behind (105).

[18] See L. Abrahamsen, 'Roman Marriage Law and the Conflict of Seneca's *Medea*', *QUCC* 62 (1999), 109, 110.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

crimes (120–2). She is 'perplexed and frenzied and maddened' (123). Her state is not merely an inner, subjective one, but involves an external dimension. Her intention is to match her past crimes in their familial consequences (134–5), in order to be socially and mythically recognized as powerful and to preserve her former identity and sense of self. If they were not directed toward Jason and their sons, Medea's revenge plans could simply result in the recovery of her former position as Jason's wife; but she wants to hurt him (124–6): 'And yet I did no crime from anger; the cruelty came from my unhappy love' (135–6). Medea confesses that she is now acting out of anger, which did not happen in the past. In her former crimes, she acted out of love, one which has now proved unhappy.

Medea's proclaimed madness in line 123 announces what afterwards will appear as a hesitation in her attitude towards Jason. She is now turning 'one way and another' (123–4), not only physically but also in the sense that she is not able to decide whether she should take revenge on Jason (138–9) or forgive him (137–8). Medea wavers between judging Jason guilty and responsible for his unforgivable behaviour, which is socially damaging for her, and declaring Creon a perpetrator of socially condemnable deeds and the sole deserver of punishment (143–9). Her attribution of guilt to Creon places him in the position of a monstrous breaker of rules, and consequently sets Medea on the side of social and religious conventions.[19]

Medea's passion breaks with the usual calculated dialectic between revenge and safety (150–4). She wants to manifest her wish for revenge even at the cost of her own death (170). She places herself beyond the logic of extremes – she is beyond hope and despair (163). Line 166 is where her famous words occur: 'Medea remains'. Medea's self-assertion is made in the face of her total loss of social ties, such as her role as Jason's wife and princess of Colchis. It points to her former power, which cannot simply be defined in inner psychological terms but should be understood on the basis of her position in a world that is socially, religiously, and mythically determined.

Medea's behaviour in her exchange with the Nurse cannot be reduced to a coherent pattern. It reflects the instability resulting from her intensely felt emotions. She moves back and forth between a total

[19] For the conflict between Medea and the Greek city of Corinth as a clash of cultures, see Abrahamsen (n. 18), 118; C. Benton, 'Bringing the Other to Center Stage: Seneca's *Medea* and the Anxieties of Imperialism', *Arethusa* 36 (2003), 271–84.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

break with all her familial ties and the awareness of her powerful social lineage – between a challenging of death itself and a concession to the logic of cunning revenge and safe escape (168–76). In line 175 the Nurse addresses Medea's *animi*, and in the following line Medea speaks of her own *animus* in terms that remind us of her former self-assertion and self-identification, which means that the *animi*/*animus* are the core of her being. From the context in which both references occur, it seems clear that Medea's *animi*/*animus* indicate her essential link to the social realm, which motivates her proud and violently enraged reaction to the feeling of social humiliation resulting from Jason's unilateral decision to break up their marriage. The fact that the *animi*/*animus* are associated with the socially determined emotions of pride and rage shows that an essential relation exists between the core of her being and these social emotions.[20]

Ode 2 places Medea – her monstrous emotions and crimes – in the framework of a series of monstrous events resulting from the audacity of the Argonautic expedition: she is the worst of several monstrous events that have taken, and will take, place as a consequence of the Argonautic insolence (301–2, 361–3). Such a presentation of Medea introduces a more objective view of the play's main character, not only because it is the Chorus who speak but also because she appears in the context of an objective view of time and events.[21] From this perspective, her emotions and crimes should not simply be interpreted as a consequence of her subjective motivations and feelings but as a result of the insolence of the Argonauts towards nature and its boundaries (309–7, 318–29). Medea's past and future crimes are presented and foreseen as resulting from a previous violation of natural boundaries and consisting in a subsequent punishment by the gods (329–34, 340–60).[22]

In the second scene between mistress and nurse, Medea keeps running here and there (385), showing emotional disorientation (389) and lack of self-control (382–90).[23] This characterization is made by the

[20] In the plural, *animus* can designate 'passion', 'pride', and 'rage': see Costa (n. 15), 88; Hine (n. 16), 136.

[21] See H. Fyfe, 'An Analysis of Seneca's *Medea*', in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Seneca Tragicus. Ramus Essays on Senecan Drama* (Berwick, Victoria, 1983), 86–7.

[22] See Fyfe (n. 21), 87, 90; G. Lawal, 'Seneca's *Medea*: The Elusive Triumph of Civilization', in G. W. Bowersock, W. Burkert, and M. C. J. Putnam (eds.), *Arktouros. Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (Berlin, 1979), 419–20.

[23] Such a portrayal of Medea is traditional – see Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.645–55. For other physical depictions in Seneca of overwhelming emotional states, see *Hercules* 1043–8; *Phaedra* 360–86;

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Nurse, who objectively describes Medea's inner state of confusion and indecision.[24] Although the Nurse first addresses Medea using the second person singular (380–1) and only afterwards shifts to the third person singular (382–96), her address to Medea already involves an objective description of the latter's emotional state. Medea's state is depicted as the swelling of a passion (392) that cannot be contained within the limits of her inner psychological sphere. Her rage has its terminus in the outer world and is directed towards external targets (391–2).

Medea's eventual monstrousness will be greater than her past monstrousness (393–4). What the Nurse sees is no longer Medea enraged but Rage itself (396),[25] which indicates that, from the mythical perspective of the play, what matters is not so much Medea as a psychological human subject as the way in which she elevates herself to the status of an external, quasi-divine emotional force, in order to surpass her own monstrous crimes in the past.

Medea seeks to assert her might by means of a comparison with fearful events taking place in nature (401–14). Her speech seems to reveal an incoherence in her view of nature and to manifest her delusional state of mind, from which she projects onto nature the contents of a psychologically disturbed, highly subjective, and erratic perspective – but in fact she is trying to show her might by placing herself and her monstrous emotions in the framework of a series of natural, objective events, which are themselves a visible expression of the way in which nature disturbs itself by means of natural phenomena. Medea claims that she is mightier than any of the aforementioned natural catastrophes (407–10), and that her monstrous emotions are a superlative expression of nature's self-destructive force (414). This is what grants Medea her social and mythical renown (423–5). Her rage and intention to destroy the world lead to an overt sacrilegious offence against the gods (424–5).

The objective dimension of the content of Medea's speech is confirmed by the Nurse's ensuing advice to her (426, 429–30). The last exchange between the two before Medea's exchange with Jason reveals a contrast between the Nurse's will to keep the current order of the

Oedipus 921–4; *Agamemnon* 237–8; *Thyestes* 908–18; *Hercules on Oeta* 233–53; *On Anger* 1.1.3–4, 2.36.4–5, 3.4.1–3.

[24] According to Hine (n. 16), 154, Medea's indecisiveness is 'an additional element' which is absent from the descriptions in Seneca's *On Anger*.

[25] For the personification of *furor*, see Sen. *Hercules* 98, 1220–1; *Oedipus* 590; *Agamemnon* 1012; Verg. *Aen.* 1.294–6; Serv. *Praef.* 1.294.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

world (429–30) and Medea's negative link to the world, in the sense that the latter's attachment to the emotions of pride and love makes her continue to feel ashamed and humiliated to the point of wanting to annihilate the entire world (427–8).

In her following exchange with Jason, Medea claims that she is entering into a completely new situation. Her words indicate that her current situation is marked by the loss of her fatherland, but her family ties have remained up to now in the form of her marriage to Jason (447–9), to which divine natural elements were witnesses (481).[26] Medea has nowhere else to go (458–60). With the break-up of her marriage to Jason, she no longer has a place among mortals. Her despair and subsequent rage are caused by her being rejected by him. This foreshadows her departure to heaven at the end of the play. The monstrously enraged Medea will have a dwelling place only among the gods.

There is an apparent incoherence in Medea's speech, in the sense that she admits her guilt for having committed monstrous crimes (461, 465, 479–80), but this is just to reinforce the idea that she is being betrayed by Jason and is therefore a victim of the utmost social humiliation and betrayal (465: *ingratum caput*).[27] Medea is enraged because of the injustice of her abandonment by Jason after all she did for him (466–89), which she feels is a higher form of injustice than that of her crimes. She nevertheless begs Jason for help as a suppliant (478–82, 489). She wants to preserve her remaining family ties. Her rage expresses her feeling of total isolation and therefore bears a social character. Medea, who defeated monsters (479), does not wish to be completely monstrous.

Lines 504–5 are revealing in terms of Jason's (and, for that matter, Medea's) motivations: they are both conditioned by the social or intersubjective emotion of *pudor* ('shame').[28] The way she reacts to his suggestion that Creusa be a mother for their children (510–12) shows that the question of social lineage and status is no secondary matter for her. In lines 517–18 and the rest of their exchange, the social roots of

[26] The gods are witnesses of their marriage in Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1128–69.

[27] See Hine (n. 16), 160: '*caput*, like Greek κάρα and κεφαλή, is used in emotive expressions like this, to express hatred or affection'.

[28] For this emotion in the tragic Seneca, see also 488, 900, 989; *Hercules* 1240; *Trojan Women* 91; *Phoenician Women* 301; *Phaedra* 250–62; *Oedipus* 19, 763, 1008, 1010; *Agamemnon* 113; *Thyestes* 27, 215. A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Seneca. Medea* (Oxford, 2014), 194–5, presents a useful summary definition of *pudor*. On shame in Seneca's prose works, see D. Wray, 'Seneca's Shame', in S. Bartsch and A. Schiesaro (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Seneca* (Cambridge, 2015), 199–211.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Medea's emotions and actions become plain. She wants to overcome all social and political threats (516–17). Her wish to regain her social position (or not lose it completely) leads her to defy Fortune itself (520). Medea's desire is directed towards Jason both as the object of her love and a means of recovering her former social position (522–4).

Pretium ('prize') in line 518 should be read along the same lines as *pretium* in line 361. Jason is an ambiguous prize: he is seen by the disputants as a beneficial prize, but from a more objective perspective the dispute around him constitutes the final episode of the chain of monstrous events depicted in Ode 2. Conversely, *pretium* in line 518 sheds light on the meaning in line 361. In both cases, the winning of the prize brings social prestige. This indicates that the whole set of events described by the Chorus in Ode 2 is motivated by social prestige. If Medea is a prize, the whole story depicted in *Medea* (notably her monstrous emotions, and their causes and consequences) should be viewed as having a fundamentally social character. Both Medea and Jason are acting cunningly, using their children and their love for them as a rhetorical weapon to socially and emotionally condition one another (541–3, 544–9). He wants to preserve his current position in Corinth, while her purpose is to take custody of her children in order to carry out revenge against him.

Once Jason is gone, Medea returns to her unrestrained emotional state. She can now reveal her deceitful strategy during the exchange with Jason (564–6, 568–78) and summon up her extremely passionate state (562–4, 566–7), which is never totally absent but acts under the surface as it guides her deceitful behaviour towards him. There is an interesting contrast and play between depth and surface, which does not so much point to an inner state of mind as takes place on an intersubjective plane. Medea understands that the control of her emotions will not grant her a place in the world, but rather result in her exile and in her being forgotten. Only revenge will grant her such a place in the form of mythical remembrance (560–2).[29]

Ode 3 confirms the social roots of the Medea case. The metaphor in lines 579–82 is not between nature and Medea's mind but between nature and the social condition of Medea as an enraged, betrayed married woman (581). The whole plot of *Medea* is again said to derive from the gods as a punishment for the Argonautic conquest of the second

[29] On mythical memory in Seneca's plays, see Dupont (n. 9), 223–34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

realm: the sea (595–9). This means that the Medea story as depicted in the Senecan play (notably her social emotions and her ensuing monstrous revenge) should not be understood as having its original motivations in her inner psychological states – but should rather be placed in a wider, temporal, cosmic, and religious framework. Although Medea's point of view dominates the play, this is not the only point of view present in it or from which the play should be interpreted. Medea is a divine instrument: the gods take revenge on the Argonauts and Jason's Corinthian hosts through her destructive effect (581–2). At the same time, she is one of the Argonauts – one of those who broke the inviolate pacts of the world (605–6) – and is also being punished by her own actions.[30] In light of the Argonautic odes, her monstrous emotions and her monstrous killing of her two sons are forms of self-destruction and self-punishment that should ultimately – cosmically and religiously – be read as divine punishments.

In sharp contrast to the Chorus's advice (603–6), the whole Medea story is presented as hubristic. The Argonautic expedition (607–15), the punishment by the gods (614–67), and Medea's monstrous behaviour as a betrayed married woman (581–2) appear to be a causal chain of events.[31] The Argonauts violate the pacts of the world; the gods pit the monstrous Medea against the Argonauts, Jason, and the Corinthians; Medea breaks basic rules of human community and profoundly disturbs the order of the city of Corinth – the violation of nature is divinely punished by the violation of human rules (668–9). The Chorus ask the gods to spare Jason (596, 608–9): they intend to restrain Medea from carrying out a revenge that will destroy some of the most fundamental rules of human community by bringing to completion the monstrous set of events ordained by the gods.

In her ensuing speech, the Nurse points to the relation between *pavor*, *horror*, and *dolor* on the one hand (670, 671) and the monstrous on the other, the latter being associated with its devastating effect (670) and the magnitude of Medea's feelings (671–2). The monstrous growth of

[30] In lines 607–15 it is suggested that all those who (*quisquis*; 607, 610) participated in the Argo expedition were or will be punished. Medea will mention later in the play that everyone will have paid the penalty (*dabimus, sed omnes*; 965) for the murder of her brother, which is one of the episodes in the narrative of the Argonauts. By murdering her children, Medea will complete the cycle of divine punishments for all those who are directly or indirectly linked to the Argonauts' crimes. The Furies will be the divine agents who make possible that these crimes are completely punished through Medea's killings (958–71).

[31] See Boyle (n. 28), 273.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

her emotions is related to the memory of her past deeds (671–5, notably 674–5: *maius his, maius parat / Medea monstrum*, 'greater than that, greater still is the monstrosity Medea is preparing').[32] Her rage (673) feeds on the past and on mythical monsters (675–90). The Nurse's description in lines 675–80 seems to point to the inner psyche as the place where Medea's monstrous passionate state originates. However, the use of terminology involving depth is misleading, for it may suggest that inner psychological depth is the 'occult, mysterious, hidden things' the Nurse refers to in line 679. Such a depth is, in fact, that of memory as the plane Medea resorts to in order to amplify her monstrous emotions. Although the Nurse describes an interior, physical space and refers to Medea's magical resources (677, 679), a connection between the 'inner sanctum' where Medea carries out her magical rituals and the more immaterial space of mythical memory is clearly suggested.[33] The Nurse points to a time yet to come in which Medea will perpetrate the monstrous crimes she is destined to commit, being the mythical figure that she is (674–5, 677–8).

It is noteworthy that the Nurse reproduces Medea's speech (690), which should obviously not be taken as the latter's own words. According to the Nurse, Medea says she will rise above vulgar criminality (690–3). To this effect, she invokes several mythical monsters (694–704). In her invocation there are some references to natural phenomena and what seems to be their allegorical interpretation. However, I think there is no allegory here: what Medea sees (and what the audience see, guided by her description) are the mythical monsters themselves that she invokes. The fact that her collection of poisons is impossible to attain in such a short time (705–30) should not discredit the Nurse's report, for tragedy belongs to the domain of fiction – and, indeed, to a fictional domain where this kind of unbelievable event usually occurs. It is the Nurse who reports this, which demonstrates that it is not something happening in Medea's supposedly delusional mind.

The same holds for the breaking of nature's laws in the context of Medea's frenzied speech (740–848). Such a breaking (757, 759) is not a reflection of her delusion but an objective state of affairs resulting from her magical powers. The materialization of her magical powers and revenge plans are not products of her imagination: they are carried

[32] See Hine (n. 16), 177: 'The alliteration of *m* is striking, reinforcing the repetition of *maius*, "greater", and the link between M[edea]'s name and *monstrum*, "horror" or "portent" (originally a religious term for an unnatural event or object that indicates the hostility of the gods).'

[33] See Dupont (n. 9), 230–1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

out in complicity with the Nurse (817, 843–4) and sacrilegious figures of the realm of myth (820–42). Medea's breaking of the laws of nature links her magical rituals to the audacity of the Argonauts, who violated the universe's laws (335, 606). Her magical rituals and their consequences are part of the divine punishment for the violation of the laws of the universe by the Argonauts. In their punishment, the gods are using the same kind of violation of the universe's laws for which the Argonauts are being punished. By having Medea as their instrument, the gods are turning her into a sacrilegious figure who challenges them through her magical powers, thus deserving their punishment.[34]

Ode 4 indicates that Medea is dominated by a savage love (849–51), whose meaning is given a few lines later. Her angry love, a mixture of love and anger, results from Jason's betrayal, which has left her socially isolated and proscribed (866–9).[35] The Chorus of Corinthian citizens sense that she is preparing a fearful revenge (851–2, 869). They describe Medea's outer look, her agitation (854–6, 862–5, especially 862: *huc fert pedes et illuc*, 'she paces to and fro'[36]), change of appearance, and change of colour (858–61).[37] She does not know what to do: Medea has long since determined her plans but hesitates every time she sees an opportunity to recover her marriage to Jason (140, 524) and her role as a mother. The physical manifestations of her passionate state should be interpreted as also mirroring the current indeterminacy of her eventual familial position. In their description of her indecisive behaviour, the Chorus proleptically point to events that will take place in the final act of the play and are connected with her adoption of one of two conflicting social selves.

In her last speech before her final exchange with Jason, Medea shows hesitation, a weakening of her monstrous emotions.[38] She reacts to this through self-address (895).[39] A continuum between her speech and her being arises: she becomes the result of a magnification of her emotions.

[34] In line 673 the nurse refers to the sacrilegious character of Medea's magical rituals. On Medea as a sacrilegious figure, see also lines 271, 424–5.

[35] See also lines 134–6 (contrast between love and anger), 137–42 (love and anger pulling in opposite directions).

[36] For similar passages, see 221–2, 382–96; Ov. *Met.* 4.622–3; Ov. *Med.* fr. 2 Ribbeck.

[37] Change of colour is associated with intensely felt emotions in Seneca and other ancient authors: see *Med.* 85; *Hercules on Oeta* 251–3; *On Anger* 1.1.4, 3.4.1; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.297–8; Hor. *Carm.* 1.13.5–6, Ov. *Met.* 7.78, 8.465–6.

[38] In *On Anger* 1.17.5, Seneca characterizes anger as an unstable emotion.

[39] Medea also resorts to self-address in 41, 973, 976, 988. Cf. Eur. *Med.* 1242; Neophron, *Med.* fr. 2.1.9 Diggle.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Medea recognizes that she is still dominated by erotic love (897–8) and family love (904–5), but intends to free herself from these, and so bids her spirit go beyond what is right and refuses to be guided in her action by any sense of shame (900: *fas omne cedat, abeat expulsus pudor*).[40] This does not mean that she is no longer under the rule of *fas* ('right') and *pudor* but rather that these principles influence her negatively. Medea wants to raise herself above common morality and to go beyond her past crimes,[41] resorting to anger as a means of recalling her former violence (902–4). These lines are not a revelation of her intrinsically evil being, of what her true nature is deep down, but rather an expression of the depths of her memory. In her heart she knows what she has done – and is fated to do and to become. The phrase *animus intus* ('the spirit within me') in 918 refers to Medea's memory of her mythical reputation, which she is not yet prepared to assume (918–20). She now understands the meaning of her past monstrous emotions and crimes and of her trajectory in life as leading to this one moment when she stops being a girl and becomes herself. 'Now I am Medea: my genius has grown through evils' (910).[42] Such evils are her monstrous emotions and crimes. They result from her violation of social, religious, and natural rules – not from the intrinsically evil nature of her self.

However, Medea becomes aware of the monstrousness of her imminent killing of her sons (926–7, 931–2). This awareness is a sign of her ambivalent state of mind. She is about to commit a monstrous crime but is not yet totally freed from common morality. This is shown by the fact that her anger starts to retreat, which she interprets in social terms: 'Anger retreats, and the mother returns, with the wife utterly banished' (927–8).[43] The mother survives the banishment of the wife and therefore constitutes a remaining positive familial tie. Medea's hesitation is between the anger

[40] Cf. Sen. *Thyestes* 47–8, 249.

[41] Cf. *ibid.* 1052–68, where Atreus says that the revenge he has carried out so far is not enough to appease him.

[42] For related passages, see Sen. *Hercules* 33; Aesch. *Ag.* 177. Bexley (n. 8) argues that Medea's self-construction involves two coalescing and overlapping elements – the metaliterary and metatheatrical – according to which Medea constructs her self by taking into account past versions of her story, and the quasi-Stoic, which point to the idea of personal constancy. However, I think that Medea's hesitations throughout the play (140–1, 524, 895, 926–32, 937–44, 988–90) are genuine and constitute a fundamental aspect in her development as a monstrous character. Medea is aware of her mythical and literary reputation, but she doubts several times whether she is capable of fulfilling her destiny as a murderous mother (926–32, 937–44, 988–90). See also Walsh (n. 11), who presents Medea's identity construction as 'a diachronic process' (75).

[43] Cf. Sen. *Trojan Women* 626, *Agamemnon* 239; Ov. *Her.* 12.61; Ov. *Met.* 6.619–30, 7.19–20, 8.463–77, 481–511, 12.30.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

resulting from her abandonment by Jason and the love that binds her to her children. Both emotions are socially determined (937–44). 'Why do you vacillate, my spirit? Why are tears wetting my face, and anger leading me to shift in one direction, love in another?' (937–9).[44] 'Anger puts mother to flight, then mother love, anger' (943–4). Medea seems to have not just one potential self but two mutually exclusive, emotionally and socially determined selves, although one of them will prevail over the other in the end.[45] Indeed, she will be able to live up to her mythical and metaliterary reputation as a monstrous child murderer. If one is allowed to speak of a normative self in the context of *Medea*, it is only in this mythical and metaliterary sense. Curiously enough, the normativity involved in Medea's self-construction is paradoxically that of the monstrous, for her mythical and metaliterary reputation is that of a religiously, socially, and emotionally monstrous being.

Medea's resentment is again triggered by the awareness of the imminent social humiliation involved in the loss of her children as a consequence of her exile and Jason's recent marriage (947–50). Her resentment towards Jason makes her wish the same loss for him (950–3). She ends up abandoning herself to a monstrous anger: 'Anger, where you lead, I follow' (953).[46] Medea is confused and disoriented, which is due not only to her intense and disorienting emotional state but also to the fact that this emotional state reflects her ambiguous status in the framework of the divine punishment of the Argonauts. She is both the instrument of the gods in such a punishment and one of its targets. This is the reason why she asks who the target of the attack by the Furies is (958–61). She refers to her brother, Absyrtus, as the one looking for revenge, which makes clear that she is also one of the targets of her own monstrous action: 'Whose shade approaches ill-defined with limbs dispersed? It is my brother, he seeks amends. We shall pay them, yes, every one' (963–5). Medea's action will be conducted

[44] See Hine (n. 16), 204: '*amor*…can be both sexual love and affection for family and friends'. The latter is the case in line 938 (cf. *Trojan Women* 589; *Thyestes* 475).

[45] Commenting on these passages, M. C. Nussbaum, 'Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*', in J. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (eds.), *Medea. Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 226, speaks of 'an oscillation or fluctuation of the whole personality'. (A longer version of Nussbaum's study can be found in her *Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* [Princeton, NJ, 1994], ch. 12.) C. Trinacty, 'Seneca's *Heroides*: Elegy in Seneca's *Medea*', *CJ* 103 (2007), 76, maintains that Medea's choice of anger instead of family love signals Seneca's departure from Ovid's elegiac tone in his *Heroides*.

[46] Cf. Sen. *Phaedra* 178–9, *Agamemnon* 142–3, *Thyestes* 100; Ov. *Her.* 12.209; Ov. *Met.* 5–668, 7.20–1; Ov. *Ars am.* 2.550.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

by objective, transcendent forces of revenge: the Furies. She addresses her brother, asking him to bid the Furies let her be the instrument of the gods' revenge, after which she sacrifices one of her sons (967–71).

Having heard some noise (972), Medea climbs to the top of the house (973–4), where she will kill her second son. She is performing for an audience (976–7), consciously representing her theatrical and mythical role before the Corinthians and before an audience – but most fundamentally before Jason (992–4). Her monstrous killing of their children is complete only when Jason becomes a spectator of the murder of their second child and is seen suffering as a result of an act that strips him of familial ties. He falls down to the same social position as her, except that he is dominated by resignation, not by monstrously magnified emotions (1014–15).

However, Medea hesitates again: 'Why delay now, my spirit? Why hesitate? Has your powerful anger already flagged? I regret what I have done, I feel ashamed. What have I done, poor woman?' (988–90). Her feeling of shame derives from her awareness that by murdering her child she has shed kindred blood and violated one of the basic rules of human society. Her final act of transgression is preceded by a return to the sphere of common morality. At the same time, she feels a growing pleasure as a result of having Jason as a spectator of her monstrous actions (991–3), which clearly indicates the mixed nature of her emotions: her wavering between common morality and an emotion deriving from a monstrous act. A similar feeling of accomplishment of her revenge comes to light a little later when, after killing her second child, she addresses her own resentment, saying that she has nothing more to sacrifice to it (1019–20).

On the roof of the house, about to kill her second son, Medea refers again to her revenge as a perverted marriage ritual (985–6). Through the violation of her social role as a mother, she sees herself returning to a pre-marital state, as if she had never married Jason and had children by him, and as if she had never committed the crimes involved in her complicity with him and the Argonautic expedition (982–4). However, Medea does not think she is literally returning to the past: she is merely showing that she is about to free herself from her current familial bonds, not returning to childhood, as is clear from a careful reading of her words.[47] First, Medea speaks of maidenhood (984),

[47] Boyle (n. 28), 373, argues that 'Medea's vengeance has enabled her to return to her pre-Argonautic past, erasing all that has happened since then, including the loss of her virginity.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

not childhood. Second, she will be remembered as the monstrous figure who, among other things, murdered her two sons in front of everyone. Her self-awareness of being a monstrous figure does not disappear after lines 982–6. A few lines later, after killing her second son and before running away on the winged chariot, she addresses Jason and identifies herself with the events related to her past crimes: 'Do you recognize your wife? This is how I always escape' (1021–2).[48] Medea will live with the gods, the only community in which she will find the acceptance she has longed for throughout the play (1022: *patuit in caelum viam*, 'a path has opened to heaven'). Jason's final lines, in which he maintains that the gods are non-existent (1026–7), can be read in different ways: it expresses either his profound existential disappointment or a wish that she not find social acceptance anywhere.[49] In any case, in the company of her divine ancestors[50] or wandering through the cosmos in solitary resentment, she succeeds in finding a place among human beings, if only as a monstrous mythical and literary memory forever haunting human communities.

To sum up: the existential approach to *Medea* proves to be extremely fruitful in terms of understanding the play and how Medea's monstrous emotions are determinant in the development of her tragic narrative. Throughout the play, she seeks recognition from others in her surrounding world. The Senecan exploration of Medea's fictional and mythical world allows him to portray the main character of the play as an eminently emotional figure and to experiment with the monstrous character of her emotions. This experimentation shows the rooting of her emotions in her feminine existence, as well as the extent to which the inconsistency and intensity of these emotions go hand in hand with the back-and-forth movement between her dreamed-of existential success and her awareness of her almost total existential failure.

She has completely recovered the "dowry" of 488–9'. See also G. Guastella, '*Virgo*, *Coniunx*, *Mater*: The Wrath of Seneca's Medea', *ClAnt* 20 (2001), 210, who more interestingly argues in connection with the question of the dowry that Medea's life regains a new meaning after the realization of her revenge.

[48] This is a knowing reference to Eur. *Med.* 1321–2. See also Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.9.28; Hyg. *Fab.* 26, 27; Pacuvius fr. 242 Warmington; Hor. *Epod.* 3.14; Ov. *Met.* 7.218–404, 350.

[49] Jason's denial of the gods has precedents in Eur. fr. 292.7 Nauck and Ov. *Her.* 12.119.

[50] On the connection between Medea's escape from Corinth and her divine grandfather, the Sun, see C. M. Campbell, 'Medea's Sol-ipsism: Language, Power and Identity in Seneca's *Medea*', *Ramus* 48 (2019), 22–53.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

The play highlights the monstrous character of Medea's emotions and how this is related to her surrounding world in its social, religious, cosmic, and mythical dimensions. Such emotions are monstrous because they are volatile, excessive, have a destructive and shocking effect, and are caused by monstrous events. The most important of Medea's emotions (family love, erotic love, anger, rage, and resentment) have complex interrelations and are responsible for the main events in the play. Her anger leads her to develop a monstrous revenge plan whose main target is the punishment of Jason via the killing of their children – but which also results in the murder of Creon and his daughter and in the destruction of the Corinthian community. Such anger is caused by Medea's feeling of total social isolation as a consequence of her abandonment by Jason and reflects the frustration of her wish to belong to a human community. The cause of her isolation – Jason's unilateral divorce from her and his marriage to the princess of Corinth, in which he is supported by Creon – is depicted as monstrous, as it violates the divinely sanctioned marriage between Medea and Jason.

The monstrousness of Medea's emotions is also manifested in her instability and in the way that she hesitates between opposing attitudes towards the social and religious world and between the alternating adoption of conflicting identities. She constantly oscillates between, on the one hand, familial love and her role as a wife and a mother and, on the other, erotic love, anger, rage, and resentment, through which she ends up embodying the monstrous identity of the destroyer of the Corinthian community and the murderer of her own children. But Medea's emotional instability and her hesitations concerning her identity are themselves, because of their volatility, an expression of their monstrous nature.

The monstrous character of Medea's emotions could not be fully understood if one did not consider the way in which the play presents them as having an objective cause in the divine punishment of the Argonauts. Odes 2 and 3 suggest that her emotions and acts are the most recent of a chain of monstrous events. Her monstrous crimes, which are motivated by her monstrous emotions, are conceived of as a punishment by the gods for the insolence of the Argonautic expedition. As she participated in this expedition and is herself one of the Argonauts, it becomes clear that the events in the play, with special emphasis on her killing of her two sons, should be understood as a punishment inflicted by the gods on Medea herself.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press

The dynamics between Medea's monstrous erotic love, anger, rage, and resentment, as well as the tension between these and the reconciling emotion of family love – which generates the conflict between her two potential identities of monster and mother – are closely related to mythical memory. From the beginning of the play and at some of its most significant points, the magnification of her emotions is attained by evoking the memory of her former crimes. She gradually becomes aware, in spite of her permanent hesitations in terms of emotional state and personal identity, that she can only earn Jason's recognition – that of her mythical identity, shaped by her crimes in the past – through her revenge against him, which is carried out as an attempt to overcome the monstrousness of her past deeds. It is the evocation of the mythical and metaliterary memory of Medea, both of her past crimes and of the future monstrous acts for which she became known to posterity (at least from the time of Euripides), that will grant her a relative integration in a human community – in the form of a monstrous memory of a madly in love, angry, enraged, and resented being who murdered her own children.

PAULO ALEXANDRE LIMA

Nova University of Lisbon, Portugal

plima@fcsh.unl.pt

https://doi.org/10.1017/S001738352000025X Published online by Cambridge University Press