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MEDEA AND THE JOY OF KILLING

At uindicta bonum uita iucundius ipsa (Juv. 13.180)

It may be agreed that the character of Medea, one of the most intertextual heroines of the Graeco-Roman literary tradition,[1] is a veritable crucible of the most disparate emotions, as the articles gathered in this issue aim to show. In Seneca's *Medea*, readers encounter a murderous mother who kills her own children, giving in to destructive anger or, rather, fury. This emotion has been widely and extensively studied both in relation to its Greek model, Euripides' *Medea*, and in the light of the Stoic view on passions, so that it can be acknowledged as one of the most salient features of the Roman character's emotional profile from a literary and philosophical standpoint.[2] Although both Medeas, while struggling within themselves in their famous monologues, debate whether they should or should not kill their children, Euripides'

[1] I refer here, of course, to S. Hinds, 'Medea in Ovid: Scenes from the Life of an Intertextual Heroine' *MD* 30 (1993), 9–47.

[2] Seneca appears to be in the unique position of being both a philosopher and a tragic poet, although there is still an ongoing debate as to the paternity of the tragic corpus preserved under his name: see e.g. M. Graver, 'Pre-Emotions and Reader Emotions in Seneca', *Maia* 69 (2017), 282, who finds that 'there are important methodological reasons not to try to pull the intelligence that produced the plays into a single interpretive frame with the author whom we meet in the treatises and letters'. Nonetheless, in these pages I will consider Seneca as the author of both the tragedies and the philosophical works. To understand some of the issues of the complex relationship between Seneca's plays and Stoic philosophy, see e.g. M. Nussbaum, 'Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*', in J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (eds.), *Medea. Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 219–49; C. Gill, 'Two Monologues of Self-Division: Euripides, "Medea" 1021–80 and Seneca, "Medea" 893–977', in M. Whitby, P. Hardie, and M. Whitby (eds.), *Homo Viator. Essays for John Bramble* (Bristol, 1987), 25–37; J. Müller, 'Did Seneca Understand Medea? A Contribution to the Stoic Account of *Akrasia*', in J. Wildberger and M. L. Colish (eds.), *Seneca Philosophus* (Berlin and Boston, MA, 2014), 65–94; C. Battistella and D. Nelis, 'Some Thoughts on the Anger of Seneca's *Medea*', in D. Cairns and D. Nelis (eds.), *Emotions in the Classical World. Methods, Approaches, and Directions* (Stuttgart, 2017), 245–56. See also A. J. Boyle, *Seneca. Medea* (Oxford, 2014), liv–lx; C. Star, 'Seneca *Tragicus* and Stoicism', in E. Dodson-Robinson (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2016), 34–56; C. Torre, 'Una passione teatrale: visualità, illusionismo e mimesi dell'ira in Seneca', in L. Neri (ed.), *La rappresentazione dell'ira tra letteratura, teatro e filosofia* (Rome, 2020), 55–83.

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heroine does not seem to murder them out of anger: she repeatedly claims that a pressing necessity urges her to do so;[3] by contrast, the Senecan Medea lets her anger literally lead the way (*ira, qua ducis, sequor*; 953). They both describe the filicide they are about to commit as a sacrificial act (compare Eur. *Med.* 1053–4: ὅτῳ δὲ μὴ / θέμις παρεῖναι τοῖς ἐμοῖσι θύμασιν, 'whoever is not permitted to attend my sacrifice' and Sen. *Med.* 970–1: *uictima manes tuos* / *placamus ista*, 'with this victim we placate / your spirit'[4]), but Seneca's character is pushed towards it by the dreadful hallucinations of the Furies and the shadow of her brother approaching (958–66), which certainly contributes to heightening the disquieting atmosphere of the play: his Medea ultimately appears as a much 'darker' and bleaker version of the Euripidean counterpart, also emerging as a full-blown villain, by whom readers are both repelled and fascinated. In addition to this, the vocabulary of extreme passions recurring throughout the play and the heights of anger that the Senecan Medea reaches represent some of the most noticeable variations on the Greek model, not to mention a famous portrait of the heroine by the Nurse (382–96), which strikingly resembles that of the angry man depicted by Seneca in *De ira* 1.1.3–5. In these pages, however, instead of focusing on the notorious *ira* and *furor* of Seneca's Medea,[5] I intend to concentrate on another and yet quite strongly related emotion: joy. In general, it may be noted that the bodily felt responses brought about by both anger and joy have in common the category of expansion, unlike fear and sadness (or grief), in which there is a tendency towards contraction.[6] To my knowledge, the emotion of joy in Seneca's play has not received much attention thus far, owing perhaps to the fact that, as mentioned, anger literally steals the limelight. Therefore, I will here attempt to delve into this emotion, which appears to characterize Medea's criminal deeds, especially towards the end of the play, with a view to bringing to the fore its nuances and function. Although joy, at first glance, may seem to be extraneous to a tragic plot staging a filicide, since it

[3] See e.g. Eur. *Med.* 1240–41.

[4] All translations of Euripides' *Medea* are taken from D. Kovacs (ed. and trans.), *Euripides. Cyclops; Alcestic; Medea* (Cambridge, MA, 1994). All translations of Seneca's *Medea* are taken from Boyle (n. 2).

[5] On this, apart from n. 2 above, see also E. Sanders, 'The Emotions of Medea: An Introduction', *G&R* current issue, n. 12.

[6] On this, see e.g. R. Plutchik, *The Emotions* (Lanham, MD, 1991), 87.

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is usually associated with good or positive events,[7] it will be argued that this emotion (also verging on pleasure) is particularly fitting for the Senecan character, in that it takes a 'perverted' and monstrous form in the play, even coming to distort some concepts central to the Stoic doctrine.[8]

To do so, I shall start by comparing the relevant passages in Euripides and Seneca, for, as is well known, the Senecan play proves itself to be a clever rewriting of the Greek tragedy, without which it could hardly be fully understood.[9] I shall next consider the Stoic philosophical background against which, in my view, Medea's joy and

[7] Joy, enjoyment, pleasure, excitement, and happiness are some of the words commonly used in English to express 'good feelings'. A little clarification of terminology is perhaps needed at this juncture: joy and happiness are both emotional responses to processes of accomplishment and, although these two concepts sometimes overlap, they present a different temporal structure and are related to different forms of self-realization. Generally speaking, there is consensus that 'joy' points to the episodic character of the affective event and is strongly bound to the present moment, whereas 'happiness' is tied to the end of the process of accomplishment and is much more based on an evaluative/judgemental stance, thus implying a connection with ethics/morality. On this, see now M. Summa, 'Joy and Happiness', in T. Szanto and H. Landweer (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotion* (Abingdon and New York, 2020, 416–25) with further bibliography (Summa's analysis is particularly useful to understand joy and happiness in a phenomenological context. I thank the author for kindly letting me have a copy of her article). This terminological and conceptual distinction may apply to the arguments of these pages as well; however, I will primarily look at joy and pleasure in Seneca's *Medea* by placing these affective states within a Stoic framework (on their difference, see later in the article). Interestingly, according to modern theories, pleasure is not usually regarded as an emotion, for it does not imply any cognitive scenario (see A. Wierzbicka, *Emotions across Languages and Cultures. Diversity and Universals* [Cambridge, 1999], 56; on joy 50–9), a view that is similar to that of Aristotle: he considers pleasure, and also pain, not as proper emotions, but as constituent elements accompanying emotions (e.g. *Rh.* 2.1 and 2.2.2, quoted below). On the other hand, according to the Stoic doctrine, which is 'anti-hedonist' par excellence, pleasure is classified as one of the four generic/basic emotions (together with desire, fear and pain; see also later in the article and n. 34) and gets in the way of happiness, making a person unhappy. For more details on this, see e.g. K. M. Vogt, 'What is Hedonism?', in W. V. Harris (ed.), *Pain and Pleasure in Classical Times* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2018), 93–110.

[8] On Medea's monstrosity, see P. A. Lima, 'Monstrous Emotions in Seneca's *Medea*' *G&R* current issue; see also G. A. Staley, *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (Oxford, 2010), esp. ch. 5 'Reading Monsters', 96–120.

[9] For a comparative approach to the two plays, see e.g. T. Ohlander, *Dramatic Suspense in Euripides' and Seneca's Medea* (New York, 1989). I align myself with the view according to which Seneca's plays can be defined as (tendentious and pointed) 'rewritings' rather than 'translations' of the works of his predecessors. Such a circumstance may be applied to his *Medea* too: given that the source text is preserved, it is possible for us to look into the ways that Seneca has worked on it and 'gauge' to what extent he has modified it. On this, see e.g. C. Battistella, 'The Ambiguous *Virtus* of Seneca's *Medea*', *Maia* 69 (2017), 268 and n. 2 (with further bibliography). Seneca's intertextuality in the plays, however, implies an intense dialogue, not only with the Greek models, but also with the Augustan poets, as C. Trinacty, *Senecan Tragedy and the Reception of Augustan Poetry* (Oxford, 2014), has recently shown. On Seneca's rewritings or, rather, palimpsestic texts, see also A. J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca. An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (London and New York, 2003), 90.

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pleasure are to be construed to make sense of the disturbing degree to which they are taken in the play, given that joy also figures as a pre-eminent emotion among those experienced by the Stoic sage.[10] My approach to the present topic follows in the footsteps of recent lines of research that, drawing on previous studies on the relationship between Seneca's plays and his prose, have demonstrated that the tragedies are un-Stoic, but not – or not just – in the rather simplistic sense that they negate or contradict Stoicism: the Senecan characters shed ambiguous light on the principles of that doctrine by wittingly applying – or, rather, misapplying – them to their own life and behaviour, thereby coming somehow to legitimize their evil actions, as I seek to show here specifically with regard to the character of Medea.[11]

Now to the play. After hearing the report of the Messenger concerning the death of Creon and his daughter, killed by her poisoned gift, and despite the Nurse's following advice to flee as soon as possible, Seneca's Medea is resolved not to leave: those deaths by no means suffice to let her be satisfied with her revenge (893–904):

egone ut recedam? si profugissem prius,
ad hoc redirem. nuptias specto nouas.
quid, anime, cessas? sequere felicem *impetum.*
pars ultionis ista, qua gaudes, *quota est?*
amas adhuc, furiose, si satis est tibi
caelebs Iason. quaere poenarum genus
haut usitatum iamque sic temet para:
fas omne cedat, abeat expulsus pudor;
uindicta leuis est quam ferunt purae manus.
incumbe in iras teque languentem excita
penitusque ueteres pectore ex imo impetus
uiolentus hauri…

Me? Withdraw? If I'd fled before, I'd return
for this. I'm watching a novel wedding.

[10] Graver (n. 2), 284.

[11] On Stoicism and Seneca's plays, see e.g. B. Marti, 'Seneca's Tragedies: A New Interpretation', *TAPhA* 76 (1945), 216–45; N. Pratt, *Seneca's Drama* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1983); A. Schiesaro, *The Passions in Play. Thyestes and the Dynamics of Senecan Drama* (Cambridge, 2003), esp. 228 ff.; G. A. Staley, *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (Oxford, 2010). In recent times, Christopher Star has shown that Seneca's characters have recourse to the Stoic method of self-address and self-command to pursue un-Stoic aims: see 'Commanding *Constantia* in Senecan Tragedy', *TAPhA* 136 (2006), 207–44; and *The Empire of the Self. Self-Command and Political Speech in Seneca and Petronius* (Baltimore, MD, 2012). See also Battistella (n. 9); C. Battistella, 'La colère en scene: quelques réflexions sur la *Médée* de Sénèque, entre dramaturgie et philosophie', *Latomus* 77 (2018), 59–73.

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Why delay, soul? Follow your fertile *impulse.*
How small a part of vengeance now thrills *you.*
You still love, mad soul, if you're satisfied
with Jason wifeless. Find a punishment
truly unique and prepare yourself now:
all morality be gone, banish shame.
Vengeance is trivial which pure hands enact.
Pressure your anger, stir your sluggish self,
fiercely drag your ancient violence
from deep in your heart...

Medea does not hide her excitement resulting from the death of her enemies: she even seems to experience some kind of aesthetic pleasure in becoming – in a metatheatrical way – the spectator of her own 'production' (*nuptias specto nouas*, 'I'm watching a novel wedding'; 894); however, this is only a *pars ultionis*, a small part of her revenge (*quota*), one that certainly has given her joy, but has still to be pursued (896) and, as we know, will culminate in the filicide. The emotions evoked by Medea clearly belong to the affective (and semantic) field of joy, as suggested by the terms *felicem* (895) and *gaudes* (896). The *impetus felix* she enjoins her soul to follow ironically plays with the double notion of *felix*, signifying both 'joyful' and 'fertile': her murderous impulse proves indeed fecund, since, after enabling her to achieve the first part of her vengeance, it will also allow her to bring her murderous plan to an end precisely through the death of those to whom she has given birth.[12] But it is especially the verb *gaudes* that noticeably identifies the type of emotion aroused in her by the first set of deaths that occurred: as Boyle notes, 'Medea is not shy about her pleasure in crime.'[13]

As a matter of fact, it is not rare to come across characters rejoicing in the death of their enemies in tragedy (and in epic as well), primarily owing to the value attached to the notion of revenge in the ancient world.[14] Creon and his daughter indeed represent Medea's enemies,

[12] Boyle (n. 2), *ad loc.* duly signals the dark irony suggested by the adjective. See also *Med.* 25–6: *parta iam, parta ultio est:* / *peperi* ('it's born now – vengeance – born: / I've given birth').

[13] *Ibid.*, 353.

[14] On joy in ancient drama in general, see now the recent volume M. De Poli (ed.), *Il teatro delle emozioni. La gioia* (Padua, 2019; esp. L. Di Raimo, 'Gioia simulata e gioia indotta: il godimento della vendetta in Seneca tragico', 313–26). On revenge in Greek culture and literature, see A. Pippin Burnett, *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy* (Berkeley, CA, 1998). See also Eur. *Bacch.* 1033 (the chorus rejoices in listening to the details of Pentheus' dismemberment); Eur. *Hec.* 1258 with J. Mossman, *Wild Justice. A Study of Euripides' Hecuba* (Oxford, 1995), 190; Cassandra's joy in Sen. *Ag.* 870–3, 1011 (she considers herself lucky in that she has survived

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her 'regular' foes, so to speak, since the former has banned her from Corinth, whereas the latter has replaced her in Jason's bed. Medea's elation over the news that her revenge plan against them[15] went well is already to be found in Euripides' play, especially at lines 1125–35, where we read the words she exchanges with the messenger who has come to announce the deaths of the king and his daughter:

Ἄγγελος:	ὄλωλεν ἡ τύραννος ἀρτίως κόρη	1125
	Κρέων θ᾽ ὁ φύσας φαρμάκων τῶν σῶν ὕπο.	
Μήδεια:	κάλλιστον εἶπας μῦθον, ἐν δ᾽ εὐεργέταις	
	τὸ λοιπὸν ἤδη καὶ φίλοις ἐμοῖς ἔσῃ.	
Ἄγγελος:	τί φῄς; φρονεῖς μὲν ὀρθὰ κοὐ μαίνῃ, γύναι,	
	ἥτις, τυράννων ἑστίαν ἠκισμένη,	1130
	χαίρεις κλύουσα κοὐ φοβῇ τὰ τοιάδε;	
Μήδεια:	ἔχω τι κἀγὼ τοῖσι σοῖς ἐναντίον	
	λόγοισιν εἰπεῖν: ἀλλὰ μὴ σπέρχου, φίλος,	
	λέξον δέ: πῶς ὤλοντο; δὶς τόσον γὰρ ἂν	
	τέρψειας ἡμᾶς, εἰ τεθνᾶσι παγκάκως.	1135
Messenger:	The princess and her father Creon have just been killed by your poisons.	
Medea:	A splendid report you bring! Henceforth I shall regard you as one of my benefactors and friends.	
Messenger:	What? Can you be in your right mind and not mad, woman? Can you commit an outrage against the royal house, and then *rejoice* at the news and not be afraid?	
Medea:	I too have something that I could say in reply to your words. Do not be hot and hasty, friend, but tell me: how did they die? You will *give me twice the pleasure* if they died in agony.	

The joy Medea feels upon hearing how her enemies have perished is, therefore, already a prominent trait in the portrayal of the Euripidean

the fall of Mycenae, also hinting at the future resurrection of Troy). Virgil's Aeneas, despite occasionally giving in to anger, only seldom rejoices in taking revenge upon his enemies: see e.g. *Aen.* 10.787, in which he appears *laetus* at the sight of Mezentius' blood, since that enemy is a *contemptor deorum*; 2.587–8, where he relishes the idea of killing Helen: *animumque explesse iuuabit / ultricis famae et cineres satiasse meorum* ('and it will be a joy to have filled my soul with the flame of revenge and satisfied the ashes of my people'; translation from H. R. Fairclough [ed. and trans.], *Virgil. Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1–6* [Cambridge, MA, 1916]) with J. Fish, 'Anger, Philodemus' Good King, and the Helen Episode of *Aeneid* 2.567–89: A New Proof of Authenticity from Herculaneum', in D. Armstrong, J. Fish, P. A. Johnston, and M. B. Skinner (eds.), *Vergil, Philodemus, and the Augustans* (Austin, TX, 2004), 119–21.

[15] Pippin Burnett (n. 14), 193, defines it as 'a complex program of slaughter that ends in the intentional killing of her two sons'.

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character, as confirmed by the terms χαίρεις and τέρψειας. There seems to be nothing wrong, however, in Medea's excitement, at least from an Aristotelian viewpoint: in a well-known passage from his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle by no means stigmatizes those who become angry for suffering injustice or being despised, oppressed, or outraged. He observes that anger, being a passionate desire for retaliation, naturally brings about a pleasure that identifies with the sweetness of revenge (2.2.2):[16]

καὶ πάσῃ ὀργῇ ἕπεσθαί τινα **ἡδονήν**, τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ τιμωρήσασθαι: ἡδὺ μὲν γὰρ τὸ οἴεσθαι τεύξεσθαι ὧν ἐφίεται, οὐδεὶς δὲ τῶν φαινομένων ἀδυνάτων ἐφίεται αὐτῷ, ὁ δὲ ὀργιζόμενος ἐφίεται δυνατῶν αὐτῷ. διὸ καλῶς εἴρηται περὶ θυμοῦ: 'ὅς τε πολὺ γλυκίων μέλιτος καταλειβομένοιο ἀνδρῶν ἐν στήθεσσιν ἀέξεται': ἀκολουθεῖ γὰρ καὶ **ἡδονή** τις διά τε τοῦτο καὶ διότι διατρίβουσιν ἐν τῷ τιμωρεῖσθαι τῇ διανοίᾳ: ἡ οὖν τότε γινομένη φαντασία **ἡδονὴν** ἐμποιεῖ, ὥσπερ ἡ τῶν ἐνυπνίων

And lastly, anger is always accompanied by a certain *pleasure*, due to the hope of revenge to come. For it is pleasant to think that one will obtain what one aims at; now, no one aims at what is obviously impossible of attainment by him, and the angry man aims at what is possible for himself. Wherefore it has been well said of anger, that 'Far sweeter than dripping honey down the throat it spreads in men's hearts.' for it is accompanied by a certain *pleasure*, for this reason first, and also because men dwell upon the thought of revenge, and the vision that rises before us produces the same *pleasure* as one seen in dreams.[17]

Euripides' Medea has indeed previously indulged in her φαντασία ('fantasy') in imagining different ways to punish her enemies (378–80),[18] but at this stage of the plot she has already completed at least the first part of her revenge and can, thus, experience 'real' pleasure. As in Seneca's rewriting, her revenge will be fully carried out only by means of the filicide. At lines 1236–7, Medea reveals to the chorus of Corinthian women, whom she evidently trusts, the final step of her plan: 'My friends, my resolve is fixed on the deed, to kill my children with all speed and to flee from this land.' She then invokes a necessity that requires their death, and finally addresses her heart and her wretched hand to spur herself on to action. In this touching soliloquy, she gets to the point of forgetting that they are her own children and

[16] See also Arist. *Rh.* 1.11.

[17] Translation from J. H. Freese (ed. and trans.), *Aristotle. Art of Rhetoric* (Cambridge, MA, 1926).

[18] On this, see D. Cairns, 'The Dynamics of Emotion in Euripides' *Medea*', *G&R* current issue.

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that she loves them – she will mourn them afterwards – but even if she kills them, they are still dear to her (1242–50).

The Euripidean Medea is no less resolute than the Senecan character in her decision to commit the most hideous murder. However, no trace of joy or pleasure is to be found either immediately before or after the children's deaths. Given that on this occasion she kills without rejoicing in her murder (appalling and yet, in her view, necessary), she is then perfectly capable of telling the two killings apart and consequently tailoring her affective responses to them. On the one hand, she is so delighted to hear that her enemies have died παγκάκως ('in agony', as she was hoping) that she can barely control her joy; on the other hand, she gets ready for her last crime in a sort of self-imposed emotional anaesthesia. After Jason has discovered that the children are dead, Medea appears triumphant in the Sun's chariot: she looks down on him and claims that the pain she is experiencing is worthwhile as long as Jason cannot mock her (1361–2).[19] A similar concept has also previously been formulated in 811–19, when the Chorus tries to dissuade her from her plan: she admits that she prefers to undergo great unhappiness, provided that Jason gets hurt.[20] In the epilogue of the play, therefore, she is likely experiencing *Schadenfreude*, a pleasure resulting directly from Jason's falling into misery, not from the actual filicide.

If we go back to the last scene of Seneca's play, some conspicuous differences between it and the Greek model emerge. First of all, Medea is represented killing the children in full view and at two distinct moments (she even kills her second child before Jason's horrified eyes). However, I believe that it is precisely her affective state that marks a veritable turning point in relation to the Euripidean model: she appears to take pleasure in committing her ultimate and most heinous murder, thus outdoing her Greek counterpart through an 'excess of emotion', which she not only does not try to harness, but is also keen to put on display (this is consistent with the exhibitionist nature of her character).

At line 910, Medea makes a famous announcement about her identity (almost an act of self-fashioning): she proclaims that she has

[19] As Pippin Burnett (n. 14), 219, notes, Medea 'has the satisfaction of knowing that they [i.e. the children] were also dear to this man who lightly dissolved the union that defined them as his'.

[20] As pointed out by D. Boedeker, 'Euripides' Medea and the Vanity of ΛΟΓΟΙ', *CP* 86 (1991), 107, the death of Creon and his daughter is the happy part of Medea's plan, which however also has a more painful sequel.

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now become Medea and that her nature has bloomed in sin (*Medea nunc sum; creuit ingenium malis*), hinting at the fact that the process of identity construction, set in motion at the beginning of the play (*Medea. . .fiam*, 171), has reached its peak. She then proudly lists her previous crimes, which are described as providing an ideal 'spring-board' for her killing spree (911–15), as well as proving her unchanged tendency to iterate criminal acts:

> iuuat, iuuat[21] *rapuisse fraternum caput,*
> *artus* iuuat *secuisse et arcano patrem*
> *spoliasse sacro,* iuuat *in exitium senis*
> *armasse natas. quaere materiam, dolor:*
> *ad omne facinus non rudem dextram afferes*
>
> What joy, joy, *ripping off my brother's head*
> what joy *slicing his limbs and robbing my father*
> *of his sacred trove*, what joy *arming daughters*
> *to kill an old man! Find material, my pain.*
> *You'll bring a knowing hand to every task.*

She then adds (920–4):

> *ex paelice utinam liberos hostis meus*
> *aliquos haberet – quidquid ex illo tuum est,*
> *Creusa peperit.* placuit *hoc poenae genus,*
> *meritoque* placuit*: ultimum magno scelus*
> *animo parandum est. . .*
>
> *I wish my foe had children by his whore.*
> *What you have by him – Creusa was their mother.*
> I want *this form of punishment and* want *it*
> *rightly.*
> *My mind must prepare, I recognize,*
> *for the ultimate crime. . .*

By disowning her own children and, thereby, circumventing the obstacle of the maternal commitment (a sort of taboo infringement), Medea cherishes the thought (see the repeated *placuit*) of having recourse to *hoc poenae genus*, that is to say the filicide, to exact her revenge. However, she is all of a sudden seized by a deep *horror*, which makes

[21] The repetition of *iuuat* ('I'm glad'), which incidentally is not uncommon, appears also in Sen. *Ag*. 1011, where it refers to Cassandra's joy after Agamemnon's murder (*iam iam iuuat uixisse post Troiam iuuat*, 'now, now it's sweet to have outlived Troy – sweet'; translation from A. J. Boyle [ed. and trans.], *Seneca. Agamemnon* [Oxford, 2020]).

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her tremble and recoil from her resolve (926 ff.). After undergoing a dramatic internal conflict dominated by two opposing sentiments (*amor* and *pietas*, 'maternal love and duty', versus *ira*, 'anger', and *dolor*, 'pain', 937 ff.), she eventually lets anger take over (953). The visual hallucinations of the Furies and her brother trigger the murder of her first child. As for the second, she plans to perform it before Jason's eyes on the roof of the house, so that she may overtly flaunt her *uirtus* ('virtue', 976–7). It is precisely thanks to the killing of her own flesh and blood (the first son) that Seneca's Medea contends that she has regained her past identity as a Colchian princess, her realm, and her virginity (see 980–4 and especially 984: *rediere regna, rapta uirginitas redit*).[22] But then, in the frantic moment between the two murders, her *ira* seems on the verge of withdrawing and she regrets the murder of the first child and feels ashamed (*iam cecidit ira? paenitet facti, pudet*, 'has anger's force now gone? I regret my crime, I'm ashamed'; 989). It is just a brief hesitation, which she chases away by uttering the following disconcerting lines (990–4):

> *quid, misera, feci? misera? paeniteat licet,*
> *feci.* uoluptas magna *me inuitam subit,*
> *et ecce crescit. derat hoc unum mihi,*
> *spectator iste. nil adhuc facti reor.*
> *quidquid sine isto fecimus sceleris perit.*
>
> *What have I done, wretch? Wretch? Though I repent*
> *I did it.* Great joy *steals into me unwished,*
> *and look, it's growing. One thing was missing:*
> *that audience. I've done nothing yet, I think.*
> *Crimes I performed without him were wasted.*

Medea expresses her feelings in quite pointed terms: after accomplishing the first murder, she surrenders – despite her apparent unwillingness – to *uoluptas*, by which she feels pervaded. She adds that this great joy is, in fact, growing, as Jason has finally arrived as the unwitting spectator of her ultimate murder. Medea's *uoluptas* is thus both retrospective, in that she rejoices, after all, in her first crime, and prospective, as she looks forward to achieving her revenge

[22] Such a claim represents, as it were, Medea's evaluative/judgemental stance on her actions and life as a whole, from which her ultimate happiness will derive: it looks as if, for her, not having regrets is the key to a happy life. On these concepts, see Summa (n. 7); see also Wierzbicka (n. 7), 53, on happiness as being dependent on some form of cognitive appraisal.

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before the eyes of her arch-enemy (she definitely espouses the idea that there is some kind of sweet pleasure in anger and revenge – see Sen. *De ira* 2.32.1: *at enim ira habet aliquam uoluptatem et dolce est dolorem reddere*).

A few lines later, while Medea spurs herself on towards her revenge, we come across a significative example of the so-called technique of self-command (1016–17), by which she even seems to exercise control over her own emotions:[23]

> perfruere *lento scelere, ne propera, dolor.*
> *meus dies est: tempore accepto utimur*
>
> Relish *your crime slowly, don't rush, my crime.*
> *It is my day: I used the time agreed.*

Medea delivers these words right before the killing of the second child, revealing how her *dolor* aims not just at revenge, but also sadistically at taking pleasure from it ('relish your crime slowly'): rushing into it would compromise the final result.[24] Clinging to a sort of perverted perfectionism, she almost seems to vie with another Senecan evildoer: Atreus in the *Thyestes* complains about experiencing a defective kind of pleasure when his brother finds out that he has devoured his own children. He regrets having been too hasty, as he admits at lines 1056–7: *uerba sunt irae data / dum propero* ('my wrath was cheated by my haste'[25]): he could have done so much worse, as pouring warm blood from the children's wound into Thyestes' mouth (1054–5), if only he had not rushed into the end of the punishment.

Tellingly, Seneca's Medea makes no distinction between the deaths of Creon and his daughter, who are strangers to her, and those of her own children, showing that she is capable of taking pleasure from both and that she does not restrain herself from feeling joy during the filicide.[26] She wants Jason to suffer, which is also the intention, as seen above, of the Greek Medea, who, however, is immune from either

[23] See Star 2006 and 2012 (n. 11), esp. Star 2006.

[24] Line 1016 might also echo Eur. *Med.* 1133 (quoted above): the Euripidean Medea wants the messenger to slow down his speech in order to get more pleasure from it; the Senecan character makes sure to execute her very last crime slowly.

[25] Translation from F. J. Miller (ed. and trans.), *Seneca. Tragedies* (Cambridge, MA, 1917).

[26] It may be suggested that the 'bipartite' structure of the filicide scene in Seneca's play could also be ascribed to the character's enhanced 'creativity': she looks more powerful than the Euripidean counterpart and more prone to experiencing joy in the process of achievement (in general, for the connection of joy with self-realization, see Summa [n. 7]).

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joy or pleasure when it comes to the children's deaths, as far as we can tell. This is certainly a noteworthy difference in Seneca's rewriting. Neither Procne nor Althaea abandons herself to joy or pleasure in killing her children (see Ov. *Met.* 6.640 ff. and 8.460 ff.). The former does, in fact, rejoice in seeing Tereus swallowing Itys' bowels and asking afterwards for his son to join him,[27] but does not betray any sign of joy in the actual killing, which thus appears to take place in a state of emotional anaesthesia that can be related, at least in this respect, to Euripides' *Medea*.[28] The latter is literally torn between her duties as sister and mother, between love and anger, but when she throws the log into the fire, her hand trembles and, again, she does not manifest any sign of joy. Therefore, the reaction of the Senecan Medea during and immediately after the filicide resembles, if anything, that of other tragic characters gloating over their victory against family members whom they have killed.[29] Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, for example, after Agamemnon's death, comes out of the palace covered in blood and still holding an axe in her hand, and glories in her crime before the chorus (*Ag.* 1384–94), whom she invites to rejoice as well:

παίω δέ νιν δίς: κἀν δυοῖν οἰμωγμάτοιν
μεθῆκεν αὑτοῦ κῶλα: καὶ πεπτωκότι
τρίτην ἐπενδίδωμι, τοῦ κατὰ χθονὸς
Διὸς νεκρῶν σωτῆρος εὐκταίαν χάριν.
οὕτω τὸν αὑτοῦ θυμὸν ὁρμαίνει πεσών:
κἀκφυσιῶν ὀξεῖαν αἵματος σφαγὴν
βάλλει μ᾽ ἐρεμνῇ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου,
χαίρουσαν οὐδὲν ἧσσον ἢ διοσδότῳ
γάνει σπορητὸς κάλυκος ἐν λοχεύμασιν.

[27] See Ov. *Met.* 6.653 *dissimulare nequit crudelia gaudia Procne* ('Procne cannot hide her cruel joy'; translation from F. J. Miller [ed. and trans.], *Ovid. Metamorphoses, Volume I. Books I–VIII*, rev. G. P. Goold [Cambridge, MA, 1984]); see also Philomela's wish that she could speak again to express her joy (659–60).

[28] In the tragedy, the killing occurs inside, but, as already said, Euripides' Medea does not display joy either immediately before or immediately after the filicide. It is useful to refer also to Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where Theseus, upon hearing that his son's body has been entirely dismembered, proclaims his joy (*hesthen*); however, he also observes that, out of respect for the gods, he will neither rejoice (*hedomai*) nor grieve himself (1257–60). Interestingly, in Seneca's rewriting, Theseus starts weeping because of the blood tie (*sanguinis uinclo*), declaring that he wanted the death of his guilty son, but he is now mourning him (*occidere uolui noxium, amissum fleo*; 1117), thus showing pity towards him. Medea's children are clearly by no means guilty in the same way that Hippolytus is for allegedly violating his stepmother, Phaedra.

[29] In a well-known passage of his *Poetics* (1453b14–26) Aristotle points out that pity and fear are brought about in tragedy not by having enemies or neutrals fighting against each other, but specifically in the display of disrupted family relationships (*philia*), where brother kills brother, son kills father, mother kills son, or son kills mother.

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ὡς ὦδ᾽ ἐχόντων, πρέσβος Ἀργείων τόδε,
χαίροιτ᾽ ἄν, εἰ **χαίροιτ᾽**, ἐγὼ δ᾽ **ἐπεύχομαι**.

Twice I struck him, and with two groans his limbs relaxed. Once he had fallen, I dealt him yet a third stroke to grace my prayer to the infernal Zeus, the savior of the dead. Fallen thus, he gasped away his life, and as he breathed forth quick spurts of blood, he struck me with dark drops of gory dew; while I *rejoiced* no less than the sown earth is gladdened in heaven's refreshing rain at the birthtime of the flower buds. Since then the case stands thus, old men of Argos, *rejoice*, if you would *rejoice*; as for me, I *glory* in the deed.[30]

There are, of course, evident differences between the revenge of the Aeschylean Clytemnestra and that of Seneca's Medea, first and foremost in the fact that Medea's sons serve as a means to her revenge without being her real target. Moreover, there is an aggravating factor in Medea's murderous deed, since she is related by blood to her sons, which, from an ethical standpoint, makes the pleasure she feels much more problematic than Clytemnestra's joy.

Now, if Euripides' Medea kills her sons in order to fulfil her revenge, thus surrendering to an unpleasant and yet necessary decision, Seneca's character, as far as we can tell, does not disdain the pleasure resulting from their deaths, thus revealing a (disturbingly) 'hedonistic' side: the *gaudium* she displays once her enemies have been proclaimed dead turns, after the death of her first child, into *uoluptas*, a very intense joy. Do these two terms therefore have a different meaning? *Gaudium* and *uoluptas* can be used as synonyms, as Seneca himself states in *Ep.* 59.1–2, where he explains that, 'in ordinary language', the term *uoluptas* is employed simply to point to *animi hilarem adfectionem* ('the contentment of the soul').[31] However, according to the orthodox Stoic conception of joy, the two notions cannot be taken as equivalent, *uoluptas* being a *uitium* ('vice'): it corresponds to the pleasure experienced by ordinary human beings, who are content with fleeting

[30] Translation from H. W. Smyth (ed. and trans.), *Aeschylus. Agamemnon. Vol. 2* (Cambridge, MA, 1971).

[31] See also Medea's words to Jason in Ov. *Her.* 12.21–2: *est aliqua ingrato meritum exprobrare uoluptas. / hac fruar; haec de te gaudia sola feram* ('I'll take what pleasure there is in attacking the ingratitude of someone who's been helped – the only joy I'll get from you'; translation from P. Murgatroyd, B. Reeves, and S. Parker [eds. and trans.], *Ovid's Heroides. A New Translation and Critical Essays* [London, 2017]), in which *uoluptas* and *gaudia* seem to be used as synonyms (and see F. Bessone, *P. Ovidii Nasonis. Heroidum Epistula XII, Medea Iasoni* [Florence, 1997], 93). On the generally negative meaning of *uoluptas*, see e.g. F. R. Berno, *Lo specchio, il vizio e la virtù. Studio sulle Naturales Quaestiones di Seneca* (Bologna, 2003), 182 n. 10.

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enjoyments, neither stable nor lasting, and also hinges on erroneous judgements – that is, on the consent given to false beliefs. By contrast, the sage is only subject to *gaudium*, which is not properly an emotion according to the Stoics, but a eupathic response: Seneca, for instance, in the same passage noted above, describes it as an elevation of the mind (*animi elatio*) towards goods that are real (*bona et uera*). *Gaudium* is thus, to quote Margaret Graver, the normative joy characteristic of the *sapiens*, a constitutive element of that person's nature: it is not brought about either by circumstances or by external objects, but is simply the good feeling experienced by a wise person when perceiving the presence of a good.[32] Moreover, as observed by Shadi Bartsch, *gaudium* arises from self-knowledge and therefore runs counter to a hedonistic conception of life.[33] In strictly Stoic terms, pleasure can by no means be linked to the *summum bonum* ('highest good') promoted by that philosophy.[34]

I believe that the joy and pleasure that the Senecan Medea attributes to herself in her revenge plan may be construed in the light of such Stoic views, but in a contrastive way. It has been argued that the protagonists of Seneca's tragedies playing the role of villains, among whom Medea is obviously to be included, frequently appear to act against a Stoic backdrop: though they are far from behaving as 'true' Stoic sages, they nevertheless adopt Stoic behavioural models, especially that of *constantia* – consisting in the ability to be firm and coherent with one's own principles – in order to give shape to their totally un-Stoic criminal identities. As Star notes, 'they cannot step outside of this linguistic system of Stoic self-creation as they struggle for

[32] M. Graver, 'Anatomies of Joy: Seneca and the *Gaudium* Tradition', in R. R. Caston and R. A. Kaster (eds.), *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World* (Oxford, 2016), 123, 126, and *passim*.

[33] See S. Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self. Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire* (Chicago, IL, 2006), 185 n. 4.

[34] The Old Stoa differentiated between *chara* and *hedone*, corresponding to *gaudium* and *uoluptas* respectively: *chara* is the proper Stoic response to any manifestation of good and belongs to the so-called *eupatheiai* or, in Cicero's words, *constantiae*, whereas *hedone* is classed under the four primary emotions and is, thus, a perturbation of the soul (*pathos*) and, as such, to be avoided. On this, see e.g. R. P. Haynes, 'The Theory of Pleasure of the Old Stoa', *AJPh* 83 (1962), 412–19. Graver (n. 32), 128–9, observes that Seneca, however, does not have the term *eupatheia* or an equivalent in his philosophical works. On Seneca's view of pleasure and joy, see also A. L. Motto, 'Seneca on Pleasure', *Helmantica* 47 (1996), 17–31 (now in A. L. Motto, *Further Essays on Seneca* [Frankfurt am Main, 2001]); J. Wildberger, 'Ethics IV: Wisdom and Virtue', in G. Damschen and A. Heil, *Brill's Companion to Seneca. Philosopher and Dramatist* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2014), 301–22.

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criminal perfection and psychological consistency of vice'.[35] Their claims often hint at values central to the Stoic doctrine: Medea, for instance, significantly manages to exercise control over her anger and pain, which she renders the instruments of her revenge by relying on a tenacious endurance that resembles Cato's constancy at the moment of his suicide.[36]

With this in mind, we can try to make sense of Medea's joy and pleasure in the epilogue of Seneca's play as well. There the Senecan character erases any distinction between *gaudium* and *uoluptas* from a Stoic viewpoint, as well as adjusting both emotions to her own set of values, in which *uirtus* regularly ties in with *uitium*. While going down her criminal path, characterized by a sort of pathological recidivism, she points to diversified degrees of joy by means of the terms *iuuat*, *placuit*, *gaudet*, up to the *uoluptas magna* of line 992, which marks the accomplishment of the first part of the filicide. But she aims to prolong that pleasure (*perfruere lento scelere*, 1016) until the final completion of her revenge:[37] it looks as if she had treasured up in her memory the sort of advice that Seneca gives in some of his philosophical works, proving that she is not interested in some kind of ephemeral or fragile pleasure. In *Ep.* 23, for example, Seneca warns his addressee, Lucilius, precisely against sweet but fleeting pleasures, which do not secure true happiness (but see also *De ben.* 7.2.2). This is an important letter to understand the role of *gaudium* in the sage's life from a Stoic (or, at least, Senecan) perspective. In 23.6 the author elucidates the perils of pleasure, especially the fact that it tends to rush headlong into the abyss of sorrow, unless it has been kept within bounds (*in praecipiti uoluptas ad dolorem uergit, nisi modum tenuit*). On the contrary, true joy is solid (23.5): *hoc de quo loquor, ad quod te conor perducere, solidum est et quod plus pateat introrsus* ('but the joy of which I speak, that to which I am endeavouring to lead you, is something solid, disclosing itself the more fully as you penetrate into it'[38]). It is constant and, since it comes from within, has inherent stability. At the outset of the same letter (23.2), Seneca states that those who know how to find joy and have not placed their happiness in the control of externals reach the

[35] See Star 2006 (n. 11), 241.

[36] On this see e.g. Battistella (n. 9).

[37] She utters eloquent words after the death of the first child (986–7): *perfectum est scelus; / uindicta nondum* ('your crime is complete – / but not revenge').

[38] Translations of the *Letters* are from R. M. Gummere (ed. and trans.), *Seneca. Epistles. Volume I* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

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heights of perfection (*ad summa peruenit qui scit quo gaudeat, qui felicitatem sua in aliena potestate non posuit*). To this passage a similar one may be added from *Ep.* 59, which is another letter focusing on joy: *gaudium hoc non nascitur nisi ex uirtutum conscientia* ('this joy springs only from the knowledge that you possess the virtues'; 16).

Interestingly, Seneca's Medea highly values her *uirtus*, upon which she unwaveringly relies (*numquam potest non esse uirtuti locus*, 'the time can never be wrong for virtue', 161; *non in occulto tibi est / perdenda uirtus; approba populo manum*, 'don't hide and squander / Virtue. Have the people applaud your deeds', 976–7). As Boyle rightly notes, she plays with the intrinsic ambiguity of this notion, implying both 'moral virtue' and 'manly courage', and also inverting the virtue paradigm of the Stoic sage.[39] However paradoxical it may seem, she possesses indeed *uirtutum conscientia* ('the awareness of one's virtues') and perfectly knows how to get to the *summa* of her joy as well. She is also in full control of her own time, as she says at line 1017 *meus dies est, tempore accepto utimur* ('it is my day: I used the time agreed'), hinting at the fact that, despite being allowed very little time in Corinth, she is going to make the most of it. Overall, she appears to comply with the piece of advice Seneca gives to Lucilius in *Ep.* 23.8: *ideo constituendum est quid uelimus et in eo perseuerandum* ('therefore, we should decide what we wish, and abide by the decision'). In particular, the epilogue of the play proves that the Senecan Medea is an incredibly consistent character, capable of successfully (mis)applying Stoic principles to her evil nature and undertakings. Euripides' Medea, too, displays remarkable perseverance, which, however, seems to stem from her obsessive belief that the children's death is an objective necessity. By contrast, the determination of Seneca's Medea can be ascribed, to a great degree, to an unquenchable desire on her part to punish her main enemy in a rather sensational way: she transforms the last phase of her revenge into a veritable spectacle, in which she immensely rejoices as it gets started and unfolds, almost regardless of the fact that on this occasion the victims are her own children.

As Seneca points out in *Ep.* 23.4, real joy (*uerum gaudium*) is a stern matter (*res seuera*), which, unlike its more cheerful but superficial counterpart, helps human beings to cope with the fear of death, the curbing of pleasures, or the endurance of pain (*dolorum patientiam*). Since pain

[39] Boyle (n. 2), 371.

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is often caused by *uoluptas*, Seneca recommends that pleasure be repressed (see, for example, *Ep.* 121.4). The Senecan Medea is certainly not immune to pain, but she deals with her *dolor* in the usual 'twisted' way, namely by exploiting it to execute revenge and feel pleasure, as we read at line 1016: *perfruere lento scelere, ne propera, dolor* ('relish your crime slowly, don't rush, my pain').

Medea's sorrow ultimately paves the way to pleasure: the joy initially felt by her after the deaths of her 'regular' enemies progressively but rapidly turns into something greater and monstrous once the filicide has come to an end,[40] to the point that she clearly draws satisfaction both from hurting her ex-partner (as in Eur. *Med.* 1361–2) and from the killing of the children. Hers is a perfect and full-blown pleasure rooted in evil that gives a strongly hedonistic twist to her revenge, for she wants to savour to the full every moment of it, even a hideous deed against nature like the filicide. In my view, by doing so, she successfully manages to posit her joy, verging on sadism, both as an un-Stoic and distorted model of *uerum gaudium* and as the final end of her gory actions.[41] Her metamorphosis into a *monstrum* is now complete: Medea's unabashed and 'unnatural' joy thus contributes no less than her anger to the effect of alienation brought about by the Senecan play.[42]

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[40] See 1019–20: *plura non habui, dolor, / quae tibi litarem* ('I had nothing more, my pain, to sacrifice to you'). As Seneca observes in *De ira* 1.6.5, the good man does not rejoice in punishment (*uir bonus poena non gaudet*).

[41] Medea almost seems to put into practice the suggestion that Seneca gives to Lucilius in *Ep.* 23.3 about learning how to feel joy (*disce gaudere*): while at line 991 she admits that a great pleasure pervades her against her will (*me inuitam*), a few lines later (1016) she enjoins herself to relish her crime slowly.

[42] On the effect of alienation, see Star (n. 2), 50.

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