

Over ten years ago, Richard Tarrant stated, "Analyzing Seneca's strong rereading of the Augustans is one of the most promising ways of further defining the themes and outlook of Senecan drama, but focusing on Seneca's generic *contaminatio* may also enhance understanding of his dramaturgy" (*HSCP*, 1995). Despite the recent works of Littlewood (2004) and Schiesaro (2003), many of the questions raised by Tarrant still remain unanswered. How did Seneca utilize other genres in his tragedies? How do the numerous reminiscences of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid add to the dramatic fabric of the plays and motivate the characters' actions? Can we discover how Seneca might have read his predecessors (cf. Putnam, 1993)?

My paper shows the pervasive influence of Ovid's *Heroides* 12 (Medea's letter to Jason) on Seneca's depiction of Medea in his *Medea*. My argument hinges on questions of genre and intertextuality and, in particular, the way in which the original context of the intertextual model retains significance in its new setting. Two examples will help elucidate my methodology.

When Seneca's Medea states, *ira, qua ducis, sequor* (953) she expresses her resolve to kill her children. This line also recalls the words of Ovid's Medea at the close of *Heroides* 12, *quo feret ira, sequar* (209). While Ovid's Medea still posited her revenge as a future act (*sequar*), Seneca's Medea is now acting out her revenge (*sequor*). The reader is encouraged to envision that the anger that has enflamed Medea throughout Seneca's tragedy is, at heart, a result of her failed (elegiac) relationship with Jason. The intertext makes this fact clear.

In addition to a greater crime, the conclusion of *Heroides* 12 foreshadows acts that will be described in a "greater" genre: *nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit!* (212). Arson, murder and infanticide are hardly the appropriate subject matter for elegy, yet they are at home in tragedy (note *Tragoedia*'s urge to Ovid at *Amores* 3.1.24: *incipe maius opus!*). Barchiesi (*HSCP*, 1993) argues that this line of the *Heroides* implies that Medea has now "outgrown" elegy and her future actions must be told in the tragic genre. Certainly Seneca's *Medea* strives throughout the play to perform "greater" crimes (e.g. *levia memoravi nimis...maiora iam me scelera post partus decent*, 48-50), and these crimes are the defining characteristic of Medea as a tragic figure.

These examples show how Seneca uses Ovid's *Heroides* in order to give passages an elegiac "tint" as well as to offer metapoetic commentary. My paper discusses how this intertextual rapport can highlight the differences (and similarities) between the genres of elegy and tragedy but it also acts to further describe and motivate Seneca's Medea. Throughout the play, she questions who she truly is; and the elegiac intertext reveals one role, that of lover, that must be left behind before she can emerge as the complex semi-divine figure that dominates the action at the conclusion of the play (*Medea nunc sum*, 910).