



# Trevet's *Medea*: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea* Through Nicholas Trevet's Medieval Commentary

James H. Kim On Chong-Gossard<sup>1</sup> 

Accepted: 21 December 2022 / Published online: 28 January 2023  
© The Author(s) 2023

## Abstract

In 1314, the Oxford Dominican monk Nicholas Trevet was commissioned to write a commentary on Seneca's tragedies. Trevet's interpretation of character and plot in Seneca's *Medea* differs in many ways from 21st-century classical scholars. Because Trevet relied on a single manuscript from the *A* tradition, he and his readers did not have access to a Senecan *Medea* who asks Jason whether he 'recognizes his wife' before departing Corinth in a flying chariot drawn by serpents because the last nineteen lines of the play did not exist in *A*. Trevet did not know a *Medea* who told her Nurse that she 'would become' *Medea*. It is Trevet's *Medea*, and not Jason, who is being pursued by Pelias's son Acastus. For Trevet, Jason's alliance with Creon's daughter Creusa is calculated not to protect himself and his sons from an angry and dangerous Acastus, but in order to save *Medea*'s life. Furthermore, the theme of *Medea* as Jason's saviour, and this act of salvation itself as the cause of crime, informs Trevet's reading (and misreading) of important passages. Finally, when *Medea* argues back and forth with herself, Trevet attributes *Medea*'s regard for her sons as 'not mine' to her loss of power over them because of her exile from Corinth, without any mention that the sons might now belong to Jason's new wife Creusa. These are all subtle interpretations that cumulatively form a unique 'reading' of Seneca's *Medea* offered by the very first commentator on all of Seneca's plays, seven hundred years ago.

---

✉ James H. Kim On Chong-Gossard  
koc@unimelb.edu.au

<sup>1</sup> Classics & Archaeology, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

Today's readers of Seneca's *Medea* are fascinated by the construction of Medea's identity and how she builds upon her past crimes – her use of witchcraft to enable Jason to steal the golden fleece, and the murder of her own brother – in order to take revenge against Jason and his new bride in Corinth.<sup>1</sup> From the start of the play, Medea speaks of how she 'will become' Medea ('Fiam', 171), and this culminates in her decision to avenge Jason by killing their sons, chillingly signalled with the phrase 'now I am Medea' ('Medea nunc sum', 910). Medea stabs the second son in front of Jason's eyes, and then asks him whether he 'recognizes his wife' ('coniugem agnoscis tuam?', 1021), before escaping Corinth unharmed in a divine chariot pulled by flying snakes. Jason, for his part, appears in Seneca's play as a desperate man with a target on his back, pursued by his cousin Acastus for the death of King Pelias at the hands of his own daughters who were tricked by Medea into butchering him. Jason even claims that his marriage alliance with King Creon of Corinth is out of concern that his sons might be targeted by Acastus (438–9), and Creon himself describes Jason as 'panic-struck in weighty terror' ('gravi terrore pauidum', 255–6) at the threat of punishment by Acastus. What emerges is, on the one hand, a Jason whose practical anxieties about his and his sons' safety are woefully paired with a lack of concern for Medea; and on the other hand, a Medea who, once offended, transforms herself through anger into the all-destroyer that she always had the potential to become, approaching divinity itself at the end. These, at least, are the crucial aspects of interpretation derived from the Anglophone commentaries on the Latin text of Seneca's *Medea* used today.<sup>2</sup>

But what if there was a different 'Senecan' Medea? What if there was a Medea who did not depart in a dragon wagon, who did not ask Jason whether he recognized her once she had killed their sons, who never said that she would 'become' Medea? What if there was a Medea whom even Jason admitted was loved by her sons and was a good mother? What if there was a Senecan Jason who married Creon's daughter Creusa not out of self-preservation, but in order to save *Medea's* life, since it was Medea who was being pursued by Acastus, and not Jason? It is just such a Medea who appears in the very first commentary to survive on Seneca's tragedies, by the medieval Oxford Dominican monk, Nicholas Trevet. By analysing how Trevet constructs his Medea directly from the manuscript to which he had access and which itself came from a specific textual tradition of Seneca's tragedies, one can pinpoint how Medea's character was interpreted at a specific moment in time.

Around 1314 Trevet (also spelled Trivet), the regent master of Oxford, was commissioned by Cardinal Niccolò Alberti da Prato (c. 1250–1321) to write a commentary on Seneca's dramatic works.<sup>3</sup> Jane Chance, in her study of medieval

<sup>1</sup> In this article, I quote the work of Fiona Macintosh, Martha Nussbaum, Gianni Guastella, Lisl Walsh, A. J. Boyle, Helen Slaney and others as representative of 'today's readers' of Seneca's *Medea*. There are, of course, countless others.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to Seneca, *Medea*, ed. C. D. N. Costa, Oxford, 1973; Seneca, *Medea*, ed. and transl. H. M. Hine, Warminster, 2000 (hereafter cited as Hine); and Seneca, *Medea*, ed. and transl. A. J. Boyle, Oxford, 2014 (hereafter cited as Boyle).

<sup>3</sup> Editions now exist for all ten of Trevet's commentaries (with two editions on *Phaedra*): Nicholas Trevet, *Il commento ... al Tieste di Seneca*, ed. E. Franceschini, Milan, 1938; id., *Expositio Herculis furentis*, ed. V. Ussani, Jr., Rome, 1959; id., *Expositio L. Annaei Senecae Agamemnonis*, ed. P. Meloni, Cagliari,

mythography, describes Trevet's commentary on Seneca as 'reflect[ing] [his] desire ... to initiate what might be termed the new humanistic (if literal) reading of Seneca, whose tragedies had received little or no attention from medieval commentators and mythographers'.<sup>4</sup> This commentary on all ten plays, including *Octavia*, became in its day the most popular work on Seneca and undoubtedly contributed directly to the wider dissemination of the tragedies by making their often convoluted plots and language easier to comprehend and appreciate.

Yet, for years Trevet's commentary on Seneca has been treated as rather dull and unimportant. As Brian FitzGerald has expressed it:

Despite the great esteem his contemporaries had for him, Trevet has been largely neglected by modern scholars: apart from interest in his conception of tragedy and renewed attention to his Boethius commentary, the bulk of research on this Dominican scholar is over fifty years old.<sup>5</sup>

Recent Italian scholarship has been much kinder to Trevet, including him in the evaluation of the 14th-century revival of interest in Seneca's tragedies,<sup>6</sup> and focusing on his definition of tragedy,<sup>7</sup> use of the scholastic method<sup>8</sup> and erudition with respect to geography<sup>9</sup> and mythology.<sup>10</sup> But for decades the more traditional evaluation of Trevet's work was reflected by Ezio Franceschini's comment that Trevet was merely a grammar teacher who explained the text to his pupils and did not concern himself with anything else;<sup>11</sup> or by Richard Tarrant's brief appraisal: 'Since Trevet's notes are elementary and often quite wrong, his importance for students of Seneca

Footnote 3 (continued)

1961; id., *Expositio L. Annaei Senecae Herculis Oetaei*, ed. P. Meloni, Cagliari, 1962; id., *Commento alle Troades di Seneca*, ed. M. Palma, Rome, 1977; R. Junge, *Nicholas Trevet und die Octavia Praetexta: Editio princeps des mittelalterlichen Kommentars und Untersuchungen zum pseudosenecanischen Drama*, Paderborn, 1999; Nicholas Trevet, *Commento alla Medea di Seneca*, ed. L. Roberti, Bari, 2004, (hereafter cited as Roberti); id., *Commento alla Phaedra di Seneca*, ed. M. Chiabò, Bari, 2004; id., *Commento alla Phaedra di Seneca*, ed. C. Fossati, Florence, 2007; id., *Commento alle Phoenissae di Seneca*, ed. P. Mascoli, Bari, 2007; and id., *Commento all' Oedipus di Seneca*, ed. A. Lagioia, Bari, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> J. Chance, *Medieval Mythography*, II: *From the School of Chartres to the Court at Avignon, 1177–1350*, Eugene OR, 2019, p. 264.

<sup>5</sup> B. FitzGerald, *Inspiration and Authority in the Middle Ages: Prophets and Their Critics from Scholasticism to Humanism*, Oxford, 2017, p. 153.

<sup>6</sup> C. Villa, 'Bartolomeo da San Concordio, Trevet, Mussato, Dante (*Inf.* XXXIII). Appunti per le vicende di Seneca tragico nel primo Trecento', in *'Moribus antiquis sibi me fecere poetam': Albertino Mussato nel VII° centenario dell'incoronazione poetica (Padova 1315–2015)*, ed. R. Modonutti and E. Zucchi, Florence, 2017, pp. 161–76.

<sup>7</sup> P. Vescovo, "'Alta tragedia": Dante, Mussato, Trevet', in *'Moribus antiquis sibi me fecere poetam': Albertino Mussato nel VII° centenario dell'incoronazione poetica (Padova 1315–2015)*, ed. R. Modonutti and E. Zucchi, Florence, 2017, pp. 177–97.

<sup>8</sup> C. Fossati, 'Il commento di Nicola Trevet a Seneca tragico: committenza, *ars dictaminis* e metodo scolastico', in *Dall' 'Ars dictaminis' al Preumanesimo?: per un profilo letterario del secolo XIII*, ed. F. Delle Donne and F. Santi, Florence, 2013, pp. 143–55.

<sup>9</sup> C. Fossati, 'Nicola Trevet e la sua erudizione geografica nel commento alla *Phaedra* di Seneca', *Itineraria*, 3-4, 2004–2005, pp. 109–114.

<sup>10</sup> Trevet, *Phaedra*, ed. Fossati (n. 3 above), pp. lviii–lxiii; and Roberti, pp. 14–15.

<sup>11</sup> E. Franceschini, *Studi e note di filologia latina medievale*, Milan, 1938, p. 28.

derives from the role played by his MS in the history of the transmission'.<sup>12</sup> In fact, Trevet's dedication to explicating a single manuscript, and one which came from a large tradition that was missing the ending of Seneca's *Medea*, serves as the starting point for appreciating the uniqueness of his interpretation.

From his commentary, Trevet's *Medea* emerges. I use the term 'Trevet's *Medea*' because his source text cannot be said to be an accurate example of what Seneca himself composed in the first century. Trevet, of course, did not have access to multiple editions of Seneca which weigh the pros and cons of manuscript traditions in order to reconstruct Seneca's text. That he based his work on only one manuscript (denoted by scholars as  $\tau$ ) is known from a letter he wrote to the cardinal, in which he mentions something he has erased from the text 'quem unicum habui' ('the only one which I had'), and he even complains about the 'textus diminutio' ('the defective condition of the text').<sup>13</sup> Most scholars doubt that  $\tau$  still survives, but it was clearly closer to the *A* tradition of the Senecan manuscripts, as opposed to the late 11th-century 'Etruscus' manuscript *E*, now in Florence (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS plut. 37.13; it was rediscovered in the late 13th century in the monastery at Pomposa, near Ferrara), or the early fifth-century palimpsest *R*, now in Milan (Biblioteca Ambrosiana, MS G. 82 sup.), which preserves only three sections of the *Medea* and two of the *Oedipus*.<sup>14</sup> Trevet's goal was not textual criticism in the classical philological sense, which was unheard of in his day, but rather explication and demystification of a single copy of Seneca that was indebted to the decisions of the anonymous copyist of the ancestor of the *A* tradition. As John Fitch put it: 'every page of his work attests that he saw it as his task to hew some sense out of the text before him, not to improve it'.<sup>15</sup>

This term 'Trevet's *Medea*' also expands on the comments of Gianni Guastella regarding Trevet's handling of Seneca's characters:

He pays a certain amount of attention to the dynamics of interactions between characters, but only with a view to clearly parsing the sequence of lines within various episodes of dialogue. ... There are other similar passages in the commentary in which Trevet explains the way a character addresses his lines to various interlocutors or to himself. ... Trevet does not fully comprehend how the lines were to be declaimed in conjunction with the action on stage. The characters, for him, begin to speak only within the framework of a text intended for reading: Trevet, then, observes how the poet makes them speak on the page. Trevet, although aware that these plays were destined for perfor-

<sup>12</sup> Seneca, *Agamemnon*, ed. R. J. Tarrant, Cambridge, 1976, pp. 81–2.

<sup>13</sup> Latin text quoted in Fossati, 'Il commento di Nicola Trevet' (n. 8 above), p. 147; for a discussion of what precisely might be meant by *textus diminutio*, see p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> For detailed discussions of the place of Trevet's textual source ( $\tau$ ) within the Senecan MS traditions, see R. H. Philp, 'The Manuscript Tradition of Seneca's Tragedies', *Classical Quarterly*, 18.1, 1968, pp. 150–79 (164–7); R. H. Rouse, 'The *A* Text of Seneca's Tragedies in the Thirteenth Century', *Revue d'histoire des textes*, 1, 1971, pp. 93–121 (118–20); and S. Marchitelli, 'Nicholas Trevet und die Renaissance der Seneca-Tragödien I', *Museum Helveticum*, 56.1, 1999, pp. 52–63 (36–63).

<sup>15</sup> J. Fitch, 'Review of Luciana Roberti', *Nicola Trevet: Commento alla Medea di Seneca*, 2004', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2004/12/09. URL <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2004/2004.12.09>.

mance, envisages them according to the traditional interpretation mentioned above: a mimed accompaniment to a text that was meant to be declaimed.<sup>16</sup>

This study takes the imagined declamatory performance with mimes as a point of departure. Relying on Isidore of Seville's *Origines*,<sup>17</sup> Trevet explains at the start of his commentary on *Hercules Furens* how a poet in antiquity would read aloud his drama at a pulpit situated in a little house called a *scæna*,<sup>18</sup> in the middle of a semi-circular theatre, while mimes would act out the reading of the poems with bodily gestures. A unique frontispiece illustration to manuscript V (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb. lat. 355, a late 14th-century manuscript that preserves the text of Seneca and Trevet) depicts mimes in costumes for Seneca's *Hercules Furens*, a chorus, an audience and the poet Seneca reciting his play aloud in a small building on stage.<sup>19</sup> This illustration contextualizes Trevet's commentary not just as a traditional exegesis of Seneca's Latin, but more importantly as a series of directions for a reciter and mimes. Trevet's comments about the tone in which a line is delivered, or a character's secret thoughts when she utters a particular line, provide an imagined motivation that could come alive in performance. For example, when Jason claims that his own tears convinced Creon to give Medea banishment rather than death, and Medea at line 492 responds 'Poenam putabam' ('I thought <my banishment> was a punishment'), Trevet glosses 'deridendo hoc dicit' ('She says this with derision'). At line 515, when Jason asks Medea what he can do for her, her response 'Pro me' ('For me ...') is, according to Trevet, 'cum pondere legendum' ('to be read with weight'). This study focuses solely on Trevet's commentary on *Medea*, but his commentaries on Seneca's other plays display a similar directorial tendency. For example, in *Agamemnon*, Trevet three times (lines 955, 956 and 960) uses the adverb 'mordaciter' ('bitingly') to describe the tone of Electra's

<sup>16</sup> G. Guastella, 'Seneca Rediscovered: Recovery of Texts, Reinvention of a Genre', in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Senecan Tragedy: Scholarly, Theatrical and Literary Receptions*, ed. E. Dodson-Robinson, Leiden, 2016, pp. 77–100 (93–4).

<sup>17</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Origines*, XVIII.1.44: 'Ibi enim poetae comoedi et tragoedi ad certamen conscendebant, hisque canentibus alii gestus edebant' ('The poets of comedy and tragedy would come down there <in the orchestra> for the contest, and while they were chanting, others would perform gestures').

<sup>18</sup> In my quotations of Trevet's Latin, I consistently use the ligatures *æ* and *œ* in place of the medieval scribe's abbreviation *e* for the classical diphthongs *ae* and *oe*. This disambiguates words like *fuge* which appears twice in Trevet's text of line 170 of Seneca's *Medea* (in Roberti, p. 43, where the medieval spelling is retained), first as the imperative singular of the verb *fugio*, and secondly as the medieval spelling of *fugae* from the noun *fuga*. However, apart from providing these ligatures, I maintain the other medieval spellings found in Roberti, such as *Jason*, *nephas*, *michi*, *nupciale*, *preciosa*, *yronia*. Only when quoting Roberti's own edition in my footnotes will I retain *e* for *ae* and *oe*. Thereby I hope to find a middle ground in the debates about Trevet's orthography. As Deligiannis explains with regard to Patrizia Mascoli's 2011 edition of Iohannes de Segarellis's commentary on Seneca's *Phoenissae*, 'the adoption of the copyist's spelling with all its late medieval peculiarities' would assume that Trevet had written with the same spelling, which 'raises methodological questions': I. Deligiannis, 'Review of Patrizia Mascoli, *Iohannes de Segarellis, Elucidatio tragoediarum Senecae: Thebais seu Phoenissae*, 2011', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2012.10.54. URL <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2012/2012-10-54.html>.

<sup>19</sup> The entire MS V can be viewed at URL [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Urb.lat.355](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Urb.lat.355) (accessed 7 December 2022). The illustration of the cast of *Hercules Furens* is on fol. 1<sup>v</sup>. For more discussion, see Guastella, 'Seneca Rediscovered' (n. 16 above), p. 95.

and Clytemnestra's insults to each other. At *Troades* 331, Trevet indicates that Pyrrhus denounces Agamemnon 'oblique et mordaciter' ('obliquely and biting'), and Agamemnon responds 'honestatis titulo' ('on the pretext of his integrity'). In *Phaedra*, Trevet says of 138–9: 'sic loquitur tamquam desperata' ('thus she speaks as if despairing'). These interpretations must be teased out of his commentary, since Trevet's method of approaching ancient texts was fundamentally different from ours. Jane Chance describes that difference as follows:

By the time of Trivet's [sic] comments on the Senecan tragedies, around 1315–16, most of the mythological comments on classical authors had turned exclusively literal and explanatory, a feature reflected in his own comments. Trivet's own explanations tend to form a kind of medieval literary criticism based on characterization, plot, and a more factual glossing of unfamiliar details; the mythological references are narrativistic and unmythographic, making the commentary resemble a modern annotated edition.<sup>20</sup>

While I agree with Chance's description of Trevet's overall approach, I would add that his 'narrativistic' mythological references are precisely what is refreshing about his commentaries for modern literary scholars who enjoy encountering unfamiliar interpretations of well-trodden classics like Seneca's *Medea*. Trevet is not only (as discussed above) a commentator on genre, geography and mythology, but even more importantly a commentator on plot derived from Seneca's rhetorical style. For the character of *Medea* specifically – surely one of the most often recreated legendary personas over time – Trevet was not working in a vacuum but possessed an understanding of her basic mythology and that of the Argonauts. He would not have had access to Euripides, who was yet unknown in Western Europe, or to Valerius Flaccus, whose work was not rediscovered until a full century after Trevet was writing; but he would have known *Medea* from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Heroides* and *Tristia*.<sup>21</sup> However, my goal here is not to delve into Trevet's sources, nor even to attempt to discover some influence he might have had on subsequent traditions of *Medea* spanning from the fourteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Rather, my goal is to illustrate how Trevet's interpretation of *Medea*'s character comes directly from the text that he is glossing, and that even though his method of explanation of the grammar for pupils is undeniable, he nonetheless shows consistent and even innovative, or at the very least non-canonical, decisions about character and plot which are instructive to 21st-century literary scholars. The proposition here is not that Trevet was wrong, but rather that he deserves some recognition, even acclaim, for his determination to make sense of a copy of Seneca that admittedly was inferior, and that his paraphrases of Seneca's terse Latin, introduced with the phrase 'quasi dicat' ('as if

<sup>20</sup> Chance, *Medieval Mythography* (n. 4 above), p. 277.

<sup>21</sup> In fact, Trevet quotes Ovid's *Tristia* Book III to explain the background of *Medea*'s crime of murdering her brother (Trevet in *Medea*, 132 = Roberti, p. 39). He also twice quotes Dares Phrygius as a source for the role of Pelias in sending Jason on the mission to fetch the golden fleece (Trevet in *Medea*, 276 = Roberti, p. 53; and Trevet in *Medea*, 336 = Roberti, p. 59), although Dares Phrygius does not mention *Medea*.

[s]he were to say'), often reveal novel gems of interpretation of character and plot. What some see as errors, I see as Trevet's laudable attempts to provide a consistent 'reading' of the play's dramatic arc.

Furthermore, this illustration of 'Trevet's Medea' reinforces the value of textual criticism for literary scholars, and shows how an understanding of the way classical texts survive over time can lead to fruitful interpretations of ancient dramas like those of Seneca. Sean Alexander Gurd, in his monograph on Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*, remarks on the 'division of labor between textual critics and literary scholars'.<sup>22</sup> He elaborates:

It is usually assumed that work on ancient literature proceeds as follows: first, the textual critics establish the texts; next, the literary scholars 'read' them. Textual criticism remains, in this model, 'preliminary matter,' as Rene Wellek and Austin Warren dismissed it in 1954. From it literary scholars get a text to read; this text is only the ground on which the literary scholar stands, the base on which higher orders of intellectual work are supposed to be constructed.<sup>23</sup>

Gurd might be overstating the distinction between textual criticism and literary philology. After all, the three critical commentaries on Seneca's *Medea* discussed in this study (Costa, Hine and Boyle) offer literary interpretations; and Martha Nussbaum in her literary study of *Medea* engaged in textual criticism (see below). Nor would the fact that classical texts survive in different versions over the centuries be of any surprise to academics trained in classical languages. Nonetheless, it is true that the 21st-century literary interpretations of *Medea* invoked in this study are in large part unconcerned with textual variants, but instead rely on agreed modern editions, which have already done the work of comparing the *A* tradition, *E* and *R* variants of Seneca's text and have decided on the most likely correct readings, as the basis for their analyses of character and plot. Trevet operated in essentially the same manner as the literary scholar, having only one manuscript of Seneca at his disposal on which to base his commentary. Even though there are times when Trevet reads the Latin of his one manuscript wrongly (as will be discussed below), we have no surviving evidence that any of his contemporaries who read or relied on his commentary noticed that he was wrong. For generations, Trevet's *Medea* would have been the *Medea* that readers of the play would have known. Accordingly, one primary goal of the present study – a commentary on a commentary – is to get a glimpse of how *Medea*'s character was understood, and how Seneca's text itself existed for its potential readers, at a specific moment in time, seven hundred years ago.

To illustrate these points, this study is in two parts. First, it will consider the focus on 'becoming *Medea*' in scholarship since the mid-1990s and demonstrate how Trevet's focus differs from this. Second, it will examine Trevet's explanation of certain narrative elements that are absent in modern commentaries. For example – as will become clear below – Trevet's *Medea* disassociates herself from her children not

<sup>22</sup> S. A. Gurd, *Iphigenias At Aulis: Textual Multiplicity, Radical Philology*, Ithaca NY, 2005, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

because she sees them as already belonging to a new stepmother Creusa, as modern scholars have argued, but rather because of Creon's decision to put her into exile, which cuts off Medea's power over the children. Furthermore, Jason's innocence and concern for Medea's welfare – rather than for his own – is a feature of Trevet's interpretation. These old – but new – ways of understanding the characters of Seneca's play will be documented in subtle and minute details.

## Part 1: 'Becoming' Medea

The interpretation of Seneca's *Medea* in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, especially among English-speaking scholars, has been dominated by the concept of Medea 'becoming Medea'. Fiona Macintosh summarizes this succinctly:

When the Nurse bemoans her mistress's loss of status and wealth at the beginning of Seneca's tragedy, Medea famously retorts: *Medea superest* [Medea is left], proclaiming her legendary self as her greatest asset (166). Even if present circumstances have temporarily eclipsed that legendary self, she reminds the Nurse of its imminent resurgence: 'Medea' calls the Nurse; 'I shall be' replies Medea (171). Later in the play after the news of the deaths of Creon and Creusa, Medea is liberated, declaring: *Medea nunc sum* [Now I am Medea] (910). From this point on Medea can be Medea; she can accede to the status accorded to her in the mythical tradition, and perform the bloody act of infanticide that the theatrical tradition has come to associate with her. Furthermore, in the final moments of the play, this actor-dramaturge is in charge of both the present and the future because (unlike Jason) she knows her Euripides: 'Don't you recognize your wife?' she sneers at Jason; and gesturing towards the now customary serpent-drawn chariot that provides her traditional exodus in the theatrical tradition, she adds *sic fugere soleo* [Thus I am wont to flee] (1022).<sup>24</sup>

Macintosh's comments about the Medea of the 'theatrical tradition' are a reference point that makes sense to today's readers familiar with Euripides's play, but it was not a reference point available to Trevet, who not only did not know Euripides, but was also using a manuscript missing the final lines of Seneca's play (as will be discussed below). These three pivotal scenes quoted by Macintosh – one from Act II (170–72), and two from Act V (907–22 and 1011–27) – will now be examined in detail.

### The Nurse and Medea in Act II

In Act II, Medea's Nurse advises her to hide her complaints against Jason and his new bride, and to fear the bride's father, Creon, the king of Corinth. The Nurse even

<sup>24</sup> F. Macintosh, 'Introduction: The Performer in Performance', in *Medea in Performance 1500–2000*, ed. E. Hall et al., Oxford, 2000, pp. 1–31 (3).



suggests that Medea take flight. Zwierlein's Oxford Classical Texts edition of Seneca, *Medea*, 170–72, reads as follows:

NVTRIX. Moriere. MEDEA. Cupio. NVT. Profuge. ME. Paenituit fugae.  
 NVT. Medea – ME. Fiam. NVT. Mater es. ME. Cui sim uide.<sup>25</sup>  
 NVT. Profugere dubitas? ME. Fugiam, at ulciscar prius.<sup>26</sup>

The crucial line of this passage is 171, in which Medea interrupts the Nurse to make a statement equivalent to 'Medea fiam', 'I shall become Medea'. For Martha Nussbaum, Medea's statement is integral to Medea's sense of self and how 'she can be made Medea again only by a revenge that removes the obstacle'.<sup>27</sup> Guastella's interpretation of the same line focuses on Medea's social role as wife and mother, how vengeance 'allows her past to regain the meaning which was destroyed by the divorce'.<sup>28</sup> Others have read the statement 'Medea fiam' as meta-poetical, requiring an audience or reader to have a pre-conceived notion of Medea from other literature, a reputation that she must reach.<sup>29</sup>

Trevet's commentary on the passage, however, indicates that his source text was quite different. I provide here a translation of his commentary, with lemmata underlined for ease of reading. Trevet is enumerating the individual speeches (of which there will be 27) that form the first of two parts in Act II (Trevet in *Medea*, 170–72):

Sixteenth, the nurse puts pressure on her by making a threat, saying: 'You will die.' Seventeenth, Medea in response annuls this threat, saying: 'I desire it.'; as if she were to say, I do not fear those threats of yours, since I desire to die. Eighteenth, the nurse gives counsel, saying: 'Flee!'; as if she were to say, unless you save yourself by fleeing, you are dead. Nineteenth, Medea shows this advice to be improper, saying: 'Flight has made me sorry', sc. on another occasion, when I fled my father, and so having to flee does not appear useful. Twentieth, the nurse refutes this response privately, saying: 'O Medea', as if she were to say: look at yourself and how you are responding, since you were fleeing not your persecutor, just as I am advising, but a father who loved you, and so <it is> not amazing if you are sorry. Twenty-first, Medea, yielding to

<sup>25</sup> Seneca, *Medea*, ed. O. Zwierlein, Oxford, 1986, p. 131. Fitch notes that Zwierlein followed Daniel Heinsius's emendation of the transmitted *uides* to *uide*, but Fitch himself argues for retaining *uides* since it 'is used in rejection of an exhortation, and means "you can see" the nature of Jason': J. G. Fitch, *Annaeana Tragica*, Leiden, 2004, pp. 82–3. As we shall see below, Trevet's source was missing this part of the line.

<sup>26</sup> 'NURSE. You will die. MEDEA. I desire it. NUR. Flee! MED. Flight has made me sorry. / NUR. Medea – MED. – I shall become. NUR. You're a mother. MED. See for what man I am (a mother). / NUR. Do you hesitate to flee? MED. I'll flee, but I'll avenge myself first.' Here and below translations of Trevet are mine, unless otherwise indicated; my translations were done with the help of Andrew J. Turner.

<sup>27</sup> M. C. Nussbaum, 'Serpents in the Soul: A Reading of Seneca's *Medea*', in *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Arts*, ed. J. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston, Princeton, 1997, 219–49 (225) (hereafter cited as Nussbaum).

<sup>28</sup> G. Guastella, '*Virgo, Coniunx, Mater: The Wrath of Seneca's Medea*', *Classical Antiquity*, 20.2, 2001, pp. 197–219 (206).

<sup>29</sup> See Hine, p. 136 ad 171; and Boyle, p. 173.

the advice of her nurse, says: 'I'll flee.' Twenty-second, the nurse warns her to flee with great care, saying: 'You're a mother.'; as if she were to say: flee in such a way that you retain the guardianship of your offspring. Twenty-third, Medea reveals what she will do before she flees, saying: 'I'll flee and avenge myself first', sc. before I flee.<sup>30</sup>

Based on his glosses, it is clear that in line 171, instead of 'fiam' (the *E* reading), Trevet's source  $\tau$  read 'fugiam' (the *A* reading). Further, a line was missing, technically the last half of 171 ('cui sim uide') and the first half of line 172 ('Profugere dubitas?'). As a result, we can reconstruct the text of  $\tau$  on which his interpretation is based (Seneca, *Medea*, 170–72 [ $\tau$ ]):

NVTRIX. Moriere. MEDEA. Cupio. NV. Fuge. ME. Pœnituit fugæ.  
NV. Medea – ME. Fugiam. NVT. Mater es. MED. Fugiam et ulciscar prius.<sup>31</sup>

In order to explain Medea's first 'fugiam', Trevet assumes there is an inner voice behind the Nurse's utterance, that she is trying to communicate something 'occulte' ('privately', 'in secret'), like a nurse chiding a child: that Medea should look at herself, look at how she is acting, consider that she was running away before from her father Aetes who loved her, so of course she would be sorry! This is a good deal to read into one vocative. Yet, it makes sense as a description of what the Nurse intends to communicate, and therefore the tone with which the reciter is meant to say 'Medea'. Imagine the variety of tones than can be given to the name Medea, none of which can be expressed fully even today by punctuation (Medea – Medea? Medea!!! Oh, Medea ... ), but require a verbal explanation of the mood ('Look at yourself and how you are responding!' 'Of course, you're sorry!'). Importantly, the Nurse is persuasive – Trevet's Medea actually yields to advice, agrees to flee, but intends to avenge herself first. Trevet also provides a motivation for the Nurse's reminder to Medea that she is a mother ('Mater es'): that once Medea has agreed to flee, the Nurse's next thought is to advise her to determine carefully how to retain guardianship of her sons. Again, this is a good deal for Trevet to read into two words, but it establishes his interpretation that characters in the play regard Medea as a mother who has genuine concern for her sons, and this theme will be repeated by Trevet

<sup>30</sup> Roberti, p. 43 (here and below, italicizations are Roberti's): 'Sextodecimo instat nutrix comminando, dicens: *Moriere*. Decimoseptimo respondens Medea has minas euacuat dicens: *Cupio*; quasi dicat: istas minas non timeo, quia mori desidero. Decimoctauo nutrix consulendo dicit: *Fuge*; quasi dicat: nisi salues te fugiendo mortua es. Decimonono Medea hoc consilium improbum ostendit dicens: *Penituit fuge*, scilicet alias, quando fugi patrem, et ideo non uidetur utile fugiendum. Vicesimo nutrix hanc responsonem redarguit occulte dicens: o *Medea*, quasi dicat: uide te ipsam quid respondes, quia non fugisti persequentem sicut ego consulo, sed patrem te diligentem, et ideo non mirum si penituit te. Vicesimo primo Medea condescendens nutricis consilio dicit: *Fugiam*. Vicesimo secundo nutrix ut discrete fugiat admonet eam dicens: *Mater es*; quasi dicat: sic fuge, ut curam habeas prolis tue. Vicesimo tercio Medea quid faciat antequam fugiat ostendit dicens: *Fugiam, et ulciscar prius*, scilicet quam fugiam.'

<sup>31</sup> 'NURSE. You will die. MEDEA. I desire it. NUR. Flee! MED. Flight has made me sorry. / NUR. Medea – MED. I'll flee. NUR. You're a mother. MED. I'll flee and avenge myself first.' In line 172, Trevet reads *A*'s 'et', supported by Fitch, *Annaeana Tragica* (n. 25 above), p. 83, who explains how Zwiirlein prints Ascensius's conjecture 'at'.

elsewhere. Trevet's Medea does not say she will 'become' Medea, since the *A* tradition of the text had long since replaced that idea with another.

### Act V – 'Now I am Medea'

After learning that she has successfully murdered Jason's new bride with the poisoned dress, and being urged by the Nurse to flee Corinth, Medea reflects on the crimes she committed in the past, including her slaughter of her brother Absyrtus and her role in the death of Pelias. Boyle's edition of Seneca, *Medea*, 907–15, reads with the following punctuation:

prolusit dolor  
per ista noster: quid manus poterant rudes  
audere magnum, quid puellaris furor?  
Medea nunc sum. creuit ingenium malis.  
Iuuat, iuuat rapuisse fraternal caput,  
artus iuuat secuisse et arcano patrem  
spoliassse sacro, iuuat in exitium senis  
armasse natas. quaere materiam, dolor.  
ad omne facinus non rudem dextram afferes.<sup>32</sup>

Scholars have interpreted these lines as a powerful moment of revelation for Medea, as well as closure. In the words of Hine, Medea here reaches her 'full potential, achieving what was promised at 171', the 'Medea fiam' line above.<sup>33</sup> Nussbaum focuses on the motif of anger:

When she has fully embraced the judgment that she has been wronged, she declared herself identical with her anger: *Medea nunc sum* (Now I am Medea). Anger now shows her the way: the final stroke of vengeance must be the killing of the children.<sup>34</sup>

Gianni Guastella and Lisl Walsh both reference the repetition of the impersonal verb 'iuuat', which they translate with the semantics of 'to be pleasing':

(Guastella) These crimes are now interpreted as the means to a new end, a preparation for redemption (*iuuat*, as Medea insists four times in three lines). At last, by means of all her suffering, Medea can achieve a full realization of her identity: *Medea nunc sum* ... 'glad am I, glad, that I tore off my brother's head.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> 'They were but practice / For my pain. How could my novice hands / Have dared great things? Or my girlish rage? / Now I am Medea. My nature bloomed in sin. // What joy, joy, ripping off my brother's head, / What joy in 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.' Translation by Boyle, p. 71.

<sup>33</sup> Hine, p. 202 ad 910.

<sup>34</sup> Nussbaum, p. 226.

<sup>35</sup> Guastella, '*Virgo, Coniunx, Mater*' (n. 28 above), p. 210.

(Walsh) As soon as she states 'now I am Medea', immediately the memories of her past come flooding back to her, and each one of them is a boon; *iuuat*, she repeats as she recounts each one ... . 'It pleases, it pleases to have stolen my brother's head.'<sup>36</sup>

Trevet, however, understands the impersonal verb 'iuuat', which is uttered four times in lines 911–13, not with its meaning of 'it gladdens someone' or 'it pleases someone' or 'it is a boon', but rather 'it is useful', as is clear from his gloss of 'iuuat' with 'utile iudico' ('I judge it useful').<sup>37</sup> A translation of his commentary on *Medea* 907–15 is provided here at length, utilizing some of Boyle's translation of Seneca:

'They were but practice for my pain', as if she were to say: the things which were done were nothing but some preliminary exercises<sup>38</sup> for the sake of things to come about. Furthermore, she shows that what she did had been modest, on account of the fact that she had not yet been instructed or experienced in committing crimes, wherefore she says: '<For> how could hands have dared great things', sc. my [hands], 'novice <hands>?', i.e. untrained and unaccustomed to crimes; 'What', sc. great thing could it commit, 'my girlish rage? Now I am Medea', sc. not a girl, but an experienced woman; 'Nature', sc. my <nature>, 'bloomed in sin', i.e. in the experience of evils. 'It is useful, it is useful', i.e. I judge it useful for committing a great crime – she repeats it out of her anger's passion – 'to have ripped off my brother's head'; she touches on how she killed her own brother and scattered his limbs in order to delay her father in pursuit. 'It is useful to have sliced his limbs' and body parts: this and the other things I have done make me daring and clever in perpetrating greater crimes; 'and', sc. it is useful, 'to have robbed my father of his sacred trove', i.e., the golden fleece, which was sacred in that it was the emblem of the kingdom, and a treasure-trove since it was guarded in secret; 'it is useful', i.e. it is useful to me for devising greater crimes, 'to have armed daughters', i.e. to have instructed the daughters of Pelias, uncle of Jason, 'in the killing', i.e. in the death, 'of the old man', sc. of Pelias, their father. '<O> my pain, find material; to every', i.e. to

<sup>36</sup> L. Walsh, 'The Metamorphoses of Seneca's *Medea*', *Ramus: Critical Studies in Greek and Roman Literature*, 41, 2012, pp. 71–93 (80–81).

<sup>37</sup> Trevet glosses 'iuuat' similarly in other plays, e.g. *Phaedra* 519: 'quam iuuat, id est ualde iuuat et utile iudicamus' ('How iuuat, i.e., it is extremely useful, and we judge it useful'): Trevet, *Phaedra*, ed. Chiabò (n. 3 above), p. 69, and id., *Phaedra*, ed. Fossati (n. 3 above), p. 41. Also, *Oedipus* 201: 'sed iuuat, id est utile reputant' ('But iuuat, i.e., they reckon it useful'): id., *Oedipus*, ed. Lagioia (n. 3 above), p. 17. Elsewhere Trevet glosses 'iuuat' with the semantics of both usefulness and delight, e.g. *Phaedra* 110: 'iuuat, id est utile et delectabile michi uidetur' ('iuuat, i.e., it seems to me useful and delightful'): id., *Phaedra*, ed. Chiabò, p. 39, and id., *Phaedra*, ed. Fossati, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> I translate the phrase 'quædam præludia respectu fiendorum', as it appears in V. Roberti, p. 111 omits the word 'præludia'. It is unfortunate that Roberti's edition is unreliable in several places, to the point that Fitch, 'Review of Luciana Roberti' (n. 15 above), deemed her editing 'breathtakingly inaccurate'. I have checked Roberti's text against V for all the passages that I cite.

a complete, ‘crime you will not bring a novice’, i.e. unlearned, ‘hand’, sc. as it was before, for it has now been educated by many crimes.<sup>39</sup>

This passage is an excellent illustration of Trevet’s general style of glossing terms and providing synonyms for Latin words, while at the same time expressing an interpretation of character based on those glosses.<sup>40</sup> He interprets ‘Medea nunc sum’ and the repetition of ‘iuuat’ not as Medea returning to her past and rejoicing in it, or identifying herself with anger (Nussbaum), or (in Boyle’s words) exhibiting a ‘criminal pleasure.’<sup>41</sup> Rather, Trevet places these lines within Medea’s broader narration of her experiences. ‘Nunc sum Medea’ is glossed that she is ‘not a girl, but an experienced woman’ (‘mulier experta’) – the point being that she has grown up, has changed, but not that she has reclaimed what she once was. With line 171 reading ‘fugiam’ rather than ‘fiam’ (see above), there is no counterbalance for ‘nunc sum Medea’, no foreshadowing in Act II for this line in Act V to be the culmination of. Instead, Trevet’s Medea in Act V observes almost rationally how her past experience is useful (*utile*) for committing greater crimes, and her hand has now been educated (‘edocta est’). I say ‘almost rationally’, since Trevet argues that Medea’s repetition of *iuuat* comes from her anger’s passion (‘ex passione iræ’). Even so, it is spoken with anger and not with the delight that most modern readers associate with the semantics of *iuuat*.

### The Lost Ending – ‘Do You Recognize Your Wife?’

At the end of the play, after Medea has killed her first son and prepares to kill the second one in front of Jason’s eyes, she dramatically declares that if she were carrying a foetus inside of her, she would drag it out with a sword (1012–13). She kills the second son and asks Jason whether he now recognizes his wife, then flies away on a serpent-drawn winged chariot, leaving Jason alone to curse her (1021–7). Medea’s ‘divinity’, which she alluded to earlier through invocations of the sun god, is revealed to Jason, who for his part reproaches her to bear witness that there are no gods wherever she goes.

<sup>39</sup> Roberti, pp. 111–12: ‘*Dolor noster prolusit per ista*, quasi dicat: que facta sunt non fuerunt nisi quedam <preludia> respectu fiendorum. Quod autem modica fuerint que fecerit probat per hoc, quia nondum erat edocta nec exercitata ad scelera facienda, unde dicit: *quid enim magnum audere poterant manus*, scilicet mee; *rudēs?*, id est indocte et insuete ad scelera; *quid*, scilicet magnum poterat facere; *puellaris furor?* *Nunc sum Medea*, scilicet non puella, sed mulier experta; *ingenium*, scilicet meum; *crevit malis*, id est experientia malorum; *iuuat*, *iuuat*, id est utile iudico ad perpetrandum magnum scelus, – ingeminat ex passione ire –; *rapuisse fratrum caput*, tangit quomodo fratrem proprium occidit et membra eius sparsit ut patrem persequentem retardaret; *iuuat secuisse artus* et membra: hoc enim et alia que feci reddunt me audacem et ingeniosam ad perpetrandum maiora scelera; *et*, scilicet iuuat; *spoliasse patrem sacro archano*, id est uellere aureo, quod erat sacrum in quantum erat insigne regni et archanum quia in secreto custoditum; *iuuat*, id est utile est michi ad ingeniandum maiora scelera; *armasse natus*, id est instruxisse filias Pelie patris Jasonis; *in exicium*, id est in mortem; *senis*, scilicet Pelie patris earum. *O dolor, quere materiam*; *ad omne*, id est ad perfectum; *facinus non afferes rudem*, id est indoctam; *dextram*, scilicet sicut prius, quia iam per multa scelera edocta est.’

<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed overview of Trevet’s method of exegesis throughout his Senecan commentary, see Junge, *Nicholas Trevet* (n. 3 above), pp. 136–57.

<sup>41</sup> Boyle, p. 357.

Yet these lines do not appear in Trevet's text, since the *A* tradition is lacking the last nineteen lines of the play. Wonderful lines as they are, Trevet does not know them and therefore cannot comment on them. Trevet's commentary on his final lines, *Medea*, 1002–8, reading the *A* tradition's *dede* at 1005 for *E*'s *dedo*, is as follows:

Sixth, when he has said: 'By god', Jason is presented begging Medea, but in vain, that she spare the other son. And so he says: 'By every god', i.e. every power of the gods, 'and by the marriage bed and the exile that was shared', sc. by you and me, since at the same time they fled her father they also entered into marriage, 'which', the marriage bed, 'my fidelity never violated', sc. but by the king I was compelled to marry another woman; 'now spare the son', sc. the surviving one; 'If there is any crime, it is mine. Give me over to death, slaughter the guilty head', sc. mine. Seventh, when she says: 'Here, where', Medea is presented denying Jason's plea and killing the other son, and so she says: 'Here', sc. on this side, 'where you object, where you grieve', i.e. for the sake of that son of yours, 'I shall thrust', i.e. I shall draw over, 'the blade.' And after the son is slain, she says: 'Go!', i.e. set forth, 'now, proud man', sc. Jason, 'seek virgins' beds', she says this ironically by casting at him his marriage to Creusa, 'leave mothers behind', sc. just like me, who bore sons to you. Eighth, when he says: 'One is', Jason is presented bewailing the son's death and saying: 'One', i.e. son who has been slain, 'is sufficient for the punishment', sc. of me. The *Medea* of Lucius Ann(a)eus Seneca ends.<sup>42</sup>

Trevet's Medea kills her second son at line 1006, rather than at line 1018, because lines 1009 and onwards are missing from Trevet's text. Trevet takes 'hac' as the indication that she intends to stab her son right away, and she does so. Trevet also confirms that the child is dead with the ablative absolute 'interfecto filio'. Further, Trevet instructs his narrator to put irony into Medea's command 'pete thalamos uirginum'. Trevet does not, however, comment on the significance of 'unus satis est poenae' (we would presume the rhetorical point is that two sons are more than sufficient punishment), but instead he wraps things up by noting that the play ends. Trevet has no knowledge of a Medea whose divinity is revealed by the arrival of a winged chariot, nor does he know of her slight delay in killing the second child and

<sup>42</sup> Roberti, pp. 119–20: 'Sexto cum dixit: *Per numen*, inducitur Jason deprecans Medeam, sed frustra, ut parcat alteri filio; unde dicit, *per numen omne*, id est omnem potestatem deorum; *perque thoros fugasque communes*, scilicet tibi et michi, quia simul fugerunt patrem et simul inierunt coniugium; *quos, thoros; nostra fides non uiolauit*, scilicet sed a rege compulsus sum aliam ducere; *iam parce nato*, scilicet superstiti; *si quod est crimen, meum est: dede me morti; macta caput noxium*, scilicet meum. Septimo cum dicit: *Hac qua*, inducitur Medea petitionem Jasonis denegans et alium filium interficiens; unde dicit: *hac*, scilicet parte; *qua recusas, qua doles*, scilicet per filium tuum istum; *exigam*, id est traducam; *ferrum*. et interfecto filio dicit: *I*, id est uade; *nunc, superbe*, scilicet Jason; *pete thalamos uirginum*, hoc yronice dicit impropere ei nupcias Creuse, *relinque matres*, scilicet sicut me, que peperit tibi filios. Octauo cum dicit: *Vnus est*, inducitur Jason mortem filii plangens et dicens: *unus*, scilicet filius interfectus; *satis est poene*, scilicet mee. Lucii Annei Seneca *Medea* explicit.'

‘milking’ the moment for all it is worth. For Trevet, Medea kills the second child, and then the play abruptly ends.

## Part II: Trevet’s Readings

### Creon’s Motivations

At various moments throughout the play, Medea and Jason’s exile in Corinth is explained to be the result of the death of Jason’s uncle Pelias, whose daughters were tricked by Medea into killing him. Pelias’s son Acastus is the new king of Iolcus and is still pursuing the exiled couple – or so Jason claims at 521, ‘Acastus instat’ (‘Acastus is closing in’). Jason’s new marriage to Creusa is directly linked to this threat from Acastus. But Trevet and modern commentators on the play differ in their interpretation of who precisely is the target of Acastus’s wrath. In Act II, Creon explains his motives for exiling Medea from Corinth. The accepted text of Seneca, *Medea*, 252–7, by modern editors (here I reproduce Hine’s) reads:

Non esse me qui sceptrā uiolentus geram  
 nec qui superbo miserias calcem pede,  
 testatus equidem uideor haud clare parum  
 generum exulem legendo et afflictum et graui  
 terrore pauidum, quippe quem poenae expetit  
 letoque Acastus regna Thessalica optinens.<sup>43</sup>

252 uiolentus *E*: uiolenter *A* 254 haud *E*: aut *A*  
 256 quippe quem *R*: quippe te *A*: quem *E*

Treuet’s source was dramatically different. At 254, τ read ‘clare’ as ‘dare’, and at 256 followed *A*’s ‘quippe te’ for *R*’s ‘quippe quem’. Furthermore, as is clear from his comments, Treuet posits a rhetorical break after ‘testatus equidem uideor’ in 254, then takes ‘uideor’ as the governing verb of the infinitive phrase ‘non me esse’. This is in contrast to modern translators (such as Hine and Boyle) who take ‘uideor’ as parenthetical, and ‘non me esse’ as a dependent clause following ‘testatus’. Finally, at 252, τ followed *A*’s ‘uiolenter’ (an adverb) instead of *E*’s ‘uiolentus’ (an adjective modifying ‘qui’). Treuet’s commentary on *Medea*, 252–7 runs as follows:

Then when he says: ‘I am not’, in the thirteenth section Creon is presented refusing Medea’s statements and attributing another reason for exile, in which he first sets aside from himself the insult which Medea cast against him, saying: ‘For my part, having attested’, i.e. to have affirmed by authority, ‘I think that I am not one who would wield the sceptre violently’, i.e. that I rule with

<sup>43</sup> ‘CREON: That I am not one who is violent at wielding the sceptre, nor one who would trample with an arrogant foot over misfortunes, I think I have attested quite clearly enough by choosing for a son-in-law a man exiled and oppressed and cowering in burdensome terror, <a man>, in fact, whom Acastus, upon obtaining the kingdom of Thessaly, pursues for punishment and death.’

violence and oppress the people, 'nor one who would trample with an arrogant foot over misfortunes', i.e. that I suppress and despise the wretched. Secondly he refutes the reason by which Medea says that she is unworthy<sup>44</sup> of exile if there is to be another one. And so he says: 'not of no account', sc. is it to me, 'to give a son-in-law', sc. the fact that you <gave a son-in-law> to your father, 'by choosing', i.e. by selecting, 'an exile', sc. just as Jason appeared to be when he came to Colchis, 'both oppressed', sc. on account of his complete lack of help and counsel, 'and cowering in burdensome terror', sc. on account of the flame-breathing bulls and the soldiers born from the ground and the sleepless dragon, all of which nevertheless he conquered by your help; as if he were to say, the fact that you took Jason as a husband when he was in exile and placed in difficulties is of some importance in my opinion, nor am I driving you into exile because of this. Thirdly, he gives the reason why she is being hunted for punishment, saying: 'In fact, Acastus', sc. the son of Pelias, 'upon obtaining the kingdom of Thessaly pursues you for punishment and death'.<sup>45</sup>

In Trevet's reading, lines 252–7 are not so much Creon's justification for accepting Jason as a son-in-law, but instead are a rehashing of Medea's past actions of 'selecting' ('legendo') Jason as a son-in-law for her own father, and the danger by association that she now poses to Jason. In Trevet's source, Creon claims that Acastus is pursuing Medea ('te', the *A* reading of 256), and not Jason ('quem', the *R* reading), for punishment. Trevet then interprets Creon's description of Jason as 'exulem et afflictum et graui terrore pauidum' ('exiled and oppressed and cowering in burdensome terror') not as a reference to Jason's exile in Corinth and fear of Acastus, but to Jason's journey to Colchis and his fear of the magical tasks he was compelled to complete in exchange for the golden fleece. Trevet is even explicit about what he perceives as the rhetorical point: as proof that he is not a violent king, Creon assures Medea that he has some respect for her for coming to Jason's aid and marrying him (in Trevet's words) 'in exilio et angustiis constitutum' ('when he was in exile and placed in difficulties'). Though it might seem a stretch to equate Jason's quest for the golden fleece with exile, what Trevet achieves is a consistent interpretation that it is Medea – not Jason – who is being pursued by Acastus, the son of Pelias. Creon later

<sup>44</sup> As Roberti, p. 51, notes, 'dignans' in *V* is corrected by a second hand to 'indignans', which makes more sense here, since in the previous lines (224–43) Medea has explained how she saved the lives of the Greek princes who supplicated her in Colchis and is therefore not worthy of another exile.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Deinde cum dicit: *Non esse*, terdecimo loco inducitur Creon dicta Medee excludens et aliam causam exilii assignans, unde primo remouet a se iniuriam quam Medea obicit dicens: *equidem testatus*, id est auctoritate confirmasse; *uideor non me esse qui scepra uiolenter geram*, id est cum uiolentia regnum et opprimam populum; *nec qui pede superbo calcem miserias*, id est deprimam et contempnam miseros. Secundo excludit causam qua Medea se dicit <in>dignam exilio si tamen sit aliqua, unde dicit: *haut parum*, scilicet est michi; *dare generum*, scilicet te patri; *legendo*, id est eligendo; *exulem*, scilicet qualis uidebatur Jason cum ueniret ad Colchos; *et afflictum*, scilicet propter destitucionem auxilii et consilii; *et graui terrore pauidum*, scilicet propter tauros flammuiomos et milites ortos de terra et peruigilem draconem, que tamen omnia tuo auxilio uicit, quasi dicat: non est parum apud me nec propter hoc in exilium te ago, quod accepisti maritum Jasonem in exilio et angustiis constitutum. Tercio dat causam propter quam petitur ad penam dicens: *quippe Acastus*, scilicet filius Pelie; *obtinens regna Thessalica expetii te pene letoque*.'



reminds Medea that it was she who tricked Pelias's daughters, so that if she disassociates her case from him, Jason can mount his own ('potest Iason, si tuam causam amoues, suam tueri', 262–3), given that Jason was innocent since his hand did not touch the sword ('afuit ferro manus', 264). In light of these later passages, Trevet's interpretation of 252–7 makes sense. Creon's *praeteritio* of listing Medea's use of magic to help Jason in the past while claiming that this is not the reason he is exiling her is a rhetorically practical starting point that segues into his real concern: a target is on Medea's back from Acastus, and if Medea will go away, Jason can claim his innocence.

### Jason's Motivations

In Act III when, according to Trevet, 'introducitur Jason disponens se ad alloquendum Medeam' ('Jason is brought on stage preparing himself to address Medea'), does he similarly excuse himself for marrying Creon's daughter and divorcing Medea? The editions of Seneca's *Medea* by Hine, Boyle and Fitch<sup>46</sup> are in agreement for the following passage (Seneca, *Medea*, 434–9):

si uellem fidem  
praestare meritis coniugis, leto fuit  
caput offerendum. si mori nollem, fide  
misero carendum. non timor uicit fidem,  
sed trepida pietas: quippe sequeretur necem  
proles parentum.<sup>47</sup>

In this edition of Seneca's text, Jason's head was forfeit to death ('leto fuit caput offerendum') at the hands of his cousin Acastus. By this logic, as Creon had argued previously at 259–65, Jason's marriage to Medea makes him a target of Acastus's revenge, but a divorce from Medea and marriage to Creusa would release him from fear of retribution from Acastus, who could indeed have targeted Jason's sons after killing Jason and Medea both. Even so, according to today's editions such as that quoted above, Jason admits that Medea through her services ('meritis') to him was deserving of his faithfulness, which he broke.<sup>48</sup> Boyle expresses elegantly the feelings that most readers surely have of the unimpressive Jason: the passage is 'an unconvincing sophistry which exposes a prime motor of Jason's conduct: fear'.<sup>49</sup>

For Trevet, his source text (τ) preserves some *A* readings which change the sense of Jason's argument. At 437, τ reads *A*'s 'carendum est' for *E*'s 'carendum', and *A*'s

<sup>46</sup> See Hine and Boyle. Seneca, VIII: *Tragedies*, I: *Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician Women, Medea, Phaedra*, ed. and transl. J. G. Fitch, 2nd ed., Loeb Classical Library 62, Cambridge MA, 2018. These all print 'nollem' in line 436, which is the *E* reading. Trevet's source has the *A* reading, 'nolim'.

<sup>47</sup> My translation: 'JASON: If I had wanted to keep faith with my wife, as she deserves, then (my) head was forfeit to death; if I didn't want to die, it was necessary for me, unhappy man, to break faith. Fear did not prevail over my good faith, but anxious parental love: for the children would have been next after the murder of their parents.'

<sup>48</sup> Boyle, p. 245, glosses 'meritis' with 'as she deserves: lit. 'with the services' (of my wife)'.  
<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

'uincit uirum' for *E*'s 'uicit fidem'. At 438,  $\tau$  reads an ungrammatical 'sequitur' for *EA*'s 'sequeretur'. But most crucially, in the absence of modern punctuation, Trevet sees no break between 'praestare meritis coniugis' and 'leto fuit' in line 435, and instead reads a sense break between 'praestare' and 'meritis coniugis'. This is all made clear in Trevet's comments on *Medea*, 434–9, in which he significantly rearranges Seneca's word order to illustrate his own understanding of the syntax:

'If I had wanted to keep faith, then my wife's head as she deserves was forfeit to death ('leto'), i.e. to death ('morti'); 'If I don't want <her> to die,' sc. my wife, 'the wretched man', sc. I, 'must break faith', as if he were to say: between two evils, for if I wish to be faithful, my wife must be put to death according to her deserts, but if I should wish to save my wife's life, it is necessary for me to break faith, which I ought to have preserved otherwise. 'It is not <fear> that defeats the husband', sc. me, 'fear', as if out of fear I do not wish her to die, 'but anxious parental love', sc. for which I tremble on account of my sons, 'for the children follow the murder of their parents', sc. <follow them> to death; therefore, if my wife had died, I fear that my sons would have died either through grief or because of the loss of <her> care.<sup>50</sup>

For Trevet, Jason marries Creon's daughter in order to save Medea's life – at least, that is part of Trevet's overall argument, which requires some creative explanation of why Jason claims that it was not 'timor' ('fear') that prevailed over his fidelity. Boyle comments that by denying fear, Jason is trying – rather unsuccessfully – to deflect an accusation of lacking 'uirtus' ('courage').<sup>51</sup> This is an interesting notion, given that Jason is speaking in soliloquy and only has himself to convince. It is also predicated on the traditional reading that it is Jason's head, not Medea's, that is facing death. Trevet, however, assuming that it is Medea's head that is forfeit to death, decides that Jason's 'timor' refers to a supposed cause for not wanting Medea to die (which Jason denies); at least that is how I interpret Trevet's succinct clause 'ut pro timore nolim eam mori' ('as if out of fear I do not wish her to die'), which is to say, surely it would be out of love that he would not wish such a thing. If so, the connection to the 'trepida pietas' which does, in fact, motivate him is not seamless.

Moreover, Trevet does not specify to whom Medea's head is forfeit. The most likely scenario is twofold. First, Trevet's *A* reading of Creon's line 256–7 ('quippe te poenae expetit letoque Acastus'), cited above, indicates that Trevet's Acastus is pursuing Medea, not Jason. Second, at 490–91 Jason reveals that Creon initially wanted to have Medea killed, but was won over by Jason's tears to grant her exile instead. Trevet comments on line 490: 'Jason ostendit Medeæ magnum beneficium

<sup>50</sup> Roberti, p. 69: '*si uellem prestare fidem meritis, caput coniugis offerendum fuit leto, id est morti; si nolim mori, scilicet coniugem meam; misero, scilicet michi; carendum est fide, quasi dicat: inter duo mala, si enim uolo fidelis esse, coniunx secundum sua merita offerenda est morti, si uero uelim saluare uitam coniugis mee, necesse est me carere fidelitate, quam debueram seruare aliis; Non uincit uirum, scilicet me; timor, ut pro timore nolim eam mori; sed pietas trepida, scilicet qua trepido pro filiis meis; quippe necem parentum sequitur proles, scilicet ad mortem, unde, si mortua esset coniunx mea, timeo ne morentur filii uel pre dolore uel pro defectu cure.'*

<sup>51</sup> Boyle, p. 245.

impendisse, quia impetrauit ei uitam' ('Jason shows that he rendered a great kindness to Medea, since he obtained life for her').<sup>52</sup> As mentioned earlier, Medea's toxic reply that she thought exile was a punishment but now understands that it is a gift (492) is glossed by Trevet with: 'deridendo hoc dicit' ('she says this with derision'). All these passages support a scenario whereby Acastus is pursuing Medea in order to kill her, Creon as well planned to kill Medea, and Jason has used tears and an offer of divorce and remarriage in order to obtain exile – and life – for the mother of his children.

Even more thought-provoking is that (in Trevet's interpretation) Jason's concern for his sons' lives was not that Acastus would try to kill them, but rather that if Medea was killed, the sons would die of grief ('præ dolore') or, even more telling, because of the loss of her care for them ('pro defectu curæ'), which implies that Jason considers Medea a good mother. A few lines later, after invoking the goddess Justice as a witness, Jason repeats his argument: 'nati patrem uicere' ('My sons defeated their father', Seneca, *Medea*, 441). Trevet is explicit about Jason's rhetorical argument: 'sc. in hoc, ut nolim coniugem mori' ('<they defeated their father> in this matter, that I do not wish my wife to die', Trevet in *Medea*, 441).<sup>53</sup> In other words, the sons themselves persuaded their father to petition for the commuting of Medea's death sentence to exile.

These concepts shed some light on Jason's final appeal to Medea in Act V that he never violated their marriage bed ('torosque, quos non nostra uiolauit fides', 1003). Modern commentators are at pains to figure out how Jason could claim to have been faithful. Boyle, for example, writes that:

Jason could, of course, maintain that since his breach of *fides* was caused by *pietas* in circumstances beyond his control (pressure from Creon and the threat of Acastus), he was not really 'unfaithful.' This is perhaps what he unpersuasively attempts to imply.<sup>54</sup>

But for Trevet's readers, is Jason's claim stronger if they know that he broke faith in order to save Medea's life, and to spare his sons dying of grief at their mother's death? Perhaps. But even if Trevet's Jason is compassionate in soliloquy, he is skilled at making excuses when arguing with Medea. Trevet's gloss to 1003, 'torosque, quos non nostra uiolauit fides' ('our marriage bed, which my faithfulness never violated'), is 'scilicet sed a rege compulsus sum aliam ducere' ('that is to say, "but I was forced by the king to marry another woman"').<sup>55</sup> It appears that Trevet would have agreed with Boyle about the utility of 'pressure from Creon' as a defence; whether Trevet would concur about its lack of persuasiveness is unstated.

<sup>52</sup> Roberti, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Boyle, p. 378 ad 1002–5.

<sup>55</sup> Roberti, pp. 119–20.

## Jason and Medea's Dialogue

In Act III at lines 496–501, *A* and *E* assign different lines to different speakers. Modern editions, following *E*'s distribution of speakers, read as follows (here I reproduce Hine):

IASON. *Medea amores obicit?* MEDEA. *Et caedem et dolos.*  
 IAS. *Obicere crimen quod potes tandem mihi?*  
 MED. *Quoddcumque feci.* IAS. *Restat hoc unum insuper,*  
*tuis ut etiam sceleribus fiam nocens.*  
 MED. *Tua illa, tua sunt illa: cui prodest scelus,*  
*is fecit.*<sup>56</sup>

In contrast, Trevet's source  $\tau$  assigned the lines consistently with the *A* tradition, in which the speaker-assignments had gone off. *E*'s speaker change to Jason at 497 is omitted in *A*; the speaker of the first half of line 498 is indicated as Medea in *E*, Jason in *A*; the speaker of the second half of line 498 is indicated as Jason in *E*, Medea in *A*; and *E*'s speaker change to Medea in 500 is omitted in *A*.<sup>57</sup> Trevet's source also reads 'obicis' at line 496.<sup>58</sup> Trevet explains this exchange in this way:

Seventh,<sup>59</sup> when he says: *Medea*, Jason accuses Medea of the fact that she accuses Jason's new love, since she herself was at one stage captured by such a love; and so he says: 'Medea, are you making a charge of love?', sc. against me; as if he were to say, you ought not, since love could have been charged against you, if <love> had been reprehensible and worthy of accusation.<sup>60</sup>

By paraphrasing Jason's question about love, Trevet reveals what he considers to be the rhetorical point. Medea has accused Jason of exiling her in order to please his new bride Creusa, and by retorting 'Do *you* make an accusation of love?', Jason

<sup>56</sup> 'JASON. Is Medea charging <me with> love? / MEDEA. And slaughter and trickery. / JAS. What charge can you hold up against me, I ask? / MED. Whatever I did. / JAS. That is the only thing left, that I also become blameworthy by your crimes. / MED. Those are yours, those deeds are yours; he to whose advantage it is, has done the crime.' I follow Hine's translation, p. 64, of 'tandem' as 'I ask', following the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. 1b.

<sup>57</sup> Incidentally, at 497 *A*'s 'obicere crimen quod potes tandem' is preferred by modern editors to *E*'s 'obicere tandem quod potest crimen' ('What charge can <Medea> hold up, I ask?'), a good example of how *A*'s readings are not consistently considered less authoritative than *E*'s.

<sup>58</sup> As one of the journal's anonymous peer reviewers has kindly pointed out, the reading 'obicis' is not unique to Trevet's source, but also survives in some manuscripts after Trevet's day: MSS *I* (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 24 sin. 4, which was completed in 1371), *r* (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 1500, which was completed in 1389) and *T* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 8031, from the start of the 1400s). Therefore, 'obicis' must have stood in these manuscripts' ancestor, now lost. See Seneca, *Medea*, ed. Zwierlein (n. 25), pp. xxiii–xxiv for details on the dating of these manuscripts.

<sup>59</sup> Reading 'septimo' as in *V*, instead of 'septima' as printed in Roberti, p. 75.

<sup>60</sup> Roberti, p. 75: 'Septim<o> cum dicit: *Medea*, Jason arguit Medeam de eo quod nouum amorem Jansonis arguit, quia ipsa aliquando tali amore capta fuit; unde dicit: o *Medea amores obicis?*, scilicet michi; quasi dicat: non deberes, cum tibi amores obiciendi essent, si reprehensibiles et redarguendi essent.'

turns such an accusation back against Medea herself. If love was a crime, Medea would be guilty of her love for Jason. Modern commentators observe a different dramatic signal; for Hine, Medea ‘has, in effect, accused him of being in love with Creusa’, and ‘his reply effectively admits the charge’.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, Trevet does not comment on Jason’s feelings towards Creusa. Instead, he concentrates on the full implications of Medea’s terse response about ‘caedem’ (‘slaughter’) and ‘dolos’ (‘trickery’):

Eighth, when she says: ‘And slaughter’, Medea shows that she does not object to love, but the many things which she did because of her love for him, which simply ought not to have been done; and so she says: ‘And slaughter and trickery’, sc. those things which I did on account of my love for you, I charge against you.<sup>62</sup>

It is not love that Medea objects to, but the slaughter and trickery which she committed out of love, which are things ‘quæ tamen facienda simpliciter non fuissent’ (‘which simply ought not to have been done’). Does this imply that Trevet’s Medea has some genuine regrets for her past crimes? Next, Trevet’s Medea turns the tables:

‘What charge/crime can you bring forward against me, I ask?’, as if she were to say, none. Ninth, responding to this Jason says: ‘Whatever I did’, sc. <whatever> crime <I did>, I can bring forward against you. Tenth, when she says: ‘There follows on’, Medea twists a reply back against Jason, saying: ‘There follows on’, sc. from your words, ‘this one thing more: that I as well am made culpable for your wicked acts’, sc. since you say that you are bringing forward against me everything which you did, and yet this is not the case. And so she says: ‘Those <acts> are yours, those are yours.’ – she doubles her words from grief and anger – however, she proves that they are his, saying that: ‘He to whose advantage it is, has done the wicked act’, i.e. on account of whose interests it was committed; whatsoever wicked act I committed, I committed it in your interests, and so whatever I did is yours.’<sup>63</sup>

Trevet interprets Medea’s ‘What charge (*crimen*) can you bring forward against me?’ as a rhetorical question expecting the answer ‘none’. His Jason has an answer: whatever ‘crimen’ (‘crime’) I did. That is, Trevet assumes that the elided object after ‘feci’, and the head of ‘quodcumque’, is ‘crimen’. Given the verb ‘feci’ (‘I did’, ‘I

<sup>61</sup> Hine, p. 163 ad 496.

<sup>62</sup> Roberti, p. 75: ‘Octavo cum dicit: *Et cedem*, Medea docet quod non amores obicit, sed multa que pro amore eius fecit, que tamen facienda simpliciter non fuissent; unde dicit: *et cedem et dolos*, scilicet que pro amore tuo feci obicio tibi.’ In *V* ‘obicio tibi’ is underlined as if it is part of the following lemma, but Roberti’s editing makes better sense.

<sup>63</sup> Roberti, p. 75: ‘*Quod crimen potes obicere tandem michi?*, quasi dicat: nullum. Nono huic respondens Jason dicit: *Quodcumque feci*, scilicet crimen, possum obicere tibi. Decimo cum dicit: *Restat*, Medea retorquet responsonem in Jasonem dicens: *restat*, scilicet ex dictis tuis; *hoc unum insuper, ut etiam fiam nocens sceleribus tuis*, scilicet quia dicis quod omnia que fecisti obicis michi et tamen non sic est; unde dicit: *Tua sunt illa, tua sunt illa* – ex dolore et ira ingeminat –, quod autem sint eius probat dicens quia; *is fecit scelus cui prodest*, id est pro cuius utilitate factum est: quodcumque uero scelus feci, pro tua utilitate feci, et ideo tuum est quicquid feci.’

committed'), 'crimen' here must have the semantics of a crime committed, rather than a charge (as at line 497); furthermore, Seneca himself uses the word 'scelus' in subsequent lines as a synonym for 'crimen'. But if (as in Trevet's source τ) Medea speaks the line 'Obicere crimen quod potes tandem mihi?', and it is Jason who responds 'Quodcumque feci', this begs the question, what crimes does Trevet assume Jason committed? Does it include, perhaps, the present 'crime' of forsaking Medea? Or the 'crime' of stealing the golden fleece? Even more astonishing, in Trevet's text it is Medea (and not Jason) who then complains that – following on Jason's words – she is made blameworthy for Jason's crimes. As Trevet explains, with these words 'Medea retorquet responsionem in Jasonem' ('Medea twists a reply back against Jason'), since in fact she will prove that she is not blameworthy for anything Jason has done. This is followed, at the point where both *A* and *E* are in sync, by an interpretation of her final lines that whatever she did for Jason was in his interests and therefore counts as his crime. Trevet's explanation of the duplication of 'tua sunt illa' as arising 'ex dolore et ira' ('from grief and anger') itself doubles as providing a motivation for a rhetorical device, and as instructing the narrator to speak with an impassioned voice.<sup>64</sup>

Crucially, there are specific aspects of character created by the arrangement of the lines (the *A* tradition) in Trevet's text. They produce a Jason who admits that he has done things (Trevet assumes they are crimes) that he can hold against Medea. This leads into her equation of crimes that she did for his benefit as crimes belonging to him. But before she reaches that point, what crimes is Jason admitting to? Is it the crime of merely existing as the beloved hero for whom Medea was motivated to commit her crimes? If so, this provides a fine segue to the next major theme in the characterization of Trevet's Medea: her role as Jason's saviour.

### Medea as Jason's Saviour

At various points in Seneca's play, Medea references her role in saving Jason's life in Colchis, as well as the lives of the Argonauts in their pursuit of the golden fleece. She proclaims as much to Creon in Act II, reminding him that she saved ('seruasse', 228) the likes of Orpheus, Castor and Pollux, and furthermore 'non paenitet seruasse tot regum decus' ('It does not cause me regret to have saved the glory of so many kings', 243). In Act III Medea even suggests that Jason flee with her, since she is capable of defeating anyone who would pursue them, even the combined forces of Creon and Acastus (as Jason suggests, 525–6), and the Colchians, Scythians and Pelasgians added to their number (as Medea boasts, 527–8). There are two sections of the play which Trevet interprets as a further expression of this theme of Medea as Jason's saviour and protector, even though modern editors read them quite differently.

<sup>64</sup> Here I respectfully disagree with one of the journal's peer reviewers who felt that 'Trevet is desperately trying to make sense out of nonsense'. I would argue instead that he has done a remarkable job of taking meaning out of the text that was at his disposal.

In the first passage, in Act III, this mythical background enables Trevet to misunderstand the Latin (Seneca, *Medea*, 560–61):

Discessit. itane est? uadis oblitus mei  
et tot meorum facinorum?<sup>65</sup>

It is evident to all readers, other than Trevet, that *uadis* should be parsed as a verb, the 2nd person singular present active indicative. Trevet, however, reads it as the genitive of the 3rd declension masculine noun ‘uas’, ‘a surety’, in agreement with ‘mei’ after the verb ‘oblitus <est>’. Metrically, this is wrong, since the genitive ‘uadis’ has a short *a*, but the metre requires a long *a*. Nonetheless, Trevet takes ‘uadis’ as ‘a surety’ and explains its semantic importance as follows:

Medea, lamenting with herself the ingratitude of Jason, says: ‘He has departed’, sc. Jason <has departed> from me; ‘Is this the case? Has he forgotten me as his surety?’, i.e., because, in order to save his life, I made myself available just like a surety and a guarantor. ‘And <has he forgotten> my many crimes?’, sc. which I committed in order to save him.<sup>66</sup>

In Trevet’s interpretation, Medea expresses her amazement that Jason can forget all the things that she did to save his life, rather than – as modern commentators have noted – because he is forgetful of her reputation for committing crimes and should be worried about her potential revenge.<sup>67</sup> Such an ominous foreshadowing is only apparent in Trevet’s comments on Medea’s following lines (Trevet in *Medea*, 561–2):

And in her own mind addressing Jason she says: ‘Have we vanished from you?’, i.e. have we been erased from your<sup>68</sup> memory? And bursting out into anger she lays down threats, saying: ‘We shall never vanish’, sc. from memory, as if she were to say: we shall do such things, that you never forget us.<sup>69</sup>

Trevet inserts Medea’s emotions – anger (‘iram’) and threats (‘minas’) – and in doing so arrives at the same conclusions about her intentions as did Hine, who paraphrased: ‘i.e., though you may for the moment have forgotten what I have done up till now, you shall never forget what I am going to do’.<sup>70</sup>

The second passage that Trevet interprets as a reference to Medea’s role as Jason’s saviour comes in the Third Choral Ode. At Seneca, *Medea*, 646–9, the

<sup>65</sup> ‘MEDEA: He has departed. Is this the case? Do you walk away, having forgotten me / and my many crimes?’

<sup>66</sup> Roberti, p. 82: ‘Medea secum ingratitude Jasonis plangens dicit: *discessit*, scilicet a me Jason; *itane est? Oblitus uadis mei*, id est quod me, pro saluanda uita sua, quasi uadem et fideiussorem exposui. *Et tot facinorum meorum?*, scilicet que ego feci pro eo saluando.’

<sup>67</sup> E.g. Boyle, pp. 268–9 ad 560–62.

<sup>68</sup> Reading *tua* as in V, instead of *sua* as printed in Roberti, p. 82.

<sup>69</sup> Roberti, p. 82: ‘Et in mente sua alloquens Jasonem dicit: *Excidimus tibi?*, id est de memoria <t>ua deleti sumus. Et in iram prorumpens minas apponit dicens: *Numquam excidemus*, scilicet a memoria, quasi dicat: talia faciemus, quod numquam obliuisceris nostri.’

<sup>70</sup> Hine, p. 166 ad 560–2.

chorus narrates a story from the Argonautic expedition about the death of a young boy whom Hercules never found:

meruere cuncti –  
 morte quod crimen tener expiauit  
 Herculi magno puer inrepertus,  
 raptus, heu, tutas puer inter undas?<sup>71</sup>

It is clear to all modern commentators that the boy in question is Hylas, Hercules's young companion, who was abducted by nymphs; Hercules abandoned the Argonautic expedition to search in vain for him. But Trevet glosses the boy as Medea's brother Absyrtus, which requires some explanation. First, he does not place a break between the phrases 'meruere cuncti' and 'morte quod crimen', and instead reads them as a complete sentence ('meruere cuncti morte quod crimen tener expiauit Herculi magno puer inrepertus'), then takes 'meruere' as transitive with 'crimen' as its direct object, and 'quod' as a relative pronoun (despite Seneca's word order whereby 'quod' precedes 'crimen') instead of as an interrogative adjective. Trevet's source at line 649 also reads 'raptus est' (the *A* reading) instead of *E*'s 'raptus, heu', thus providing a syntactical break at the end of line 648. Trevet's explanation of how lines 646–9 relate to Absyrtus is fascinating:

'All of them', sc. the companions of Jason, 'deserved the crime', i.e. the punishment for the crime, 'which a tender boy', sc. the brother of Medea, 'undiscovered by great Hercules', i.e. not found by great Hercules,<sup>72</sup> 'atoned for by his death',<sup>73</sup> sc. was killed by Medea so that in this way she together with Jason might flee safely to the ships; 'The boy was snatched away', sc. to death, 'amidst waves', i.e. while they were making their way to the waves, '<that were> safe', since while her father had been occupied in collecting the boy's limbs, Jason with all of his companions entrusted himself to the waves as if he was secure amidst them. Moreover, 'the boy undiscovered by great Hercules' is said since, amidst the monsters that he mastered and the crimes that he avenged, he did not find a crime so great <as this> to be avenged.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> 'CHORUS: They all deserved what they got – / but what crime was expiated by the death of the young boy / whom great Hercules never found, / the boy abducted, alas, in safe waters?' Translation by Hine, p. 85.

<sup>72</sup> As A. J. Turner has pointed out to me, the wording here ('a magno Hercule') indicates that Trevet has understood the dative of agent used by Seneca.

<sup>73</sup> I take 'expiauit' ('atoned for') as transitive with 'quod' ('which', a relative pronoun) as its object. Another possibility (suggested by A. J. Turner) is to understand 'quod' as a conjunction, in which case Trevet's ordering of the Latin ('cuncti meruere crimen quod tener puer inrepertus magno Herculi expiauit morte') could be translated: 'All of them deserved <punishment for> the crime: that a tender boy, undiscovered by great Hercules, averted <their misfortune> by his death.' This would interpret the verb 'expio' in the sense of 'avert' (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. 4), with an elided object. However, since Trevet typically glosses elided objects and does not do so here, and since 'expio' is usually not intransitive, I opt for interpreting 'quod' as a relative pronoun.

<sup>74</sup> Roberti, pp. 90–91: 'cuncti, scilicet socii Jasonis; meruere crimen, id est penam criminis; quod tener puer, scilicet frater Medee; inrepertus magno Herculi, id est non inuentus a magno Hercule; expiauit morte, scilicet interfectus a Medea ut sic ipsa cum Jasone securi fugerent ad naues; raptus est puer, scilicet ad mortem; inter undas, id est dum peruenitur ad undas; tutas{?}, quia dum pater occupatus erat circa



The theme of the chorus's ode is the disastrous fate that has befallen all who sailed on the *Argo* or were associated with it, culminating in the death of Pelias (694–7), the very man who ordered Jason on his mission. These disasters are a punishment for their daring to tread into Neptune's realm, and the narrative of the individual Argonauts is framed by two appeals to the gods (595–6 and 698–9) to spare Jason. That Trevet puts Medea and her brother in the catalogue is intriguing since Medea appears nowhere else within it. Although the comparison of her rage at Jason to winds and flooding rivers are the *topoi* of the choral ode's beginning (579–94), Medea would not otherwise be invoked by the chorus unless Trevet put her there. Yet, Trevet assumes that Absyrtus is the 'tener puer' ('tender boy') who somehow atones for the Argonauts' crime by his death at his sister's hands, and that the Argonauts deserved the punishment they got. Throughout, Trevet presents the story of Absyrtus's death as integral to Jason's safety; even 'tutas undas' ('safe waters') is glossed as being safe not for Absyrtus, but for Jason and his companions. Trevet's explanation of why Seneca describes Absyrtus as 'undiscovered by great Hercules' is rather far-fetched, but understandably necessary when the story of Hylas has been discarded in favour of Absyrtus. To his credit, Trevet carries through the theme of 'crimen' which begins the passage, positing the Absyrtus story both as the greatest crime that Medea committed in order to save Jason, and as yet another cause of the Argonauts' dreadful fates.

### Medea's Motivations

Medea's 'vacillation' over killing her sons in Act V is a vitally important part of all interpretations of Seneca's play, and as one should expect, Trevet understands the syntax of various lines at variance with the punctuation of modern editions and thereby arrives at a seemingly anomalous interpretation of Medea's thinking process.

To begin with, Trevet is explicit in his comment on line 924 that what will follow in Medea's soliloquy is a rhetorical argument with two opposing sides:

Then when she says: 'Children', she debates about committing this crime against her own children, arguing now on one side and now on the other.<sup>75</sup>

Trevet divides the whole next scene into sections; in the first (lasting only a line and a half), Medea summons the children, and in the second 'quasi pietate commota, ab hoc scelere se retrahit' ('as if moved by familial love, she withdraws herself from

---

Footnote 74 (continued)

membra pueri colligenda, Jason cum omnibus sociis commisit se undis tamquam in eis existens securus. Dicitur autem: puer irrepertus magno Herculi, quia inter monstra que domuit et scelera que uindicauit, tale scelus uindicandum non inuenit.' Roberti prints a question mark after 'tutas', consistent with modern editors of Seneca who understand 'quod' in 647 as interrogative. However, as stated in n. 73 above, Trevet's own explanation of the line provides a syntax in which 'quod' is a relative pronoun, and no question is posed.

<sup>75</sup> Roberti, pp. 112–13: 'Deinde cum dicit: *liberi*, deliberat de hoc scelere faciendo in liberos proprios disputando nunc ad unam partem, nunc ad aliam.'

this crime', Trevet in *Med.* 926).<sup>76</sup> Medea's vacillation is at its height at the end of this second section, lines 931–6:<sup>77</sup>

incognitum istud facinus ac dirum nefas  
a me quoque absit; quod scelus miseri luent?  
scelus est Iason genitor et maius scelus  
Medea mater – occidant, non sunt mei;  
pereant, mei sunt. crimine et culpa carent,  
sunt innocentes, fateor: et frater fuit.<sup>78</sup>

Guastella argues that Medea thinks that her sons have inherited a guilt from their parents' union, *and* that they are to die because they are Creusa's sons also, or at least legally under Creusa's jurisdiction.<sup>79</sup> Nussbaum also finds this passage important in her description of 'conflict ... as an oscillation or fluctuation of the whole personality'.<sup>80</sup> In quoting lines 931–6, she punctuates them as: 'Let them die, they are not mine, let them perish. – They are my own', then draws attention in a footnote to how this differs from most editors:

I have punctuated this utterance slightly differently from the way chosen by Zwierlein 1986b, Costa 1973, and Miller 1917, who all write: *occidant, non sunt mei; / pereant, mei sunt, crimine et culpa carent*, etc. Ahl 1986 translates that punctuation. On that reading, the shift takes place later, after *sunt*, and the thought is, 'Let them die because they now belong to Creusa, and let them perish just because they are mine (and therefore also Jason's).' I find this implausible, because throughout Medea has linked anger and the desire for revenge with the thought that the children are Creusa's, while connecting love and shrinking from vengeance with the thought that they are hers (cf. 920–25, 929–30).<sup>81</sup>

Trevet's commentary indicates that he would have punctuated his source text with the same divisions as Nussbaum. Even though his source text would not have had modern punctuation, a close look at his exegesis indicates where Trevet placed sense breaks and rhetorical breaks, and they accord with Nussbaum. Even so, his interpretation (Trevet in *Medea*, 931–6) is quite different from hers:

'Let that unimagined crime and dire wrong be far away from me too; for what crime will these miserable ones atone?', i.e. for what crime will my sons be

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>77</sup> I reproduce Hine's edition; Boyle and Fitch concur.

<sup>78</sup> 'MEDEA: Let that unimagined crime and dire wrong be far away from me too; for what crime will these miserable ones atone? The crime is Jason, their father; and a greater crime is Medea, their mother – let them die, they are not mine; let them perish, they are mine. They are without crime and guilt, they are innocent, I admit: my brother was, too.'

<sup>79</sup> Guastella, '*Virgo, Coniunx, Mater*' (n. 28 above), p. 211.

<sup>80</sup> Nussbaum, p. 226.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227 n. 10. In fact, Zwierlein and Costa punctate with a full stop between *mei sunt* and *crimine* in 935, but this does not affect Nussbaum's point.

punished?<sup>82</sup> As if she were to say; it is not clear. Third, as if responding to this, she says: ‘The crime is Jason, their father’, i.e. this is the crime for which they should atone: that their father is Jason; ‘and a greater crime is Medea, their mother’, i.e. that Medea wanted to be the mother of the sons of Jason and to bear him sons; ‘Let them die’, i.e., on account of this let them die; ‘they are not mine’, sc. since I am about to go into exile, I have lost power over them; and so ‘let them perish.’ Fourth, as if moved by natural compassion, she restrains this rush of her mind, saying: ‘They are mine’, sc. since I gave birth to them. ‘They are without crime and guilt’, sc. since they have done nothing bad for which they ought to be punished; ‘I admit, they are innocent.’ Fifth, as if returning to anger, she objects to that which she has just said, saying: ‘The brother, too’, sc. mine, whom I killed, ‘was’, sc. innocent.<sup>83</sup>

Trevet is explicit about where he thinks there are changes of sense, by enumerating them and proposing a motivation (‘as if moved by natural compassion’, ‘as if returning to anger’). It is easy to give a translation of Trevet’s reconstructed source text (Seneca, *Medea*, 931–6 [τ]), with punctuation based on his commentary, and with hyphens and emotional directions to indicate where Trevet sees a change in argument:

MEDEA (*moved by familial love*):

- Let that unimagined crime and dire wrong be far away from me too; for what crime will these miserable ones atone?
- The crime is Jason, their father; and a greater crime is Medea, their mother. Let them die, they are not mine, let them perish.
- (*with compassion*) They are mine, they are without crime and guilt. They are innocent, I say.
- (*with anger*) My brother was, too.

Trevet’s Medea does not think of Creusa as a stepmother here. Instead, she thinks of her sons as no longer her own because she has lost ‘potestatem in eos’ (‘power over them’) as she is ‘itura in exilium’ (‘about to go into exile’). Trevet adds ‘et ideo’ (‘and therefore’) before his lemma of Medea’s ominously succinct ‘pereant’ (‘Let them die’), signalling the logical sequence of thoughts. Medea’s ‘exilium’, imposed on her by Creon, is common knowledge to everyone in the play. It is *because* she must leave Corinth without her sons that she has lost ‘potestas’, and it is *because* she has lost this ‘potestas’ that the children are not ‘hers’, and *therefore* they may die.

<sup>82</sup> Roberti, p. 113, misprints *puniatur* for *puniuntur*.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14: ‘*Absit quoque a me istud facinus ac nephas dirum, quod scelus luent miseri?*, id est pro quo scelere punie<n>tur filii? Quasi dicat: non apparet. Tercio quasi huic respondens dicit: *Scelus est Jason genitor*, id est hoc est scelus quod debent luere, quod pater eorum est Jason; *et maius scelus Medea mater*, id est quod uoluit Medea esse mater filiorum Jasonis et parere ei filios; *occidant*, id est propter hoc moriantur; *non sunt mei*, scilicet quia itura in exilium perdidit potestatem in eos; et ideo *pereant*. Quarto, quasi mota compassione naturali, cohibet hunc impetum animi dicens: *mei sunt*, scilicet quia peperit eos; *crimine et culpa carent*, quia scilicet nichil mali fecerunt, pro quo puniri debeant; *fateor, sunt innocentes*. Quinto, quasi ad iram rediens, contra hoc quod nunc dixit obicit dicens: *et frater*, scilicet meus, quem interfeci; *fuit*, scilicet innocens.’

## Conclusions

Textual criticism and the knowledge of manuscript traditions remains crucial to our understanding of the classical tradition and how readers in different centuries (including our own) have inherited ancient texts. Our current readings of Seneca's *Medea* are based on editions by the masters of our own times, such as Otto Zwierlein and John Fitch, that compare the merits of variants in different manuscript traditions to arrive at the most likely correct text. But it is instructive for us to remember that readers in previous eras, such as that of the revival of classics in the late medieval world, knew texts in forms different from ours. Trevet and the readers of his commentary did not have access to a Senecan *Medea* who asks Jason whether he 'recognizes his wife' before departing Corinth in a flying chariot drawn by serpents, because the last nineteen lines of the play did not exist in his source. Trevet and his readers did not know a *Medea* who told her Nurse that she 'would become' *Medea*. Trevet arrived at conclusions that might seem anomalous to us, yet we should not undervalue his ability to construct a 'reading' of a Senecan drama based on his analysis of the rhetorical impact of the characters' words as they appeared in his single *A* tradition source, and what those words reveal about characters' motivations and the plot. It is Trevet's *Medea*, and not Jason, who is being pursued by Pelias's son Acastus. Jason's alliance with Creon's daughter Creusa is calculated not to protect himself and his sons from an angry and dangerous Acastus, but in order to save *Medea*'s life. Trevet's *Medea* has a target on her head from both Acastus and Creon. Jason, persuaded by his sons – if not verbally, then at least out of his concern for them – makes a bargain with Creon to grant *Medea* exile instead of death. Furthermore, the theme of *Medea* as Jason's saviour, and this act of salvation itself as the cause of crime, informs Trevet's reading (and misreading) of important passages. When Trevet's *Medea* says '*Medea nunc sum*' ('now I am *Medea*', 910), she speaks in the context of growing out of girlhood – when her crimes were mere preliminary exercises – into a woman experienced in crime. She cannot refer back to a point when she declared she would 'become' *Medea* ('*fiam*', 171 in *E*), since Trevet's text has a different reading ('*fugiam*', 171 in *A*). Unlike the 21st-century Senecan *Medea* who, to quote Helen Slaney, establishes 'a new scale of passion in which all former atrocities are dismissed as trivial ('*levia*', 906) and recalled as pleasurable ('*iuuat*', 911)',<sup>84</sup> Trevet understands his *Medea* as fixated on '*iuuat*'s semantics of usefulness and utility, rather than pleasure. When *Medea* argues back and forth with herself about whether or not her children are 'mine' ('*mei*', 934–5), Trevet reads the same break in syntax (and hence punctuation) that Nussbaum argued for, but reaches a contrasting conclusion, attributing *Medea*'s regard for her sons as 'not mine' ('*non sunt mei*', 934) to her loss of power over them because of her exile from Corinth, without any mention that the sons might now belong to Creusa. These are all subtle interpretations on Trevet's part, but they are explored by no other commentator on the play, and cumulatively they form a unique 'reading' of Seneca's *Medea* offered

<sup>84</sup> H. Slaney, *Seneca: Medea* (Bloomsbury Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy), London, 2019, p. 107.

by the very first commentator on all of Seneca's plays. Finally, uncovering Trevet's reading has intrinsic value since, to quote Fiona Macintosh, 'There is a very real sense that in understanding Medea in the past, we are decoding her for the present and future as well'.<sup>85</sup>

**Funding** This study was supported by Australian Research Council (Grant No. DP190100218). Open Access funding enabled and organized by CAUL and its Member Institutions.

**Data Availability** Not applicable.

**Code Availability** Not applicable.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

---

<sup>85</sup> Macintosh, 'Introduction' (n. 24 above), p. 7.