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Title: Gender and Power in the Senecan Corpus

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Abstract: This thesis explores constructions of gender in the Senecan corpus. Seneca's different constructions of gender are demonstrated to share concerns with the constraint and lack of constraint upon action.

Chapter One discusses Seneca's *Thyestes*, illustrating that its protagonist, Atreus, performs extreme, unconstrained actions, in a display of hypermasculinity. The idea of hypermasculinity is, in the Roman world, conceptually unusual, particularly in its unequivocal binary opposition to effeminacy. In presenting Atreus as hypermasculine, Seneca encourages the reader to reflect upon gendered models of ethics.

Chapter Two explores constraint of action in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*. The concept of *patientia*, which has effeminising potential, is rehabilitated by Seneca as masculine. This chapter discusses the conceptual and pedagogical tricks Seneca uses in his *Epistulae* in order to convince his reader of this idea.

Chapter Three considers Seneca's *Medea*, particularly in comparison with the *Thyestes*. I illustrate the juxtaposition of, on the one hand, the lack of moral constraint manifested in Medea's actions and, on the other hand, the social constraints Medea clearly experiences and articulates. In acting for the benefit of others, Medea experiencing constraints upon her autnomy. The fact that a figure as seemingly unconstrained as Medea has the capacity to experience social constraint highlights the issue of social constraints upon women.

Chapter Four analyses Seneca's *consolationes ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, with a view to understanding how Seneca addresses women philosophically. By addressing women philosophically and by allowing them the capacity to achieve philosophical virtue, Seneca seems to permit them a remarkable degree of philosophical autonomy. At first glance this seems at odds with Roman, conservative conceptions of gendered ethics. However, through conceptual and rhetorical trickery, Seneca limits the practice of philosophy to a select group of women, and directs women's philosophical aims towards their practical roles as wives and mothers.

GENDER AND POWER IN THE SENECAN CORPUS

By

Sophie Ngan

A thesis submitted to Durham University (Department of Classics and Ancient History) for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2024

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Acknowledgements

This work has been supported by the Northern Bridge Consortium (AHRC).

Writing this thesis has taken a village – and then some.

I thank immeasurably all members of my supervisory team, past and present. Firstly, Erica Bexley, under whom Chapters Three and Four were initially drafted, and whose guidance at the start of this journey was invaluable. Secondly, Jennifer Ingleheart, who has mentored me most generously throughout my lengthy time at Durham. Finally, Roy Gibson, who, after taking on this project at a difficult time for both the world and myself, has overseen it with immeasurable kindness and care.

I also thank the friends I have made along my way at Durham. Justine Wolfenden, who has helped me since my first day in Durham and never stopped. Martina Astrid Rodda, whom I thank a little bit for help with Greek, and a lottle bit for friendship. Esther Meijer, my fellow Senecan, I thank for looking out for me. Joe Watson, in whose presence I have spent (too) many hours, and so whose influence certainly betrays itself (in Freudian fashion) in this thesis. Sasha Kelly, whom I thank for company and meals in the last few months of writing this thesis.

I must also thank my sibling, and fellow writer, Liv Ngan, who, since proofreading this thesis, has become one of the handful of people who might read every word of it.

Finally, I thank my own ethical teacher, my mother.

Introduction.

1 The Themes of This Thesis

This thesis explores constructions of gender across the generic range of the Senecan corpus. Each of the four chapters presents a discussion of a text with the same central question in mind: in this text, what particular ideas or concepts are central to constructions of gender? In answering this question, the chapters take sometimes divergent directions as each text gives its own, unique answer. Nevertheless, these answers converse and converge with each other, revealing a more or less coherent picture of ideals and concerns in Seneca's exploration of the behaviour of men and women. Seneca's writings are unique, in Classical Latin, in discussing and addressing – at considerable length – both men and women in both prose and verse. My exploration of what Seneca has to say reveals connections across the corpus and a definable set of concepts and concerns when it comes to gender.

Texts have been chosen which, firstly, give interesting answers to the questions I have asked and which, secondly, collectively cover a range of genres and genders. The texts of the first half deal with men and masculinity, and those of the second half with women and femininity. All four texts have in common a concern with freedom of action and restraint upon action: power and its limitation. Where the dramatic universe exhibits the complete annihilation resulting from total freedom to act, didactic philosophy aims to present a positive perspective on constraint on action. In this sense, tragedy presents the most extreme outcome of a problem – unrestrained action. This is the same problem which philosophy attempts to solve – by means of control

and restraint. The concepts of freedom and restraint, and their role in Roman gender construction, will be discussed in due course.

2 The Senecan Corpus: Prose and Verse

In demonstrating coherent conceptual connections between Seneca's tragic and philosophical works, this thesis makes a significant contribution to the study of Seneca. It is particularly unique in its status as a singular work which does close readings of both prose and drama, giving equal weight and attention to both sides of the Senecan corpus; one of my central principles in approach has been to avoid prioritising either philosophy or tragedy. My work fits into and develops a trend of increasing interest in finding connections between the two halves of Seneca's writings.

Many studies which find connection between Seneca's dramatic and philosophical works tend to prioritise the philosophical, whilst discussing one or the other side of the corpus. On the one hand, research which discusses tragedy tends to focus on finding traces of philosophy in Senecan drama, looking for philosophical doctrine reflected in the tragedies or employing philosophy as a tool for making sense of the tragedies;[1] in its least productive form, this approach can put the tragedies at risk of being reduced to mere philosophical parable. On the other hand, research which discusses

[1] I give here some examples of the different philosophical areas discussed with reference to Seneca's tragedies. Rosenmeyer 1989 discusses Stoic cosmology in Seneca's tragedies. Davis 1983 highlights the Stoic sides of *Natura* in Seneca's *Phaedra*. The Stoic nature of passions are discussed by: Leeman 1976; Nussbaum 1997; Gill 2009. Some of the most recent work on philosophy in Senecan drama has focused on the idea of the self, e.g. Littlewood 2004; Bartsch 2006, chap. 5; Busch 2009; Schiesaro 2009; Wray 2009; Star 2012, chap. 2; Bexley 2022.

philosophy often views literary features or verse intertexts as supportive of philosophical teaching.[2]

More recent work challenges such prioritisation of Senecan philosophy. For example, a more sustained discussion across philosophy and tragedy is taken in McAuley's 2016 monograph *Reproducing Rome*. McAuley considers the fictional mothers of tragedy as meaningful and relevant to contemporary Roman culture and society,[3] as "bad", tragic mothers destabilise and call into question the "good" maternal stereotype presented in Seneca's philosophy.

Like McAuley, I consider tragedy's engagement with Roman social, cultural and political concerns to be just as serious and meaningful as philosophy's. In this work, I give the same attention to prose and drama, and ask the same question of the texts I discusses: what concepts are key to understanding gender construction in this text? The answers reveal that there is, in fact, a coherent set of concepts used across the philosophy and drama, demonstrating that the same set of concerns and anxieties is explored across the range of Seneca's writings. The two sides of Seneca's work, which have

[2] For example, Volk and Williams 2006 edited volume *Seeing Seneca Whole*, despite its title, focuses on Seneca's philosophy, with individual chapters exploring the literary aspects of Seneca's philosophy: Henderson 2006 chapter discusses how Seneca utilises literary form and features in the *Epistulae Morales*, in ways which reflect the irregular nature of philosophical progress; G. D. Williams 2006 chapter discusses how Seneca's innovative employment of the genre of consolation to a situation of exile, in the *consolatio ad Helviam*, allows for exploration of different forms of exile (physical, social and spiritual). More recent work in this vein are Trinacty 2018 (which compares Seneca's employment of intertexts in his philosophical and tragic works) and Graver 2023 (which emphasises the literary aspects of Seneca's literary philosophy).

[3] McAuley 2016, 205: 'I consider ways in which Seneca's *Medea* and *Phaedra* might, rather, be problematizing or destabilizing the idea of a 'clear line' between his dramatic heroines and 'ordinary Roman women' (and men). Instead of reading the plays as directly reflecting a specific social reality, however, I argue that Seneca's drama plays on the ambiguities of Medea and Phaedra's literary and cultural contexts, and their familial and social roles, to raise questions about contemporary Roman gender relations and the larger sociopolitical and aesthetic implications of women's representation in tragedy.'

often been considered disparate and discordant, can, in fact, be made to talk to each other to produce a conceptually coherent whole.

As exemplified by the above discussion, the idea that Seneca's tragic and philosophical works can engage with each other is not a new one. In this thesis, my focus is less on direct engagement with specific philosophical doctrine, and more on conceptual overlap. In talking of conceptual overlap, I have in mind the kind of conceptual intertextuality discussed by König, Langlands, and Uden:[4] engagement with similar, culturally significant ideas, without necessarily using the same language or words. I demonstrate how Seneca's tragedies and philosophical works look at the same ideas, but from different angles and perspectives. Whereas the tragedies are extreme and excessive, the philosophical writings are, naturally, much more moderate. The human behaviour which Seneca displays and discusses in his different works matches the expectations of genre: the tragedies are suited to extreme behaviour, whereas the philosophical writings encourage constraint.

3 Gender

The fields of gender and feminist studies, and the scholarship on gender in the ancient world are far too vast to be dealt with here in any comprehensive way. Indeed, it will be noticed that some, perhaps many, aspects of feminist and gender theory are not explicitly handled in the main body of this thesis. The ways in which I think about gender in this thesis are not wedded to any one particular theory or theorist. Rather, my approach fits

[4] König, Langlands, and Uden 2020.

into the broader theoretical category of constructionism, i.e. the idea that genders are not fixed, but contingent on societal ideologies and anxieties.

What I mean by a constructionist approach is that there are no "natural" or "inherent" categories of "man" and woman".[5] Behaviour and ideals attributed to men and women are, rather, indicative of broader ideologies at play. In other words, what it is to be a man or a woman cannot be accepted at face value, but can (and should) be interrogated as to the greater meaning of the behaviours and ideals attributed to genders.[6] Theorists who have influenced me in this regard are the likes of Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler.[7] Underpinning the writings of these theorists is the idea that categories of gender and/or sexuality do not simply exist, but are socially constructed. I am not wedded to any particular constructionist methodology, but my approach sits under the broad, constructionist umbrella, in considering what concepts, concerns and anxieties are important to what Seneca says about and in address to men and women. It will be demonstrated that Seneca's concerns centre upon the ideas of power, autonomy and freedom of action.

Although many modern theorists have focused on the role of power – often systemic power hierarchies – in gendered constructions,[8] these theorists

[5] This is not to say that non-binary genders do not exist – they obviously do. Rather, I am primarily concerned, in this thesis, with the binary genders, since these are the main categories of concern to Seneca, who reflects dominant Roman thought. It should also be noted that, even within the highly binaristic scheme of Roman thought, it is possible to explore the existence of non-binary genders; for a most successful example of this, see Mowat 2021.

[6] This line of thinking is particularly indebted to Michel Foucault. As Foucault shows with reference to sexual behaviours, the seemingly unquestionable and obvious moralising of sexual behaviours actually has greater ideological significance.

[7] Beauvoir 1988; Foucault 1985; Butler 1999.

[8] The societal oppressions of patriarchy are a major theme of feminist studies. To give some examples. The French feminists (of which the main proponents are Cixous, Kristeva and Irigaray) explore effects of patriarchal oppression on the psyche. The oppressive effects of

are not of direct relevance to this thesis. Unlike these modern theorists, I do not seek to critique the structures of power at play in Seneca's writings and society, but to understand the concepts employed in Seneca's writings; by seeking this understanding, Seneca is shown to be concerned not so much with systemic power, but individuals' freedom, or lack of freedom, of action. In his focus on individuals and their behaviour, Seneca's outlook is philosophical, ethical and regulatory. Where contemporary, Western theoretical writings on gender often focus on and prioritise non-normative identities,[9] constructions of gender in Seneca's writings are bound by the idea of normativity, i.e. how a person of a specific gender ought to behave.[10] Thus, within the broad area of gender studies, this thesis focuses specifically on gendered ethics.

I now explain in a little more detail why my focus is the normative and the ethical. My focus is on the normative in that I consider how, according to Seneca, men and women ought to behave. In other words, my thesis discusses the dominant ideologies present in Seneca's texts. This focus is fruitful for Seneca's texts for a number of reasons. Firstly, ethical normativity – how a person should behave – is obviously a central concern of Seneca's philosophical writings. It has also not escaped notice that Seneca's tragedies

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language dominated by men and the masculine are discussed by, for example, Spender. Ideas such as intersectionality, first coined by Crenshaw, deal with the compounding effects of systemic oppressions by both race and gender.

[9] To give just a few examples. Butler 1999 uses the art of drag to deconstruct socially hegemonic constructions of gender, thereby highlighting the performative aspect of gender and individual gendered expression. Normative ideas about masculinity are deconstructed by Connell 2005 with the concept of hegemonic or toxic masculinity. Ahmed 2006 explores the non-normative orientations to the world and the queer experience of difference.

[10] Gill 1996 considers ideas of ancient Greek personhood in a similar way, which he terms "objective-participant" in contrast with a "subjective-individualist" conception; as Gill discusses with reference to personhood in Greek literature, Greco-Roman ideas about personhood and self are intimately bound up with ethics and morality, and participation within the shared values of a community.

are distinctly philosophical and ethical.[11] A second reason for my focus on normative gender in Seneca is the sheer pervasiveness of gender in Roman conceptualisations of ethics. In general terms, the manliness encoded in the word *virtus* is an ethically positive quality, whilst the effeminacy encoded in the word *mollitia* is an ethically negative quality. As such, to talk about gender, what it means to be a man or a woman, is, in conceptual terms, intimately tied up with normative and ethical ideas.

The Roman ideas on gender which are foundational to my work have been studied by many scholars. My thinking is particularly influenced by Craig Williams' monograph *Roman Homosexuality*.[12] Williams explores the links between sexual roles and gender, and, of particular relevance to this thesis, the dichotomy of real manliness (*virtus*) and improper effeminacy (*mollitia*).[13] My approach to Roman masculinity is also informed by Richlin's and Gleason's writings – although they differ in focus, they both discuss ideals and expressions of Roman masculinity.[14] Conceptually central to Roman masculinity is the idea of being active, in opposition to being passive – it is this idea which plays a major role in Chapters One and Two, on the *Thyestes* and the *Epistulae*.

In dealing with the term *virtus* and its significant baggage, I have been influenced by Myles McDonnell's monograph *Roman Manliness*, which details the development of the term from pre-Classical, Republican usage to

[11] To give a few examples of ethical readings of Seneca's tragedies. On the *Hercules Furens*: Lampe 2018. On the *Medea*: Nussbaum 1997; Gill 2009; Bexley 2016. On the *Thyestes*: Dodson-Robinson 2010.
[12] C. A. Williams 1999 (2nd edition published 2010).
[13] C. A. Williams 1999, 125–59. The quality of *mollitia* is also discussed by Edwards 1993, 63–97.
[14] Richlin 1983; Gleason 1995.

Classical usage.[15] Literally meaning “manliness”, *virtus* goes beyond simply “being a man”.[16] In pre-Classical usage, *virtus* referred ‘to the ideal behavior of a man’ and ‘the quality associated with, and responsible for Roman greatness’.[17] From these associations, the term came to be used as the calque for the Greek ἀρετή, to refer to philosophical *virtus*.[18] By Seneca’s time, *virtus* is a quality denoting an ideal in terms of both gender and philosophy.

Finally, my approach to women utilises the significant body of research on women’s social roles within their patriarchal societies. Seminal in this area is Sarah Pomeroy’s monograph *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*.[19] Particularly important to Chapters Three and Four are Emily Hemelrijk’s *Matrona Docta* and Kristina Milnor’s *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus*;[20] both of these problematise the dichotomy of public and private, highlighting the somewhat paradoxical politicisation of women’s domestic and familial roles. It may be noted that the aspects of the ancient world on which I focus are normative and mainstream; this is because Seneca is, as I show, normative and mainstream in the ideology he presents. Seneca is not an idealist, but a realist.

4 Constraint, Power, Freedom, Control

As mentioned above, the unifying concepts of this thesis, the concepts shown to be central to what Seneca says about men and women, are freedom

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[15] McDonnell 2006.
[16] This is illustrated by the definitions given at *OLD* 2073-4 s.v. “*uirtus*” 1a ‘the qualities typical of a true man, manly spirit, resolution, valour, steadfastness’. Encapsulated within the term *virtus* is an ideal of manliness and masculinity.
[17] McDonnell 2006, 2.
[18] McDonnell 2006, 105–41.
[19] Pomeroy 1975.
[20] Hemelrijk 1999; Milnor 2005.

of action and constraint of action. The ways in which I use terms such as "power", "autonomy", "constraint", "freedom", "control", etc. are very much tied to how they are conceptualised within Roman ethics. In this section, I discuss how these concepts feature in Roman ethics. I begin with an overview of these ideas, and follow up with some illustrative passages.

Central to Roman ethics and this constellation of concepts are the ideas of possessing self-control and exerting control over others.[21] The concept of self-control in Roman thought spans many areas, such as moderating extreme emotions, living frugally and without luxury, and abstaining from extreme or perverse pleasures. Although seemingly disparate areas, good morality involves moderation and control in these areas, whereas bad morality involves excess and a lack of control in these areas. The import of good or bad morality bridges the gap between ethics and politics. On the one hand, a man's good morality connotes his cultural and social capital, which justifies social standing, his position within the political hierarchy; on the other hand, a man's bad morality, his lack of self-control, is indicative (for the Romans) of his lack of ability as a political actor. In other words, if a man cannot master himself, he cannot be trusted to hold mastery over others.[22]

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[21] My discussion in this chapter has in mind Edwards 1993: 'The discourses of morality in Rome were profoundly implicated in structures of power. This relationship is one of the principal preoccupations of my book. Attacks on immorality were used by the Roman elite to exercise control over its own members and to justify its privileged position.' (p.4). 'The elite justified their privileged position by pointing to their superior morals. Their capacity for self-control legitimated the control they exercised over others who were, it was implied, unable to control themselves.' (p.25). 'Just as a man might boast of his wealth, his military achievements or his ancestry in his attempts to secure power and influence, so too he might parade his moral rectitude as a form of "symbolic capital".' (p.26). 'But the attribution of sexual and sumptuary excesses to emperors had particular political connotations. *Incontinentia* was traditionally associated with tyranny. Yet some emperors may have exploited this association, emphasising their absolute power precisely through publicising stories of their sexual and sumptuary excesses.' (p.28).

[22] In the bastardised words of eminent philosopher RuPaul Charles: If you can't control yourself, how in the hell you gonna control somebody else?

On the other side of the coin, to display power over another is to exert one's authority and superiority over them. Roman masculinity is not absolute, but relative, concerned with displaying one's greater masculinity over others. A significant aspect of the status of women, children and enslaved people is their lack of powers, social and legal, as they are not independent societal or legal agents, but subject to the rule of a *paterfamilias*.

In Latin texts, the most direct and explicit discussions of the workings of self-control in ethics are, for obvious reasons, in philosophical texts. Self-control and self-restraint feature as dominant ideas in ancient Greek culture and philosophy, encapsulated by the abstract noun σωφροσύνη.[23] for example, Plato and Aristotle.[24] The virtues of moderation, temperance, self-control, etc. are particularly preached in Hellenistic Greek philosophy.[25]

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[23] See *LSJ* s.v. "σωφροσύνη" 2 'moderation in sensual desires, self-control, temperance'. For overview of this concept, see North 1966; Rademaker 2005.

[24] Plato, *Gorgias* 491d: Socrates glosses someone who rules himself (ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα) as 'σώφρονα ὄντα καὶ ἐγκρατῆ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ, τῶν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἄρχοντα τῶν ἐν ἑαυτῷ' (someone who is temperate and in control of himself, someone who has rulership of the pleasures and passions within himself). Plato's *Charmides* is an extended discussion about defining σωφροσύνη, which does not come to a conclusion. Plato, *Republic* 3.390b-391e: Socrates gives examples of mythological stories which he claims should not be taught to taught to the youth, as they are counteractive to σωφροσύνη; these mythological examples include Zeus' lust for Hera in *Iliad* 14 and Achilles' contempt for the gods and proper religious behaviour. *Republic* 4.431b-c: σωφροσύνη is described as one of the virtues of government, lacking to women, children and enslaved people, and so implied to be possessed primarily by men. For discussion of temperance and moderation in Plato, see Rabinowitz 2023. The concept of restraint or moderation takes a slightly different slant in Aristotle, where the focus is less on limitation and more on the mean between excess (ὑπερβολή) and deficiency (ἔλλειψις or ἔνδεια). This idea is most explicitly expounded in book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For discussion of the mean in Aristotelean ethics, see Urmson 1980, 1988, 28–35; Broadie 1994, 95–103.

[25] Restraint in the face of passions and desires is a subject of much discussion in Epicureanism and Stoicism. In ranking pleasure as the ultimate ethical goal, it might seem that Epicureanism is oppositional to the idea of restraint. However, Epicurus is clear that pleasure is limited to an absence of pain and that desires beyond necessities should be restrained; see Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* 131-2, recorded at 10.121-135 of Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae Philosophorum*; the third and eighteenth of the "key doctrines" of Epicureanism, recorded at Diogenes Laertius' *Vitae Philosophorum* 10.139-154. Likewise, Lucretius, at *de Rerum Natura* 3.1078-84, explains that unrestrained desires do not increase pleasure. The idea of restraint is conceptually more straightforward in Stoicism, in which passions are irrational and so acting on them should be restrained, on which see passages collated in Long and Sedley 1987, v.1 §65.

These virtues are taken up in the Roman philosophy of the late Republic and early Empire, as illustrated by their direct discussion and explanation by Cicero and Seneca. However, as will be shown, the concepts of self-control and moderation are not limited to technical and philosophical discussion; the idea of self-restraint will be shown to be a concern in wider Roman culture, through its distinctly Roman colouring and through its presence in texts which are non-technical and poetic.

One of the most direct discussions of the idea of self-restraint is in book four of the *Tusculanae Disputationes*, in which Cicero's speaker discusses extreme and controlled emotions and desires. Here, the speaker describes the inability to control one's emotions as morally negative (Cicero, *Tusc Disp* 4.34-35):

> [34] iidem inflammant **appetitione nimia**, quam tum **cupiditatem**, tum **libidinem** dicimus, **impotentiam** quandam animi a **temperantia** et **moderatione** plurimum dissidentem. [35] quae si quando adepta erit id, quod ei fuerit concupitum, tum efferetur alacritate, "ut nihil ei constet" quod agat, ut ille, qui "voluptatem animi nimiam summum esse errorem" arbitratur. Eorum igitur malorum in una virtute posita sanatio est.
>
> ([34] The same things [*turbidi animorum concitatique motus* = stormy and excited movements of the soul] inflame with too much longing, which we call, at one moment, desire, at another, lust, a certain lack of restraint of the mind, greatly dissimilar from control and moderation. [35] If that longing ever acquires the thing which

> was coveted by it, it is carried off with haste, "so that nothing that it does is steady for it", according to that man who thinks that "excessive pleasure of the mind is the greatest mistake".[26] Therefore the cure for all these evils is placed in virtue alone.)

In this first section, Cicero's speaker associates ideas of lack of restraint – such as *appetitio*, *cupiditas*, *libidino* and *impotentia* – with morally negative behaviour;[27] the adjective *nimius*, meaning "excessive, overmuch, superabundant", particularly highlights the lack of control associated with this negative idea.[28]

In order to illustrate the ethical badness of unrestraint, Cicero's speaker employs the mythological figure who epitomises such lack of self-control, Tantalus (Cicero, *Tusc Disp* 4.35):

> Quid autem est non miserius solum, sed foedius etiam et deformius quam aegritudine quis adflictus, debilitatus, iacens? Cui miseriae proximus est is, qui appropinquans aliquod malum metuit exanimatusque pendet animi. Quam vim mali

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[26] The quotations in this sentence come from lines of the comic writer Trabea, which are also quoted by Cicero at *de Fin.* 2.4.13 and *ad Fam*. 2.9.2.

[27] A look at these words' definitions highlights the centrality of excess, overmuchness and uncontrollability. *OLD* 151 s.v. "*appetitio*" 1 'the action of trying to reach or grasp, stretching out for', 2a 'desire, appetite', 2b 'impulse'; e.g. Cicero, *De Finibus* 3.23, where *appetitio* is given as a calque for the Greek ὁρμή. *OLD* 472 s.v. "*cupiditas*" 1a 'passionate desire, longing, yearning', 2a 'immoderate desire, lust, cupidity, greed' 2b 'an immoderate desire, passion', 3a 'desire for wealth, greed, avarice', 3b 'desire for power, ambition', 3c 'carnal desire, lust'; e.g. Cicero, *Pro Caelio* 49, where *cupiditas* is used rather euphemistically of excessive sexual desire. *OLD* 1026 s.v. "*libidino*" 1a 'a desire, longing, wish, fancy', 2a 'one's will of pleasure (as an overmastering force in determining one's conduct', 2b 'a passion', 3a 'sexual appetite or desire, lust, wantonness'; e.g. Cicero, *In Catiilinam* 2.25. *OLD* 850 s.v. "*impotentia*" 1 'weakness, helplessness', 2 'lack of self-restraint, immoderate behaviour, violence, lawlessness, etc.'; e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 85.10, where *impotentia* is defined as a *vitium*.

[28] *OLD* 1178 s.v. "*nimius*".

> significantes poëtae impendere apud inferos saxum **Tantalo** faciunt
>
> Ob scelera animique **impotentiam** et superbiloquentiam.
>
> Ea communis poena stultitiae est; omnibus enim, quorum mens abhorret a ratione, semper aliqui talis terror impendet.
>
> (Nevertheless, what is not only more wretched, but also more base and defective than someone afflicted by sickness, crippled and lying down? To this state of misery this man is nearest, he who, on approach, feared some evil and, agitated, became deadened in his mind. The poets, signifying such force of badness, make that a rock hangs over Tantalus in the underworld…
>
> on account of his crimes and the lack of restraint of his mind and his arrogant speech.[29]
>
> This is the usual penalty of stupidity. For, for all those whose mind shies away from reason, some fear of this kind is always overhanging.)

The mythological *exemplum* provided here is emblematic of unconstrained and excessive behaviour. Tantalus overstepped divine/mortal boundaries by stealing nectar and ambrosia from the gods and trying to deceive the gods into eating human flesh (that of his own son Pelops); as punishment for his excessive, uncontrolled behaviour, he stands in a pool of water and under a fruit tree, both of which recede when he tries to reach them.[30]

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[29] The origin of this quotation is unknown.
[30] For the myth of Tantalus, see Homer, *Od.* 11.983-92; Pindar, *Olympian* 1.35-65; Lucretius, *de Rerum Natura* 3.980-983.

Cicero's speaker concludes this section by describing the polar opposite of the negative figure who lacks self-control, namely someone who possesses moderation and self-restraint (Cicero, *Tusc Disp* 4.36):

> [36] Atque ut hae tabificae mentis perturbationes sunt, aegritudinem dico et metum, sic hilariores illae, **cupiditas avide semper aliquid expetens** et inanis alacritas, id est laetitia gestiens, non multum differunt ab amentia. Ex quo intelligitur qualis ille sit, quem tum **moderatum**, alias **modestum**, tum **temperantem**, alias **constantem continentemque** dicimus; non numquam haec eadem vocabula ad **frugalitatis** nomen tamquam ad caput referre volumus.
>
> ([36] And, just as these wasting disturbances of the mind, I mean distress and fear, in the same way those more cheerful emotions, such as desire, which is always greedily seeking something, and empty liveliness (in other words, itching joy), are not much different from madness. From this description there is understood a kind of man exists, whom we call, at one moment, moderate, at another time, discreet, at another, controlled, and, at yet another, steady and restrained. Sometimes I want to ascribe these same words to the idea of frugality, as if to their origin.)

In contrast to those like Tantalus, who exhibit *cupiditas avide semper aliquid expetens*, Cicero describes the morally positive man who possesses qualities of self-restraint (e.g. *temperantia*, *moderatio*, *constantia*, *continentia* through

their related verbs and adjectives).[31] These abstract nouns come from some fairly concrete ideas of boundaries or limits. The words *moderatio*, *moderatus* and *modestus* relate back to the noun *modus*, meaning "limit" or "bound".[32] *Continentia* and *continens* come from the verb *contineo*, meaning "to hold" or "to restrain".[33] *Constantia* and *constans* come from the verb *consto*, meaning "to stand firm" or "to be fixed".[34] And *temperantia* and *temperans* come from *tempero*, meaning "to restrain" or "to moderate".[35] Thus, to behave in a morally positive way is to be bounded, restrained and controlled. In contrast with this positive idea of bounded behaviour, morally negative behaviour lacks boundaries; it is excessive, uncontrolled and unrestrained.

And so, the conceptual ground of self-restraint and excess is clear. Behaviour deemed morally positive is bounded restrained, controlled, moderate, etc. Behaviour deemed morally negative is lacking in boundaries

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[31] All these abstract nouns are concerned with moderation, self-control and self-restraint. *OLD* 1913 s.v. "*temperantia*" 1 'self-control, moderation, restraint'; e.g. Cicero's description of Pompey at *Man.* 13 as *tanta temperantia, tanta mansuetudine, tanta humanitate* ('with so much moderation, so much clemency, so much humanity'). *OLD* 1121 s.v. "*moderatio*" 1a 'conduct which avoids extremes, moderation in action, restraint', 2 'moderation (as a quality of persons), self-control, temperateness'; e.g. Cicero gives *moderatio* as a calque for σωφροσύνη at *Tusc. Disp*. 3.16. *OLD* 419 s.v. "*constantia*" 1 'changelessness, invariability, steadiness', 2 'steadfastness, persistence, consistency', 3 'firmness of purpose, resolution, fearlessness, self-possession'; e.g. Cicero at *Phil*. 3.13 mentions *constantia* alongside *virtus* and *gravitas* as positive qualities of the Gauls. *OLD* 430 s.v. "*continentia*" 1 'the action of holding back, repression', 2 'repression of one's passions or appetites, restraint, self-control'; e.g. Cic. *Inv*. 2.164 describe *continentia* as that *per quam cupiditas consilii gubernatione regitur* ('through which desire is ruled by the control of resolve').

[32] *OLD* 1121 s.v. "*moderatio*" = '*moderor* + *-tio*', s.v. "*moderor*" = '*modus* + *-o*'. *OLD* 1122 s.v. "*moderatus*" = 'pple. of "*moderor*'. *OLD* 1122 s.v. "*modestus*" = '*modus* + *-tus*'. *OLD* 1124 s.v. "*modus*" 1 'a measured amount', 4a 'a due or proper measure, correct or permitted mount', 5a 'a limit, bound, end'.

[33] *OLD* 429 s.v. "*contineo*" = 'pple. of *contineo*'. *OLD* 430 s.v. "*continentia*" = '*continens* + *-ia*'. *OLD* 430 s.v. "*contineo*" 2a 'to hold in a specifies position; to hold in position, fasten, secure', 6 'to prevent from going away, hinder, detain, confine', 7a 'to restrain from physical or other action, to keep under control', 7b to prevent from a specified course of action, keep from', 8a 'to surround, enclose, embrace', 8b 'to keep within certain bounds, limit, confine'.

[34] *OLD* 419 s.v. "*constans*" = 'pple. of *consto*'. *OLD* 419 s.v. "*constantia*" = '*constans* + -*ia*'. *OLD* 420 s.v. "*consto*" 2 'to remain motionless, stand still; to remain constant, be steady'.

[35] *OLD* 1913 s.v. "*temperans*" = 'pple. of *tempero*'. *OLD* 1913 s.v. "*temperantia*" = '*temperans* + *-ia*'. *OLD* 1913 s.v. "*tempero*" 1 '(intr.) to exercise restraint, behave with moderation', 4 '(tr.) to abate the excessiveness of, moderate, temper', 8 'to control physically', 9 'to maintain in a state of balance or moderation, control, regulate'.

is uncontrolled, excessive, wild, etc. These ideas are not unique to Roman ethics, but (as mentioned above) feature in ancient Greek ethics, and are even familiar aspects of many present-day ethical evaluations. However, as I shall now discuss, ideas of self-control and moderation become especially significant for ideologies and identities of Roman-ness, due particularly to Cicero's innovation on the term *frugalitas*.

At the end of the above passage, Cicero ascribes the morally positive ideas of self-control, self-restraint, etc. to *frugalitas*. Like other abstract nouns which have been discussed (e.g. *moderatio*, *temperantia*, *continentia*), *frugalitas* also relates to self-control, restraint, a lack of excess, etc.[36] However, unlike these other abstract nouns, *frugalitas* has nothing to do with boundaries or limits, but is related to the adjective *frugalis* and the noun *frux*, words with agricultural associations.[37] Therefore, it seems odd that *frugalitas* is part of the same conceptual nexus as *moderatio*, *temperantia*, etc. – a fact which Cicero seems to recognise in the above passage, due to his separation of *frugalitas* from these other virtues.

In the following section, I discuss *frugalitas*, a term which seems semantically anomalous alongside other Latin virtues of restraint, in more detail. By discussing the unusual presence of *frugalitas* in Cicero's list of virtues, I shall highlight some key aspects of self-control in Roman ethics: firstly, that self-restraint is considered within Roman thought (by the time of the early empire) as a particularly Roman virtue; secondly, that self-restraint has such import during the late republic and early empire as a fruitful way of

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[36] *OLD* 739 s.v. "*frugalitas*" 1 '(abst.) steadiness of life, sober habits, temperance, self-restraint, etc.'

[37] *OLD* 739 s.v. "*frugalitas*" = '*frugalis* + *-tas*'; s.v. "*frugalis*" = '*frux* + *-alis*'. *OLD* 741 s.v. "*frux*" 1a 'the edible produce of trees, plants, etc., fruit, crops', 1d '(tranf.) output'.

dealing tyrants and autocrats; and finally, that the effort required to transform *frugalitas* indicates that self-restraint is a virtue worth Romanising.

A more in-depth discussion of *frugalitas*, and its connection with ideas of self-restraint, can be found in book three of the *Tusculanae Disputationes*; in this book, Cicero's speaker discusses different calques for the Greek σωφροσύνη (*Tusc. Disp.* 3.16):

> Veri etiam simile illud est, qui sit temperans,—quem Graeci σώφρονα appellant eamque virtutem **σωφροσύνην** vocant, quam soleo equidem tum **temperantiam**, tum **moderationem** appellare, non numquam etiam **modestiam**, sed haud scio an recte ea virtus **frugalitas** appellari possit, quod angustius apud Graecos valet, qui frugi homines χρησίμους appellant, id est, tantum modo utiles; at illud est latius; omnis enim abstinentia, omnis innocentia—quae apud Graecos usitatum nomen nullum habet; sed habere potest ἀβλάβειαν: nam est innocentia adfectio talis animi, quae noceat nemini—reliquas etiam virtutes frugalitas continet;
>
> (This is also likely, that the kind of person who is temperate, whom the Greeks call "σώφρων" and to whom they apply the virtue "σωφροσύνη". I myself am accustomed to sometimes call this virtue *temperantia*, at other times *moderatio*, and even occasionally *modestia*, but perhaps could rightly be called the virtue of *frugalitas* – which has narrower meaning for the Greek, who call "frugal" men "χρήσιμος", in other words only "useful". But for us its meaning is wider, all *abstinentia* and *innocentia*, which, for the Greeks, has no

> usual term (but it is possible to use ἀβλάβεια,[38] for *innocentia* is the disposition of the kind of soul which would harm no one). Indeed, *frugalitas* also encapsulates all remaining virtues.)

In this passage, Cicero explains that there are a number of available Latin translations for the Greek "σωφροσύνη", for example *temperantia*, *moderatio* and *modestia*. As at *Tusc. Disp.* 4.36, Cicero again appends *frugalitas* to this list of virtues of self-restraint and moderation, seeming to acknowledge that it is unlike the other terms he has listed. Indeed, Cicero seems to confer special status on *frugalitas*, explaining that it is peculiar to the Romans due to its lack of parallel in Greek and, in the final words of this passage, claiming its supremacy over other virtues.

Cicero's claims about the special status of *frugalitas* have been scrutinised in detail by Gildenhard, on whose chapter, which examines usages of *frugalitas* from the late Republic to early Empire, I draw heavily.[39] Gildenhard highlights that Cicero, in these passages of the *Tusculanae Dispuationes*, innovates on *frugalitas* to turn it from a positive quality of enslaved people and those of the lower classes, into a virtue for elite aristocrats. This transformation relies on the agricultural roots of *frugalitas* (via *frux*); Cicero capitalises on these agricultural roots, in order to associate *frugalitas* with old-fashioned Roman austerity and transform it into a Republican value. As Gildenhard explains, Cicero's claim at *Tusc. Disp.* 3.16, that *frugalitas* is a specifically Roman word and idea, invents *frugalitas* as an

[38] A Ciceronian neologism.
[39] Gildenhard 2020.

ancestral virtue of Rome, as distinct from and superior over Greek philosophical ideas about self-control.[40]

It is this aspect of *frugalitas* – namely, the way in which it creates an association between self-control and Roman identity – on which I am drawing to explain the import of self-control within Roman ethics. Self-control is not a general philosophical or ethical concept, but a concept with special significance and potency within a specifically Roman ethical framework. To quote Gildenhard (emphasis mine):

> 'by the end of the republic *frugalitas* had joined other terms signifying thrift, austerity, self-restraint and diligence, such as *diligentia*, *industria*, *moderatio*, *modestia*, *modus*, *parsimonia* or *temperantia*. But unlike its quasisynonymous brethren, with their comparatively narrow scope of meanings and rather bland semantics, *frugalitas*, as **a specifically Roman mode of self-restraint**, possessed a stunning degree of what one might label "interstitial complexity".'[41]

[40] Gildenhard 2020, 284–86 highlights that this is particularly clear from the similarity Cicero draws between the Stoic *sapiens* and the Roman *homo frugi*; see in particular the following from p.285: 'Embedded within this explicit identification of the Roman *homo frugi* with the Stoic *sapiens* is a threefold assertion of Roman superiority. First, the fact that *frugalitas* is an ancestral value implies chronological priority over Stoic theorising. Second, the proverb proves wide dissemination and demotic appeal: by projecting Stoic idiom, figures of thought and conceptual parameters back into Rome's ancestral cultural imaginary, Cicero promotes the Romans as always already committed to proto-Stoic ideals. And third, the dismissal of the Stoics for their rhetorical grandstanding feeds right into Roman prejudices about voluble and boastful Greeks in general and the rhetorical-didactic ineptitude of the Stoics in particular.'

[41] Gildenhard 2020, 293.

This transformation of *frugalitas*, into an ancestral and republican virtue, occurs during a specific political context – when the Roman republic is under threat. Gildenhard notes that Cicero's focus on *frugalitas* as a Roman virtue is limited to the *Tusculanae Disputationes*.[42] This work was written in around 45 BCE, when Cicero was distanced from Rome's political life, having fallen out of favour with Julius Caesar who was at the height of his power. Cicero's transformation of *frugalitas* occurs when Roman republicanism is under threat from the dictatorial designs of Caesar; and Cicero abandons this project for *frugalitas* upon Caesar's assassination. In the words of Gildenhard (emphasis mine):

> 'Cicero here [in the *Tusc. Disp.*] further ennobles an original slave-value that enabled him to **combine ancestral discipline (and hence commitment to a nostalgic republicanism) with the inner disposition necessary to cope with conditions of tyranny**… Accordingly, Cicero dispensed with *frugalitas* when the political situation changed drastically yet again on the Ides of March 44 BCE. With the dictator dead, he could return to conceptual choices better aligned with the traditional semantics of the republican commonwealth, where *frugalitas* only ever featured marginally. After Caesar's assassination and the concomitant revival of the res publica, Cicero abandons the experiment with *frugalitas* and the investment in *uirtus* as

[42] Gildenhard 2020, 291–92.

> primarily an inner disposition and reverts to a conception of *uirtus* grounded in its practical application, above all in politics.'[43]

In other words, *frugalitas* is fruitful for Cicero as a distinctly Roman way of dealing with the tyrannical political climate created by men like Caesar. The concept of *frugalitas* only becomes an ancestral, republican virtue when republicanism is under threat. And so, as Roman politics undergoes radical changes in the early empire, writers of the early empire (such as Seneca) take up *frugalitas* for their own purposes.[44] These writers 'accorded *frugi*, *frugalitas* and related lexemes a salient role in their literary projects and their authorial self-fashioning.'[45] Amongst the manifold functions of *frugalitas* discussed by Gildenhard are 'to define what it is to be Roman; to flesh out a (specifically Roman) ethics of self-restraint, for educational purposes in rhetoric or philosophy', both of which resonate with my discussion of gendered ethics in Seneca.[46] Taking as my focus not *frugalitas*, but self-restraint and its lack more broadly, I discuss how positive self-restraint and negative lack of restraint are central to how Seneca conceptualises the behaviour of Roman men and women within the turbulent political climate of the early empire.

This discussion has highlighted the cultural specificity of self-restraint in the early empire. Self-restraint becomes the Roman virtue *par excellence*, within a world dominated by the tyrannical figure of the emperor. This virtue

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[43] Gildenhard 2020, 292.
[44] Gildenhard 2020, 295–336 discusses usages of *frugalitas* by Horace, Valerius Maximus, Seneca the Elder, Petronius, Seneca the Younger, Quintilian and Pliny the Younger.
[45] Gildenhard 2020, 295.
[46] Gildenhard 2020, 295.

is epitomised by the austere and republican undertones of *frugalitas*. However, *frugalitas* is not straightforwardly transformed into a republican virtue. Originally a virtue of people of lower status – enslaved people and farmers – its transformation into an aristocratic virtue is not an easy one.[47] As Gildenhard notes: 'The transformation of *frugalitas* into the virtue of all virtues, however, rested on shaky arguments and evidence.'[48] The effort involved in transforming *frugalitas* in order to Romanise self-restraint indicates that self-restraint is a concept which has cultural value, which is worth Romanising.

In summary, the term *frugalitas* indicates some key aspects of the concept of self-restraint in Roman ethics. What is most important to this thesis is how *frugalitas* indicates that self-restraint, in the early principate, is bound up with ideologies of Roman identity. Behaving with self-restraint is not just about being a philosophical *sapiens* (in the way of Greek philosophy), but about behaving properly as a Roman. The Romans' idea of self-control is linked to a specifically Roman idea of virtue, which has links to Roman identity and the idea of Roman-ness – namely agriculture austerity, old-fashioned rusticity. This idea of Roman-ness is distinctly opposed to the figure of the tyrant/dictator/autocrat, who represents luxury and a lack of restraint.

Much of the preceding discussion of self-control and restraint has centred on some specific ethical terminology, namely abstract nouns for virtues of self-control and vices of unrestraint. However, this specific

[47] On which, see Gildenhard 2020, 250–63.
[48] Gildenhard 2020, 292.

language is not necessary for talking about or exploring the concepts of restraint and lack of restraint. Indeed, these ideas are pervasive in how Romans think about behaviour, ethics and power hierarchies, to such an extent that specific, technical vocabulary does not need to be employed in order for the ideas to be discussed. This fact is particularly relevant to this thesis, as the texts I discuss often do not contain technical vocabulary of self-control and lack of restraint, but they do, nevertheless, deal with these ideas.

In order to demonstrate that restraint and lack of restraint can be without technical language, I examine a passage from Seneca's *de Constantia*, a philosophical treatise on the immovability of the Stoic *sapiens*. In the following passage, Seneca describes the *sapiens*' indifferent reaction to injuries or insults (*De Constantia* 13.5):

> Nullius ergo **movebitur** contumelia. Omnes enim inter se differant, sapiens quidem pares illos ob aequalem stultitiam omnis putat; nam si semel se demiserit eo, ut aut iniuria **moveatur** aut contumelia, non poterit umquam esse **securus**. **Securitas** autem proprium bonum sapientis est; nec committet, ut iudicando contumeliam sibi factam honorem habeat ei qui fecit; necesse est enim, a quo quisque contemni moleste ferat, suspici gaudeat.
>
> (And so he [the *sapiens*] will be moved by the insult of no one. For everyone may differ amongst themselves, but the *sapiens* thinks them all equal, on account of their stupidity. For if he, one time, stoops so far that he is moved by either injury or insult, he will not ever be able to be free from care. However, freedom from care is the

special good thing of the *sapiens*. And he will not act so that he, by judging that an insult has been made against himself, renders an honour to the man who made it; for it is necessary that)

In this passage, Seneca describes the *sapiens*' lack of reaction to insults or injuries (i.e. his restraint), which results in his state of tranquillity. The verb which which communicates the *sapiens*' restraint, via his lack of action, is the passive form of the verb *moveo*. This verb is very commonplace and seems, on its own, to lack import and significance. However, this verb is responsible for bringing in the concept of restraint – a concept which, as I have discussed, has especial significance for Roman ethics.

It might be noted that this passage of the *De Constantia* is not completely bereft of technical, philosophical terminology, containing the noun *securitas* and the related adjective *securus*. However, these words are not used to communicate the idea of restraint, but the idea of philosophical tranquillity which results from restraint. These ideas, although not completely unrelated, are separate and distinct. And for the concept of restraint, it is the verb *moveo* which does the heavy lifting.

This brief analysis highlights how technical language is not a necessary part of engaging with discourses and concepts of self-restraint and its lack. Much of the language which will be examined in this thesis is non-technical, such as generic verbs of action (e.g. *ago* or *facio*), adjectives of size (e.g. *magnus*, *maior*, *nimius*), words indicating transgression (e.g. *audeo*, *scelus*), or words associated with aggression (e.g. *impetus*, *ferox*, *saevus*). This non-technical vocabulary is used to describe different levels of action –

from inaction and action, to an excess of action – thereby engaging with the concepts of self-restraint and its lack.

To sum up. This section has highlighted the import of self-restraint and self-control within Roman ethical thinking, particularly during the late republic and early empire. This has been made clear particularly by discussion of the term *frugalitas*, which highlighted the distinct Romanisation of self-restraint, transforming self-restraint into a Roman ancestral virtue, which becomes associated with republican values and austerity. This transformation of *frugalitas*, this valorisation and Romanisation of self-restraint, occurs under the specific political conditions of dictatorship, as a coping mechanism for Roman elite men in the face of those with absolute power (i.e. tyrants, dictators, emperors). In other words, self-restraint and self-control are tools for dealing with compromises to autonomy, incurred by those with greater power, those higher up in the hierarchy. In short, it is this which is central to this thesis, namely these two sides of power hierarchies – absolute power (or what might seem to be) and dealing with compromised autonomy.

5 Overview

I now give an overview of each of the chapters of this thesis, explaining how the kinds of constraint and freedom discussed above form the conceptual centre of this work.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses hypermasculinity in Seneca's *Thyestes*. Thyestes' brother, Atreus, responds to a loss of power, in the form of emasculation, with an assertion of masculinity. Since Atreus demonstrates totally unrestrained freedom of action, the reader is confronted with the

possibility that an assertion of masculinity can go too far and venture into hypermasculinity – that there can be too much of a good thing – and with devastating effects. Through programmatic generic language and sub/superhuman imagery, Atreus and Thyestes are characterised as binary opposites: the one hypermasculine and superhuman, the other effeminate and subhuman. However, despite their undoubted binary opposition in these regards, Atreus and Thyestes also demonstrate the striking potential to be confused and interchangeable, thereby suggesting a certain fluidity to gendered categories. This fluidity of gendered categories calls into question rigid Roman understandings of gender.

The *Epistulae Morales*, the topic of the second chapter, encourage constraint upon action; in this sense the *Thyestes* can be successfully read as counterpart and counterpoint – at least conceptually – to the *Epistulae*. Outside the extreme universe of tragedy, total freedom to act is a rare affordance; most people's actions are constrained in some way. Inaction, often encoded in the highly loaded term *patientia*, is rehabilitated for masculinity in the *Epistulae*. Inaction towards circumstances, in terms of endurance of forbearance, is an ethical virtue in Stoic doctrine (hence the contemporary adjective "stoic"). However, such inaction can also be considered, by the Romans, as passivity, a negative, non-masculine, effeminate trait. It is this gap between Stoic determinism and Roman gendered ethics, between virtue and effeminacy, contained within the term *patientia*, which requires bridging in the *Epistulae*.

The third chapter of this thesis explores women's unrestrained actions in Seneca's *Medea*. Like Atreus in the *Thyestes*, Medea transitions from a

position of disempowerment to unrestrained freedom of action. However, whereas this transition is immediate for Atreus, Medea meditates on her disempowerment for the first three acts of five. Medea's reflection on her past actions reveals that different characters perceive them in different ways. From Medea's point of view, her past actions are indicative of her disempowerment, since they were socially embedded, committed for the benefit of others – indeed, others who do not acknowledge their benefit. These others, by contrast, consider Medea's actions as crimes for which she alone bears the guilt. This clash of perspectives is reflected in the juxtaposition of the language of benefits and mutual exchange with the language of criminality. In response to her perceived lack of autonomy, her disempowerment and exploitation, Medea, at the end of the play, commits infanticide. As in the *Thyestes*, infanticide is reflective of the most extreme freedom of action. For Medea, it is also indicative of her rejection of society, of the socially embedded actions of her past, as she no longer acts for the benefit of others.

The final chapter of this thesis discusses how women are simultaneously allowed philosophical autonomy and constrained in their actions, in the *consolationes ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*. In ascribing the possibility of philosophical virtue, or *virtus*, to women, Seneca seems to afford them a remarkable degree of autonomy, to an extent which may be at odds with traditional Roman conceptualisations of gendered ethics. The possibility of women's *virtus* and the encouragement of Marcia and Helvia to formal, philosophical education bestows on women, at a first glance, a radical degree of power and autonomy. However, this radical potential is neutralised

by the rhetoric and practical end point of Seneca's philosophical advice to women. By employing a rhetoric of exceptionalism, Seneca only allows the actualisation of philosophical excellence, of *virtus* to a select and elite group of women, thereby protecting the exclusivity accorded by *virtus*. In practical terms, Marcia and Helvia are directed to familial support, a role domestic and conservative; they are to manifest their philosophical excellence by nurturing family members, by taking up the duties of a traditional Roman *matrona*. This conservative practical outcome neutralises the radical potential of women's *virtus* and women's education, maintaining social constraints upon women's actions. Moreover, the philosophical import of a domestic and supportive role for women allows women to take agency over what might seem constrained actions. For a woman, like Medea, troubled by the lack of autonomy felt by acting for the benefit of others, such constrained actions are now elevated by the philosophical excellence they can confer on women.

6 The Dramas of Senecan Drama

Before diving into the first course of the *Thyestes*, there remain for discussion the scholarly set pieces on Senecan drama: the order of composition and the issue of performance. The order of composition of Seneca's tragedies has been discussed, most notably, by Fitch, who groups the plays into three groups: the earliest group are the *Agamemnon*, *Phaedra* and *Oedipus*, followed by the second group of the *Hercules Furens*, *Troades*, and *Medea*, and finally the *Thyestes* and *Phoenissae*.[49] Chapter Three compares the *Medea* with the *Thyestes*, showing how Medea's trajectory

[49] Fitch 1981.

differs from Atreus'; since this chapter focuses on audience response and, as mentioned above, my approach considers conceptual overlap, regardless of the order of composition of the plays, the interaction between these plays can be explored.

Much ink has been spilled on the question of whether Seneca's plays were actually performed.[50] Whether or not they were actually performed, they are written in dramatic form and have, as has been discussed, features conducive to performance.[51] In addition, Seneca's tragedies are, undeniably, verbally dense and textually intricate. For these reasons, my analyses of the *Thyestes* and *Medea* consider the plays as both performable dramatic pieces and as works which may be returned to, time and again, by a reader. As will become apparent in the following chapter, the *Thyestes* is a play in which reading and re-reading is fruitful for gaining a full understanding of the complex mechanics of masculinity employed.

[50] For an overview, see Boyle 2017, xl–xlii.
[51] On the performability of Senecan drama, see, for example: Boyle 1997, 3–12; G. W. M. Harrison 2000; Kohn 2013.

Chapter One. Masculine Models in Seneca's *Thyestes*.

1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is masculinity in Seneca's *Thyestes*. The *Thyestes*, itself, is a confusing play, dense with themes and imagery, in which a reader can struggle to find coherence. The complexity of the *Thyestes* in literary terms is reflected by the complexity of its engagement with masculinity. I demonstrate three different, but ultimately complementary, ways in which the *Thyestes* questions different conceptualisations of masculinity:

1. Through the employment of changing literary models, as different modes of masculinity.
2. Through challenging the respective alignment of sub- and supra-human imagery with effeminacy and hypermasculinity.
3. Through inviting reflection on the binary opposition and similarities of effeminacy and hypermasculinity.

I will show how these different interrogations develop across the course of the play, intertwining and interacting with each other. Due to this complex interaction of ideas in the play as a whole, I explain, here in the introduction, the main conclusions of my analysis through each lens.

First, different poetic voices are used as different models of masculinity, which are all eventually revealed as somewhat lacking or unsatisfactory. Atreus initially employs elegy, as a way of expressing his emasculation (176-180). Atreus then rejects elegy in favour of action and aggression (180-243), claiming to quasi-divinity (260-287). Atreus pushes his

literary masculine voice even further in taking up priapic aggression (885-891). However, priapic poetics are highly performative, a source of ridicule and often imply underlying vulnerability; in this sense, Atreus' employment of a priapic poetic voice of masculine aggression makes his masculinity farcical. Moreover, there is potential to interpret Atreus' combination of masculine voice – namely elegiac vulnerability and priapic aggression – through a further model, that of Catullus. As will be discussed, the potential Catullan model makes explicit the vulnerability always lurking behind priapism. Atreus' extreme, aggressive response to elegiac emasculation creates a poetic voice – whether interpreted as priapic or Catullan – which reveals the vulnerabilities and anxieties behind such claims to machismo.

The respective associations of the sub-human (beasts) and supra-human (quasi-divine Giants) with effeminacy and hypermasculine aggression, are employed, questioned and, ultimately re-evaluated. Initially, Atreus dehumanises/bestialises Thyestes, whilst elevating himself to godlike/Giant status, thereby effeminising Thyestes and (hyper)masculinising himself (260-286). However, Atreus becomes increasingly bestial himself, in his own eyes. The association of this nonhuman category with effeminacy is questioned. Atreus is simultaneously bestial (sub-human) and Gigantic (supra-human) (685-737). These two opposing categories become overlapped or blurred, thereby calling into question the association of sub-humanity with effeminacy and supra-humanity with hypermasculinity.

The categories of effeminacy and hypermasculinity are also themselves questioned and scrutinised. In their contrasting hypermasculinity and emasculation, Atreus and Thyestes appear to be polar opposites. Yet,

there are moments throughout the play at which they are conflated or confused with one another (32-36, 194-5, 640). The brothers are shown, despite their polarity, to be not so different after all. Their equal potential to occupy either position, their interchangeability, encourages reflection on the similarities between the polar opposites of hypermasculinity and emasculation, and (unusually) hints at the non-essentialist, constructed nature of masculinity and genders more broadly.

This summary of the main conclusions of my analysis highlights the complex layers of this play. As the above procession of line numbers make clear, later parts of the play are important for making sense of earlier parts of the play; in particular, Atreus' later priapic posturing transforms his opening elegiac voice into a Catullan persona. For this reason, I employ the idea of re-reading. In thinking about re-reading the text, I consider the responses of a repeat reader, a reader invested in making sense of the text – as different from the responses of a first-time reader. Seneca's tragedies, in their literary denseness, are texts which invite rereading, re-evaluation and reflection; this will become particularly apparent in my discussion of the *Thyestes*.

The structure of this chapter largely follows the linear order of the play. This allows tracking of the simultaneous development of different themes and ideas – particularly the use of literary models and supra-/sub-human imagery. The three different interrogations of masculinity, outlined above, do not occur at distinct or discrete moments of the *Thyestes*, but across the entire tragedy. Themes will appear, disappear and reappear throughout the chapter, as they do throughout the play. By working through the themes as they come, I show how the different ideas develop alongside each other, to

create a whole which is larger than its individual parts. Worked into this linear analysis of the play, forward and backward references will be used to highlight the retrospective significance of later parts of the play for earlier parts of the play. This will highlight the different responses of a repeat reader, who can use later parts of the play to make sense of earlier parts of the play.

With this structure in mind, I now commence discussion of the play.

2 Act One 1-175: Supernatural Prologue, Bestial Appetites

The play opens with a supernatural prologue: summoned from the Underworld by a Fury, Tantalus is forced to infect his grandson Atreus with his own criminality. The criminality of the Tantalid line is conceived of in the bestial terms, connecting bestial insatiable appetite with figurative hunger for power, which leads to extreme crimes. Bestiality is not, in the prologue, associated with effeminacy, but with extreme behaviour and transgression. This thematic conglomeration – of bestiality and criminality – is coloured, in the prologue, by the typical concerns of Senecan tragedy (e.g. extreme behaviour, inherited transgression). And so it seems, particularly to a first-time reader, that bestial themes will be associated with inherited criminality, and that both Atreus and Thyestes will be characterised as bestial, wild, savage.

The familial curse of the House of Atreus and Senecan drama's metaliterary concern with inherited *scelera*, *crimina*, *mala* are jointly manifested in the (apparently) direct incitement of Atreus by Tantalus. The *mala* of Tantalus and Atreus are also thematically connected through food – both literally and as a conceptual field. Tantalus, in the version followed by

Seneca, serves his son, Pelops, at a banquet of the gods. As a result, he is eternally punished with insatiable hunger and thirst, which he cannot satisfy as the fruits in the trees above him and the water in the pool below him move from his grasp.[52] At a fundamental level, Tantalus' crime and punishment illustrates the boundaries between humans and gods, and humans and animals. Tantalus breaks fundamental boundaries by killing his own son and by trying to deceive the gods into eating human flesh. Both filicide and (suggested) cannibalism hint at non-human, bestial behaviour. Actualising this potential cannibalism, Atreus, in this play, will kill Thyestes' sons and feed them to him.

However, even before consuming Seneca's play the audience is acutely aware of these aspects of the Tantalid myth.[53] And so the audience can identify Tantalus, although unnamed, as the speaker of the opening lines from the references to hunger (1-2):

> quis inferorum sede ab infausta extrahit
>
> avido fugaces ore captantem cibos?
>
> (Who draws out from the unspeakable region of the Underworld the man trying to capture food fleeing from his greedy mouth?)

The (self-)description of Tantalus in the second line jointly draws on and reinforces his association with food and hunger. The nouns *os* and *cibus* immediately signal this theme, which will turn out to be relevant for the rest of the play. The range of meanings of *avidus* is such that it can be used to

[52] Seneca's chorus recount this myth (*Thy*. 136-175).
[53] For the history of the myth before Seneca, see overview by Boyle 2017, lxix–lxxviii.

refer to literal hunger, or figurative eagerness or desire for something (e.g. power).[54] Hunger implies some sense of insatiability or indulgence, as highlighted by the opposites listed in the *TLL*.[55] The verbal separation of *cibos* and *ore*, reflecting their actual separation for Tantalus, further highlights insatiability. Although not, by any means, used exclusively of beasts, the adjective *avidus* implies intemperance and greed; its associations with animalistic hunger and with greed for power become fully realised in the course of the prologue and play.

Along with establishing the theme of hunger, the prologue highlights the self-referentiality of this play on various levels. Boyle notes that the opening lines of the *Thyestes* are an intratextual reference to the ghost of Thyestes in the *Agamemnon*.[56] The collision of literary and familial inheritance is a well-trodden trope when it comes to Senecan tragedy and work on Senecan tragedy.[57] In this play, the ghost of Tantalus (apparently) literally incites his descendant, Atreus, to action (18-20):

iam nostra subit
e stirpe turba quae suum vincat genus
ac me innocentem faciat et inausa audeat.

(Now from my lineage comes a crowd to overpower their own race and make me innocent and dare undared things.)

[54] *OLD* 215 s.v. "*avidus*" 1 'greedy for gain, covetous, avaricious'.
[55] These antonyms are *abstinens, contentus, contemptor, fugax, lentus, liberalis, modestus, parcus, patiens, piger* (*TLL* 2 s.v. "*avidus*" 1429.33-35).
[56] Boyle 2017, 102: Thyestes in the *Agamemnon* says that Tantalus *aquas fugaces ore decepto appetit* (*Ag.* 20: He sought water fleeing from his deceived mouth).
[57] See, for example: Littlewood 2004, chap. 3; Schiesaro 2003, chaps 2, 5.

Here we get a recognisably Senecan trope – the emulation and escalation of inherited wrongdoing.[58] The audience joins together the dots between: Tantalus' crime and punishment, inherited wrongdoing, and the Thyestes myth known well in Rome. In short, this looks like (and indeed is) a quite literalised version of the inherited *mala* trope of Senecan tragedy. Moreover, the escalation of *mala* ties into the excess already connoted through ideas of literal appetite.

The more figurative and bestial side of Tantalus', Atreus' and Thyestes' appetite is developed in descriptions by the Fury and the Chorus (83-86; 149-152):

> ante perturba domum
> inferque tecum proelia et ferri malum
> regibus amorem, concute insano ferum
> pectus tumultu.
>
> (First, shake up your home and bring in with you battles and an evil love of the sword to kings, then agitate their wilds hearts with maddened uproar.)

> hos aeterna fames persequitur cibos,
> hos aeterna sitis; nec dapibus feris
> decerni potuit poena decentior.
>
> (Eternal hunger follows this food, and eternal thirst; and a more fitting punishment could not be found for wild feasts.)

[58] On which see, Seidensticker 1985; Schiesaro 2003, 31–36, 130–31.

The adjective *ferus* is applied to both the heart of Atreus (roused to passion for revenge against Thyestes) and the feast of Tantalus (prepared for the gods). This creates a connection between the past actions of Tantalus and the future actions of Atreus – both figured as bestial. Seneca explicitly points out the centrality of food in both the crime and punishment of Tantalus – a connection which makes one appropriate for the other (*decentior*). The adjective *ferus* is also also repeated by the chorus in a description of Atreus and Thyestes (136-137):

> Tandem lassa feros exuat impetus
> sicci progenies impia Tantali.
> (At last, may the impious offspring, tired out, of parched Tantalus lay aside their beastly vehemence.)

Atreus and Thyestes have bestial aggression (*feros impetus*) towards each other. They are generalised as the *impia progenies*, in familial language which connects them to their father, Tantalus. Simultaneously, the bestial and the familial are emphasised; the Tantalid line is wild and feral.

The themes and tone established by the end of the prologue are highly emblematic of Senecan tragedy. Tainted by their ancestor, Tantalus, Atreus and Thyestes are pitted against each other, savage and bestial in their violence. For the first-time reader, bestiality is only associated (at least for now) with violence and transgression, thereby setting up expectations for how this theme might be dealt with in the rest of the play. As will become apparent as my discussion continues, these expectations will be subverted, and, for the repeat reader, bestiality has other associations, with effeminacy.

3 Act Two 176-180: Enter Emasculated/Elegiac Atreus

After the firm establishment of bestial violence, as a trait possessed by both brothers, in the first prologue, the second prologue comes as a distinct tonal shift, as Atreus figures his situation in terms programmatic of elegy. The bestial savagery of the first prologue is juxtaposed with the elegiac refinement of Atreus' first words in the second prologue. This contrast of tones is highly disconcerting, particularly to the first-time reader; towards the end of this section, I discuss how a reader might find make sense of this odd combination of bestial wilderness and elegiac urbanity. For now, I focus on the elegiac aspects of Atreus' characterisation.

Firstly, Atreus' situation is itself elegiac. His wife's adultery with Thyestes is very much like an elegiac love triangle, in which the elegiac poet (Atreus) loses the affections of his beloved (Aerope) to a rival (Thyestes).[59] Secondly, more importantly, Atreus characterises himself and his situation in terms programmatic of elegy. At his entrance in the play, Atreus takes on the voice of an elegiac poet, by presenting himself as disenfranchised, emasculated and powerless due to his wife's adultery,[60] in specifically elegiac terms (176-180):

> **Ignave, iners, enervis** et (quod maximum
> probrum tyranno rebus in summis **reor**)

[59] Some examples of elegies which deal with this scenario: Tib. 1.5; Prop. 1.8, 2.5, 2.9; Ovid, *Am.* 2.19, 3.4.

[60] Atreus' weakness, as clear from these opening words, might also be observed in his lack of agency within the wider play, as his hunger for revenge is incited by the Fury, via Tantalus; on this interpretation, see Dodson-Robinson 2010.

inulte, post tot scelera, post fratris dolos

fasque omne ruptum **questibus vanis agis**

iratus Atreus?

(Idle, lazy, weak and – what I consider the greatest disgrace for a king in important matters – unavenged, after so many crimes, after the tricks of my brother and everything proper broken, do you act with vain complaints, angry Atreus?)

Atreus' opening words are the adjectives *ignavus*, *iners* and *enervis*, used to describe himself. As I shall now show, these adjectives have specific generic significance and are programmatic of the genre of elegy.

Atreus' first word in the play, *ignavus*, is an adjective with a range of meanings concerning the idea of inactivity.[61] This adjective is particularly used in elegiac poetry to refer to the poet-*amator*'s emasculation through rejecting military pursuits in favour of erotic ones. For example, in Propertius 3.11, the narrator is unmanned by his beloved (Prop. 3.11.1-4):

Quid mirare, meam si versat **femina** vitam

et trahit addictum sub sua iura **virum**,

criminaque **ignavi capitis** mihi turpia fingis,

quod nequeam fracto rumpere vincla iugo?

(Why do you wonder, if a woman twists my life and drags off a resigned man under her rule? Do you fashion shameful charges of a cowardly person for me, because you suppose I cannot break the yoke and rend my bonds?)

[61] *OLD* 822 s.v. "*ignavus*" 1a 'lazy, indolent, slothful', 2 'lacking physical energy, sluggish, torpid', 3 'faint-hearted, cowardly, spiritless', 4 'ignoble, mean', 5 'performing no useful function, useless'.

The poet explicitly points out the inverse of the conventional power dynamic between genders, describing himself as under the rule of a woman (*sub sua iura*). The gendered aspect of this situation is emphasised through specific reference to himself as a *vir* and his beloved as a *femina*. Moreover, that this situation is unusual is shown through the rhetorical question which frames it: *quid mirare*? I.e. that a man is subject to a woman's whims is something to be remarked upon as strange. Alongside the highlighted gender dynamic at play in this poem, the poet describes himself as an *ignavum caput* (a cowardly person). Thus, this adjective, *ignavus*, is part of the semantic nexus which expresses the inaction of elegiac poets. That this inaction has military and political connotations is hinted at in these lines by the narrator's metaphorical capture by his beloved; this is fully borne out in the rest of the poem, which features mythological *exempla* of women taking militaristic/heroic roles and, in so doing, often replacing and emasculating the men with whom they are associated.[62]

Similarly, Ovid's *Amores* 1.9 features the rejection of traditionally masculine fighting in favour of erotic pursuits.[63] Where the Propertian poem has a narrator emasculated by a powerful woman, the narrator of *Amores* 1.9 co-opts soldiers' actions for lovers, showing how the two groups are not so different from each other. The disingenuous Ovidian narrator claims that he was spurred to action by his *puella* (1.9.43-44):

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[62] E.g. Medea and Jason (ll. 9-12), Omphale and Hercules (ll. 17-20).
[63] Further discussion of *Am.* 1.9 can be found in McKeown 1995.

inpulit **ignavum** formosae cura puellae

iussit et in castris aera merere suis.

(Care for a beautiful girl drove me, when I was lazy, and ordered me to earn bronze in her camp.)

It seems that Ovid is denying the association of elegists with the adjective *ignavus* and, indeed, with inaction at all. However, this is a denial which shows the holes in the argument; metaphorically serving under the banner of his *puella* is not the same as literally serving as a soldier. And, like Propertius, by serving his *puella*, he participates in a reversal of traditional gender and power dynamics.

In addition to its attribution to the elegiac poet, *ignavus* is also attributed to the genre of elegy, in contrast to epic and tragedy. In *Amores* 2.18, Ovid juxtaposes his own poetry with that of his addressee, Macer (*Am.* 2.18.1-4):

Carmen ad **iratum** dum tu perducis **Achillen**

primaque iuratis induis **arma viris**,

nos, Macer, **ignava** Veneris cessamus in umbra,

et tener ausuros **grandia** frangit Amor.

(Whilst you draw out a poem toward the anger of Achilles and impose from the start arms upon men sworn to war, I, Macer, am idling in the cowardly shade of Venus, and tender Love quashes me as I venture greater things.)

Ovid describes Macer's poetry as archetypal epic through reference to earlier epic poetry.[64] The *iratus Achillen* of the first line refers to the opening of the *Iliad*: **μῆνιν** ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω **Ἀχιλῆος** / οὐλομένην. And three out of the five words of Ovid's second line are also found in the opening of the *Aeneid*: ***arma virum****que cano, Troiae qui* **primus** *ab oris / Italiam*. Ovid also does the common attribution of the adjective *grandis* to epic themes, when he claims his intentions to write epic were offset by Cupid.[65] Instead of pursuing epic poetry, Ovid is inactive in the *ignava Veneris umbra*. Since inactivity is a generic marker of elegy and the elegiac poet, the adjective *ignavus* corresponds to the semantic nexus of deliberate idleness in opposition to the militarised action expected of men. In being *ignavus*, the elegiac poet fails at normative masculinity, due to his failure to take up the expected pursuit of military service. Applying this to the *Thyestes*, Atreus' failure at masculinity is compounded. Atreus' failure to take up action indicates his failure at masculinity; beyond this, his failure to take up specifically military action indicates his further failure, as a king, a militarised figure.

Atreus' second word upon his entrance is the adjective *iners*, which particularly points towards the sexual aspect of Roman masculinity and Atreus' emasculation. In its most general senses, the adjective *iners* means "lazy", "useless", "inactive".[66] As with *ignavus*, such ideas of inactivity connoted by *iners* are gendered.[67] Even more specifically, *iners* is used in a

[64] On which see McKeown 1998, 383, 387–89.
[65] McKeown 1998, 389.
[66] *OLD* 891 s.v. "*iners*" 2.
[67] *OLD* 891 s.v. "*iners*" 3 "having no spirit, unadventurous, unmanly".

sexual sense of erectile dysfunction,[68] with a most well-known example in Ovid's *Amores* 3.7.13-16:

> tacta tamen veluti gelida mea membra cicuta
> segnia propositum destituere meum;
> truncus **iners** iacui, species et inutile pondus,
> et non exactum, corpus an umbra forem.
>
> (Nevertheless, my limbs, as if touched by cold hemlock, lazily abandoned my purpose. I lay, an impotent trunk and a useless weight, and it was not determined whether I was a body or a shade.)

In a simultaneously gendered and sexual sense, *iners* refers to the flaccid penis. On the one hand, in terms of gender, *iners* works within the binary of activity/inactivity; on the other hand, in terms of sexuality, *iners* works within the binary of erect/flaccid penis. Both of these senses come from and contribute to the binary of masculinity/effeminacy. Normative and ideal masculinity is active and hard; a failure of masculinity is passive and soft. It is this binary of which *iners* is a part, and which connects the gendered and sexual aspects of this adjective. Although not strictly an elegiac theme, impotence is sexual and emasculating.[69]

The third adjective Atreus attributes to himself is *enervis*. Along with its related verb *enervo* and antonymic noun *nervus*, *enervis* not only does generic work similar to the adjective *ignavus*, but also gendered work similar

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[68] This meaning given at *OLD* 892 s.v. "*iners*" 5d "having no sexual capacity, impotent". See also Adams 1982, 46 on the language of sexual impotence.
[69] For discussion of elegiac sexual dysfunction, see Hallett 2014.

to the adjective *iners*.[70] To illustrate this, I turn to the Ovid's highly programmatic *Amores* 1.1 (1-4, 17-18):

> **Arma** gravi numero violentaque bella parabam
>
> edere, materia conveniente modis.
>
> par erat inferior versus—risisse Cupido
>
> dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.
>
> …
>
> cum bene **surrexit** versu nova pagina primo, 17
>
> attenuat **nervos** proximus ille meos;
>
> (I was preparing to tell of arms and violent wars in serious metre, with material befitting form. The second line was equal to the first, but Cupid is said to have laughed and snatched away one foot… When a new page rose up well in its first line, the next line softens my might.)

In this poem, the Ovidian narrator claims that he started writing epic hexameter until Cupid stole a foot of the following line, resulting in elegiac couplets. Along with references to metre, Ovid's intended subject is also signalled by the opening word, *arma*, which recalls the opening of Virgil's *Aeneid*. After accusing Cupid of stepping on the toes of other divinities, in inspiring poetry, Ovid goes on to characterise the metrical forms of epic and elegy in terms which can be (and have been) interpreted as referencing the penis.[71] Epic hexameter, earlier described as *gravis* (weighty, serious), is said to rise up (*surrego*) and is identified with the poet's *nervi*. This noun, which

[70] For example, the related verb *enervo* is used of sexual incapacity at Horace, *Epodes* 8.2.
[71] See, e.g. Kennedy 1992, 59–61.

literally refers to bodily tissue, such as muscle or tendons, and is used figuratively of strength or vigour, can refer to the erect penis.[72] Whilst the first line of the elegiac couplet has the potential to continue in virile and sexually potent epic hexameters, the second line confounds this potential. The Ovidian narrator claims that the pentameter weakens his *nervi*, i.e. reverses his erection. As the epic genre is connoted by virile erection, correlatively the elegiac genre is connoted by effeminate flaccidity.[73]

It seems, then, that the adjectives *ignavus*, *iners* and *enervis* (as oppositional to the noun *nervus*) can be applied to physical idleness, sexual dysfunction, and the elegiac genre itself – all of which are failures of normative masculinity, i.e. indicative of the emasculation of the Roman *vir*. Before moving on from these three words, it is also worth considering the instances where they (or their etymological relations) appear together. Whilst this is one of only two places in extant Latin literature where all three of these adjectives are in close proximity, there are various examples of two of these adjectives used together.[74]

Cicero ascribes the adjectives *iners* and *ignavus* and related nouns *inertia* and *ignavia* to those he aims to discredit. In general, Cicero advises the lawyer-in-training to associate his opponent with *inertia* or *ignavia*, in order to discredit them (*De Inventione* 1.11):

[72] See Adams 1982, 21 and *OLD* 1173 s.v. "*nervus*" 1b '(obsc.) the penis'.

[73] Just as pregnancy is not necessarily a feminine state, the erect or flaccid penis need not (and should not) connote respectively masculinity or its failure. Nevertheless, the masculinising associations of erection and emasculating associations of flaccidity were certainly as meaningful for normative Roman masculinity as for hegemonic masculinity in contemporary society.

[74] The only other instance of *enervis, ignavus* and *iners* occurring together is in the pseudo-Senecan *Hercules Oetaeus*.

> in contemptionem adducentur, si eorum **inertia**, neglegentia, **ignavia**, desidiosum studium et luxuriosum otium proferetur.
>
> (They will be brought into contempt if their idleness, carelessness, cowardliness, lazy exertion and luxurious leisure are brought forth.)

In a more specific example, Cicero presents Verres as a most extreme instance of *inertia* and *ignavia* (*In Verrem* 2.2.192):

> At homo **inertior**, **ignavior**, magis vir inter mulieres, impura inter viros muliercula proferri non potest.
>
> (But one cannot be produced – a man more useless, more cowardly, more a cavalier amongst women, or more an impure hussy amongst men.)

In this example, there is also clearly a correlation between Verres' *inertia* and *ignavia* and his failure to behave in accordance with normative masculinity; Verres is a macho posturer in the company of women, but becomes effeminate amongst real Roman men. Verres' effeminacy is especially emphasised by his description as a *muliercula*, the diminutive of *mulier* (woman); the diminutive form of this noun gives it a dismissive force, to mean a woman "little, weak, foolish, etc."[75] The concurrence of *iners* and *ignavus* in Cicero highlights that these two adjectives belong in a similar semantic nexus. Both are ascribed to someone inactive or cowardly, i.e. someone who does not fulfil normative masculinity.

[75] *OLD* 1141 s.v. "*muliercula*". See also *TLL* 8 s.v. "*muliercula*" 1575.39-1575.40 '*mulier parva, miseranda, contempta, necnon familiaris*'; 1576.25 '*de viris impudicis vel ignavis*'.

The effeminising force of *iners* and *enervis* is illustrated by the concurrence of *iners* and *enervis*/*nervus*/*nervosius* in numerous poems on the topic of sexual impotence.[76] Together, *iners* and *enervis* (alluded to as the negative of *nervus*/*nervosius*) form the vocabulary of impotence, of the sexually dysfunctional penis, particularly as symbolic of the failure of normative masculinity. The inability to perform sexually is mapped onto a deficiency of masculinity, of proper manliness.

That such failure of normative masculinity, signalled by *ignavus*, *iners* and *enervis*, is programmatic of elegy has been made clear from Ovid's *Amores* 1.1 (*nervus*) and 2.18 (*ignavus*). To hammer home this point, a final concurrence of two of these three adjectives is present in the opening lines of Ovid's *Amores* 1.15:

> Quid mihi Livor edax, ignavos obicis annos,
>
> ingeniique vocas carmen inertis opus?

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[76] Catullus 67.23-28: *sed pater illius gnati violasse cubile / dicitur et miseram conscelerasse domum, / sive quod impia mens caeco flagrabat amore, / seu quod* ***iners*** *sterili semine natus erat, / ut quaerendum unde <unde> foret* ***nervosius*** *illud, / quod posset zonam solvere virgineam.* (But the father is said to have violated the bed of his son and to have stained the wretched house, either because his wicked mind was burning with blind love, or because his son was impotent with sterile seed, such that a more vigorous thing needed to be sought, of the sort which could loosen a maiden's girdle.)
Horace, *Epodes* 12.16-20: *pereat male, quae te / Lesbia quaerenti taurum monstravit* ***inertem****, / cum mihi Cous adesset Amyntas, / cuius in indomito constantior inguine* ***nervus /*** *quam nova collibus arbor inhaeret.* (May she perish badly, that Lesbia, who showed me that you were limp when I was looking for a bull, when I had Amyntas of Cos, in whose unrestrained crotch stands a member firmer than a young tree in the hills.)
Ovid, *Am.* 3.7.35-6, which featured *iners* at line 15: *quid vetat et* ***nervos*** *magicas torpere per artes? / forsitan inpatiens fit latus inde meum.* (What holds me back? Is it through magic arts that my might is numb? Perhaps that's why my side becomes unfeeling.)
Carmina Priapea 82.38-45: *quid est,* ***iners****? pigetne lentitudinis? / licebit hoc inultus auferas semel, / sed ille cum redibit aureus puer, / simul sonante senseris iter pede, / recente* ***nervus*** *excubet libidine, / et inquietus inguina arrigat tumor, / neque incitare cesset, usque dum mihi / Venus iocosa molle ruperit latus.* (Why's it limp? Does its slowness upset you? I'll let you snuff it out once with impunity; but when that golden boy returns, at the same time as you feel his journey with sounding feet, may my power stir with recent lust, may my restless surge stiffen my crotch, may arousal not cease, all the way until playful Venus bursts my soft side.)

> (Why, consuming Envy, do you reproach my cowardly years and call my poetry the work of an idle mind?)

Like *Amores* 1.1 (the opening of the book), *Amores* 1.15 (the close of the book) is highly programmatic. Ovid defends his preoccupation with erotic poetry, instead of the military or legal career a young man ought to pursue, on the grounds that his poetry will grant him immortality. His time writing poetry – specifically elegiac poetry – is characterised by (implicitly) *Livor* as *ignavus* and Ovid himself (*qua* poet) is considered *iners*. In other words, Ovid, according to *Livor*, wastes his most virile years on the unmanly production of elegiac poetry.

In summary, our three adjectives are part of a similar semantic nexus – a nexus which evokes the failure of normative masculinity. This failure occurs in different ways which are simultaneous and mutually reinforcing: inaction or idleness, erectile dysfunction, and elegiac poetry. Therefore, Atreus' opening words – *ignave, iners, enervis* – both demonstrate his sense of emasculation and evoke the programmatic language of elegy; and this programmatic language is language which itself capitalises upon the gendered aspects of these particular words. In Atreus' opening words, Seneca demonstrates generic self-consciousness, that the model he is evoking is elegiac.

Moving beyond Atreus' first three words in the play, the remainder of this first sentence, a rhetorical and self-addressed question, continues in an elegiac vein. The "first-person" and self-descriptive elements of Atreus'

question contribute to his self-styling as an elegiac narrator.[77] Moreover, Atreus ascribes to himself *questus* (complaints), from the verb *queror*, a verb which epitomises the poetry of the elegist.[78] In response to his wife's adultery with Thyestes, Atreus has been, in his own words, inactive like the elegiac poet. He berates and deprecates himself for his *vani questus*, elegiac complaints he has been making in the place of real action.[79] In his first sentence, then, Seneca's Atreus concisely characterises himself as an elegiac poet, activating multiple touchpoints programmatic of the genre of elegy – touchpoints which highlight his inaction, his emasculation, his failure at normative masculinity.

At this point, it is necessary to recontextualise Atreus' opening words within the play so far. The first prologue, the conversation between Tantalus and the Fury, established the bestial themes relevant to the house of Atreus and coloured them with the hallmarks of Senecan tragedy. After the themes of bestial savagery and wildness which dominate act one, Atreus' elegiac voice, which opens act two, comes as a source of surprise and confusion. For this combination of contrasting themes and tones – ferality and elegy – the most obvious resolution is the *topos* of elegiac hunting, featuring the elegiac poet-hunter and elegiac beloved as hunted.[80] The reader, trying to make sense

[77] Strictly, Atreus' first sentence contains both a first-person verb (*reor*) and a second-person verb (*agis*); nevertheless, *agis* is also self-directed, in self-address.

[78] James 2003, 108–32 discusses elegiac laments or *querela* as the foundational address of the poet-lover to the *puella*: 'the *querela* is thus the overarching unifying element in virtually every address made by the lover-poet to the *docta puella*' (p.109).

[79] Keep in mind Atreus' self-reproach for inaction, and his highly active response, as Chapter 3 of this thesis discusses a similar trajectory from inactivity to activity by Seneca's Medea. As noted by Boyle 2017, 172; *Med.* 26: *querelas verbaque in cassum sero?* Medea, here, similarly berates herself to action; however, as will become apparent in Chapter 3, Medea's aspiration to action is hindered and curtailed by the circumstances of her (at least as self-perceived) lack of autonomy.

[80] Documentation of this *topos* by Murgatroyd 1984.

of the juxtaposition of themes, might, then, expect to find, in the remainder of the *Thyestes*, a particularly elegiac treatment of bestial themes, in which Atreus, the elegiac poet, as a hunter pursues a hunted object of desire (his wife? Thyestes?). Indeed, the *Thyestes* would not be the only Senecan drama to explore themes of elegy within the dark setting of tragedy; however, as I shall discuss in the next section, engagement with elegy in the *Thyestes* differs in extent and mode.

4 Elegy and Intertextuality

In this section, I pause my analysis of the *Thyestes* to take a short digression on elegy in Senecan tragedy. I shall first summarise Seneca's intertextual engagement with elegy in the *Phaedra*, as a play which likewise features both elegy and bestiality. I shall then explain how Seneca's dealings with elegy differ in the *Thyestes*, and so how my intertextual approach differs.

As discussed most fully by Christopher Trinacty, significant engagement with Ovid's *Heroides* occurs in the *Phaedra*.[81] By comparing Seneca's tragic heroine to her Ovidian counterparts, Trinacty shows how Seneca innovates on aspects of her Ovidian characterisation. Trinacty explores how Seneca's *Phaedra* resituates the elegiac stance of Ovid's *Heroides* 4 (itself a resituation of a Greek tragic plot into the world of elegy) within a tragic universe – and, more specifically, a Senecan tragic universe with Senecan concerns. Seneca's Phaedra corrupts Hippolytus' pure and ultimately sterile view of the natural world, by speaking of herself as a huntress, an elegiac pursuer of her stepson. By putting the elegiac stance of

[81] Trinacty 2014, 67–93.

Ovid's Phaedra back into the character's original genre of tragedy, Seneca demonstrates that her elegiac rhetoric fails, and that tragedy is the most appropriate genre for Phaedra.

My approach to elegy in Seneca, unlike Trinacty's, deals with few direct, traceable intertextual parallels, since the *Thyestes* (unlike the *Phaedra*) contains few direct, lexical parallels with elegiac poetry. Rather than finding specific linguistic parallels, my discussion focuses on how the voice of the elegiac poet (amongst, as shown later, other literary models) is invoked as a mode of masculinity. In this sense, the intertextuality with which I deal is conceptual, rather than lexical.

To clarify what I mean by this. In using earlier literature to interpret later literature (particularly that of Seneca), my approach belongs to the intertextuality family.[82] Different thresholds of evidence suggest different kinds of intertextuality. Where the most specific evidence allows, Senecan appropriation of earlier literature is linguistic, drawing on specific parallels of phrasing. However, intertextuality need not be limited to specific verbal parallels, but can extend to engagement with wider cultural or literary phenomena, such as literary models of masculinity.[83] This conceptual kind of intertextuality also lends itself to centring the reader's interpretation.[84] The question of whether Seneca intentionally brings in different poetic voices (though I am inclined to think Seneca is aware of what he is doing) does not

[82] Intertextuality as an approach to Latin poetry is exemplified by, to give but a few examples, Conte and Segal 1986; Hinds 1998. An intertextual approach has also been taken to Seneca's highly referential tragedies; see, for example, Hinds 2011; Trinacty 2014.
[83] I have in mind the kind of interactions described by König, Langlands, and Uden 2020. Interactions need not be tied to specific weighted phrases, but can also be tied to wider cultural phenomena; texts can interact with each other because of 'shared awareness of Greco-Roman culture and history' (König, Langlands, and Uden 2020, 17).
[84] See discussion of author and reader roles in intertextual interpretation by Hinds 1998, ch. 2, esp. pp. 47-51.

change the fact that such interpretations are available to and useful for the reader attempting to make sense of this confusing and dense play. In short, I am using intertextuality to think about what cultural touchpoints are most accessible for the audience of Seneca's *Thyestes*.

At this point in the play, the opening of Act Two, elegy is the tallest landmark on the journey so far. However, as we shall see, the landscape will change. This prominent sight of elegy will turn out to be only part of the picture. The eventual appearance of priapic poetics will combine with the vulnerable elegiac voice to bring the reader to Catullus – as mentioned in the introduction. In this way, elegy undergoes a more complex transformation in the *Thyestes* than in the *Phaedra*. In terms of generic play, elegy in the *Thyestes* does not take the lead role (as in the *Phaedra*), but shares the stage with other generic touchpoints. To use a metaphor: if elegy is cheese, the *Phaedra* is cheese on toast, and the *Thyestes* is lasagne.[85]

The traces of Catullus' poetry in Atreus' opening four and a half lines, available to a repeat-reader, will be examined later in the chapter.[86] For now, keep in mind the following main points. Firstly, bestial themes feature prominently in the first act. Secondly, Atreus, at the opening of the second act, has been fashioned as an elegiac poet, through his use of programmatic elegiac language. Thirdly, the reader try to put these two contrasting tones together to expect an exploration of the *topos* of elegiac hunting – a conclusion which would not be unheard of for Senecan tragedy – but this

[85] I am very sorry to all Italians for this analogy; I am informed that proper Italian lasagne does not contain cheese sauce, but only a sprinkling of parmesan in the bechamel layers.
[86] See §12 and §13.

expectation by the reader will be subverted. Let us now return to the linear reading of the play.

5 Act Two 180-204: Atreus Rejects Elegy

I now continue my analysis of Atreus' opening speech. This section will demonstrate that the remainder of this speech leaves behind the markedly programmatic elegiac voice, so strongly conjured in the first sentence. As we shall see here, elegiac language and elegiac masculinity/emasculation are replaced by the large-scale conflict and warmongering much more characteristic of, for example, epic or tragedy. By exchanging the inaction of elegy for violent aggression, Atreus rejects elegiac masculinity/emasculation in favour of a more normative, militarised kind of masculinity. Atreus' initial adoption of the elegiac voice and its immediate abandonment seem to be for the purpose of establishing what he is not.[87] However, as will become clear later on in this chapter, the significance of elegy lingers, waiting to be reactivated in a conceptual sense, in spite of its verbal absence from the the rest of the play.

In the remainder of his opening speech, Atreus turns from the inactivity of elegy towards action (180-204):

fremere iam totus tuis 180

debebat armis orbis et geminum mare

[87] This situation is both similar to and different from the *Phaedra*. On the one hand, elegy is presented as insufficient, as somehow lacking, within the genre of tragedy. On the other hand, where the failure of elegy comes about through Phaedra's vain attempts to shoehorn Hippolytus into her elegiac view of the world, Atreus himself recognises the insufficiency of elegy for his purposes; in the *Thyestes*, elegy is not shown to fail by the play itself, but is stated to fail by a character within the play.

utrimque classes agere, iam flammis agros

lucere et urbes **decuit** ac strictum undique

micare ferrum. tota sub nostro **sonet**

Argolica tellus equite; non siluae **tegant** 185

hostem nec altis montium structae iugis

arces; relictis bellicum totus **canat**

populus Mycenis, quisquis invisum caput

tegit ac tuetur, clade funesta **occidat**.

haec ipsa pollens incliti Pelopis domus 190

ruat vel in me, dummodo in fratrem **ruat**.

Age, anime, **fac** quod nulla posteritas probet,

sed nulla taceat. aliquod **audendum** est **nefas**

atrox, cruentum, **tale quod frater meus**

suum esse mallet – scelera non ulcisceris, 195

nisi **vincis**. et quid esse tam saevum potest

quod **superet** illum? numquid abiectus iacet?

numquid secundis patitur in rebus modum,

fessis quietem? novi ego ingenium viri

indocile: flecti non potest – frangi potest. 200

proinde antequam **se firmat** aut vires **parat**,

petatur ultro, ne **quiescentem** petat.

aut perdet aut peribit: in medio est scelus

positum **occupanti**.

(The whole world should already have been groaning with your arms and fleets on each side should have been rousing the twin seas. It was befitting

> that already fields and cities were alit with flames and drawn swords flashed on all sides. May the whole Argive land resound under my horsemen. May neither the woods nor the citadels built up on the high ridges of the mountains cover the enemy. After leaving Mycenae, may the whole population signal war. Whoever hides and protects that hated being, may they die in fatal destruction. May this here powerful house of renowned Pelops fall to ruin, even on me, so long as it falls on my brother. Come now, spirit! Do what no posterity will condone, but none will be silent about. Something wicked must be dared, something dreadful, something bloody, of the kind which my brother might prefer as his own. You do not avenge crimes unless you outdo them. And what can be so savage as to overpower him? Does he lie cast aside? Does he suffer his bounds in favourable circumstances? Does he suffer peace in unfavourable circumstances? I myself have come to know the intransigent nature of the man. He cannot be bent, but he can be broken. So, before he fortifies himself and prepares his strength, let him, instead, be sought, before he seeks me when I am resting. He will either kill or be killed. Between us, there is crime, arranged for the one seizing upon it first.)

Atreus prescribes for himself an aggressive military response. Having characterised himself as and berated himself for being like an elegiac poet, he describes what the appropriate response should have been. The verbs *debebat* and *decuit* are used to highlight the way(s) in which Atreus has failed in his response. The fact that these verbs are in the past tense with the repeated *iam* shows that Atreus is already late to the party – he should have acted long ago. And these actions are not the individualised conflicts of elegy, but large-scale, involving armies, seas and whole populations of people.

Atreus moves from describing what was appropriate (*debebat*/*decuit*), to actively willing action (with the hortative subjunctive e.g. *sonet*, *tegat*, *canat*, *occidat*, *ruat*), and finally ordering himself to action (with the imperative e.g. *age*, *fac*). This shift in orientation towards action – describing inaction, describing appropriate action, willing himself to action, ordering himself to action – represents a rejection of the inactivity of elegy. Within Atreus' opening speech, then, elegy is efficiently invoked and almost as efficiently rejected. Unlike the emasculated elegiac poet, Atreus does not meditate on his emasculation. In fact, the brevity of Atreus' elegiac allusion serves to highlight that he is very much not the elegiac poet-*amator*, who wallows in his inaction.

If Atreus immediately eschews the pose of elegiac poet, what model is taken up as an alternative? This passage hints at not only a rejection of the inactive languishing of elegy, but its antithesis in violent aggression. Within the topsy-turvy world of Senecan drama, which grapples with the (seemingly) cyclic inevitability of world and word simultaneously making and being made by each other, elegy undergoes a transformation not into "not-elegy" but "anti-elegy".[88] By willing himself to action through the imperative *age* addressed to the vocative *anime* (192), Atreus speaks as a tragic protagonist.[89] In this section, it becomes apparent that the action to which Atreus exhorts himself is extreme. The noun *nefas* draws attention to the extreme impropriety

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[88] The referential and reflective aspects of Senecan tragedy are particularly well-articulated by Boyle 2006, 205–18.

[89] Boyle 2017, 177: 'the apostrophe of the soul or mind, animus, as ingredient, even marker, of a soliloquy seems to occur in Roman tragedy as early as Pacuvius' *Periboea*.' Although not exclusive to tragedy, the vocative form of the noun *animus* is most frequently found in Senecan tragedy, particularly at key dramatic moments of internal conflict. Seneca uses the form *anime* in: *Ag.* 108, 192, 228, 868, 915; *Med.* 41, 895, 937, 976, 988; *Oed.* 933, 952, 1042; *Phoen.* 45; *Tro.* 613, 662; *Thy.* 192, 270, 283.

of Atreus' vengeance on Thyestes. The verbs *audeo*, *vinco* and *supero* all encapsulate the same idea of excess, of going too far. Finally, with the noun *scelus* (203), recalling the earlier use of this noun (31, 95), the atmosphere of Senecan tragedy established in the supernatural prologue resumes. The brief elegiac interval of Atreus' first words is clearly over as Atreus immediately rejects the terms of the elegiac poet's emasculation. In allowing his actions to speak louder than his words (at least insofar as this is possible in Senecan tragedy, a medium (in)famous for its rhetoricity), Atreus transcends the bounds of elegy.

There is some further nuance to Atreus' focus on action: that his action will pre-empt Thyestes'. This is shown by Atreus' exhortation to act whilst Thyestes still readies and prepares himself (201: *se firmat aut vires parat*). From Atreus' perspective, if he does not act first, he might be caught unawares, his imagined inaction encoded in the participle *quiescens* (202). By pipping Thyestes to the post, Atreus strives to be the more active of the two. He makes a similar comparison between himself and his brother in the aim to outdo his crimes (196: *vinco* and 197: *supero*). The comparative nature of the action Atreus describes highlights the competitive nature of his relationship with Thyestes, and that the active, masculine stance he takes is concerned with superiority over and domination of Thyestes.

6 Act Two 220-243: Elegy's Failure

At this point in the play, after two prologues (one supernatural and the other in the realm of the human), some themes have been established for the reader. The first prologue, featuring Tantalus and the Fury, brings together

the themes of Tantalid bestiality and Senecan tragedy. In the second prologue, a brief but unsubtle and unmistakeable elegiac interlude provides a starting point for understanding Atreus' sense of emasculation and passivity; after this sentence-long foray into elegy, Atreus takes up the role of tragic protagonist and the atmosphere of the first prologue resumes. As elegiac pose and tragic world come into contact, the incongruities of an elegiac Atreus come to light; the dissimilarities between Atreus' situation and that of the elegist are precisely why elegiac rhetoric fails. Unlike Propertius and Ovid, Atreus' emasculation through his wife's adultery has significant implications for his socio-political standing as monarch; consequently, inactive languishing is not a viable option for a Senecan Atreus.

In discussion with his attendant, Atreus highlights that the infidelity of his wife has weakened the strength of his rulership and he looks towards a tragic model for action (ll. 236-243):

hinc omne cladis mutuae fluxit malum:
per regna trepidus exul erravi mea,
pars nulla nostri tuta ab insidiis vacat,
corrupta coniunx, **imperi** quassa est **fides**,
domus aegra, **dubius sanguis** et certi nihil 240
nisi frater hostis. quid stupes? tandem **incipe**
animosque **sume**: Tantalum et Pelopem **aspice**;
ad haec **manus** exempla poscuntur meae.

(From this place all the evil of shared destruction flowed: I wandered through my realms as a scared exile, no part of my possessions is free from

> plots, my wife has been tainted, faith in my rule shaken, my home ailing, my bloodline doubted and nothing certain except my enemy brother. Why are you surprised? At last, begin and raise your spirits. Look to Tantalus and Pelops; to these examples my hands are demanded.)

The effects of his wife's adultery are ubiquitous; none of his domains is unaffected (l. 238: *nulla pars nostri*). Atreus goes on to specify these *partes nostri* in a grammatically disjointed list, including: *corrupta coniunx*, *fides imperi*, *aegra domus* and *dubius sanguis*. The association of more domestic aspects (*corrupta coniunx* and *aegra domus*) with those more political (*fides imperi*) highlights the impact of his wife's adultery on his socio-political standing. The overlap of the domestic and political is most clearly understood from the reference to *dubius sanguis*; the doubted legitimacy of Atreus' sons calls into question the paternal lineage through which political power would pass, thus weakening Atreus' own claim to power. On the one hand, like the elegiac poet, Atreus' emasculation is symbolised within the very fact of his wife's adultery with another man. On the other hand, a wife's adultery has significantly different impact on Atreus than on the elegiac poet, as it entails the doubted paternity of his children and the weakening of his dynasty. Atreus' concerns with children are bloodlines are very much alien to the world of elegy,[90] highlighting the limitations of the genre of elegy for his situation.

If elegy is rejected as a framework for understanding Atreus' situation, it seems to be replaced with anti-elegiac, tragic ways of behaving.

[90] Notably, children do not feature in elegy, and the only potential offspring of elegiac trysts are aborted (e.g. *Amores* 2.13 and 2.14).

By invoking the names of Tantalus and Pelops, Atreus replaces elegy with tragedy.[91] The Atreid myth is well-trodden ground of Republican tragedy.[92] By naming his predecessors, Atreus combines biographical and literary lineage – a technique highly typical of Senecan tragic characters –[93] and thus he eschews the elegiac pose in favour of the (mis)deeds of tragedy. The inaction of the elegiac poet-*amator* is replaced by action, which is communicated through the imperatives with which Atreus exhorts himself to action (*incipe*, *sume*, *aspice*) and through the noun *manus* which refers to the tools of violent, aggressive action and revenge (as it does in the *Medea*).[94] In other words, the brief but conspicuous employment of elegy serves as a negative model, highlighting what Atreus is not. However, as we shall see later in the chapter, elegy's significance will go beyond negative example, as it combines with a priapic poetic voice to produce a Catullan pose and masculinity.[95]

7 Act Two 244-403: Size Matters, Dehumanisation, Emasculating Thyestes

At this point in the play, literary models of masculinity are joined by another conceptualisation of masculinity, that of quasi-divinity/supra-

[91] In other words, a statement of generic ascent from elegy to tragedy; this brings to mind the similar sentiment of Ovid in *Amores* 3.1 and 3.15. On generic ascent in Ovid, see S. Harrison 2002; Farrell 2004. On ascent from elegy to tragedy in Seneca, see Trinacty 2007.
[92] Ennius and Pacuvius are known to have written plays titled *Thyestes*, and Accius write an *Atreus*, on which see Boyle 2017, lxxiii–lxxvii.
[93] I think particularly of the references of Seneca's Phaedra to her mother, Pasiphaë, and sister, Ariadne (*Phaed*. 113-5, 661-2); on which scholars have discussed how biographical and literary heritage entangle and collide (e.g. Segal 1986, 159; Armstrong 2006, 289–92; Trinacty 2014, 89–90).
[94] Examples of comparative uses at *Med*. 129 (referencing her commitment of past crimes, quoted on p. 220), 809 (addressing her hands, exhorting them to her revenge infanticide), 1009 (on the insufficiency of her vengeance for her hands, quoted on p. 280).
[95] As discussed in §13 of this chapter.

humanity and bestiality/sub-humanity. As we shall see, both models are, in the *Thyestes*, communicated about through the language of magnitude.

The inextricable connection between genre and gendered behaviour has been set up and established by the intertextual references to elegy in Atreus' first sentence of the play. The correlation of gender and genre is strengthened by Atreus' response to emasculation (encoded within elegy): aggressive and violent action which can be a marker of both masculinity and the genre of tragedy. Yet, the correlation of gender and genre also has implications for Atreus' response to emasculation: the particular rhetoric of excess applied to Atreus' future actions demarcates both the extremity of the horror of these actions and the superabundance of Atreus' assertion of masculinity. At the same time as each other, elegiac poet becomes tragic protagonist, and Atreus emasculated asserts his masculinity; both of these are encoded in Atreus' growth in stature, as he claims to exceed the status of human and become supra-human. In his intention to rival the gods, Atreus becomes dehumanised; and the actions which constitute this challenge to the gods are symbolic not of normative masculinity, but of an excessive hypermasculinity.

By similar logic to Atreus' gendered transformation, Thyestes, initially the dominant "alpha male", seems to be made submissive by Atreus. That Thyestes dominates Atreus with his superior masculinity (thus emasculating him) is not necessarily clear from the start of the play, but becomes more evident for a re-reader, who would have the capacity to realise the potential of an ultimately Catullan framework. A re-reader might especially notice that, where Atreus is dehumanised as a quasi-deity, Thyestes

is dehumanised as bestial or animalistic. Hints of this are evident in Atreus' address to his attendant (244):

> profare, dirum qua caput mactem via.
>
> (Tell me, by what course I can make an offering of a wicked being.)

Atreus avoids referring to Thyestes by name, instead only using the descriptor *dirum caput*. Moreover, the verb *macto* is highly suggestive in this context; used most specifically of sacrificial killing, *macto* places Thyestes in the position of sacrificial victim, the animal offering in a religious rite.[96]

In contrast to the bestial status he ascribes to Thyestes, Atreus represents himself as godlike. In the text quoted below (260-86), Atreus and his attendant discuss the exact form his vengeance on Thyestes will take. Initially uncertain, Atreus is clear that his vengeance will be bigger and worse than any before. He then goes on to find similarity and inspiration in the actions of Philomela and Procne, thus becoming resolved on having Thyestes – like Tereus – cannibalise his offspring – two sons, unlike Tereus' one.

> AT. fateor, tumultus pectora attonitus quatit 260
>
> penitusque volvit; rapior et quo nescio,
>
> sed rapior. – imo mugit e fundo solum,
>
> tonat dies serenus ac totis domus
>
> ut fracta tectis crepuit et moti Lares
>
> vertere vultum. **fiat hoc, fiat nefas** 265

[96] As Boyle 2017, 198 notes, this verb also anticipates the styling of Atreus' killing of Thyestes' sons as a sacrifice.

quod, di, timetis!

SAT. facere quid tandem paras?

AT. nescioquid animo **maius** et solito **amplius**

supraque fines moris humani tumet

instatque pigris manibus. haud quid sit scio,

sed **grande** quiddam est! ita sit. hoc, anime, occupa. 270

dignum est **Thyeste** facinus et **dignum Atreo**:

quod uterque faciat. vidit infandas **domus**

Odrysia mensas – fateor, **immane** est scelus,

sed occupatum: **maius** hoc aliquid dolor

inveniat. animum Daulis inspira parens 275

sororque; causa est similis: assiste et manum

impelle nostrum. liberos **avidus** pater

gaudensque laceret et **suos artus edat**.

bene est, abunde est: hic placet poenae modus

tantisper. ubinam est? tam diu cur innocens 280

servatur Atreus? tota iam ante oculos meos

imago caedis errat, **ingesta** orbitas

in ora patris – anime, quid rursus times

et ante rem subsidis? **audendum** est, age:

quod est in isto scelere praecipium nefas, 285

hoc ipse faciet.

SAT. sed quibus **captus** dolis

nostros dabit perductus in **laqueos** pedem?

> (AT. I confess, a frantic fury shakes my heart and turns deep within me. I am seized – I don't know to where – but I am seized. The ground groans from its deepest depths, the clear day thunders, the house, as though broken, creaks in all its roofs, and the disturbed household gods look away. Let this, let this atrocity happen which you, gods, fear.
>
> SAT. Now, what do you prepare to do?
>
> AT. In my mind something bigger, larger than usual and beyond the bounds of human custom swells and urges on my lazy hands. I do not know what it is, but it is something great. Let it be so. Take hold of this, my spirit – this deed is worthy of Thyestes and worthy of Atreus. Let both do it. The Odrysian house saw unspeakable tables. I confess, that crime is huge, but taken. Let this grief of mine find something bigger. Daulian parent and sister, inspire my mind. Our motivation is similar. Stand by and drive on my hands. May the father, greedy and rejoicing, tear up his children and may he eat his own flesh. It is well, it is bountiful. This method of punishment pleases me for now. But where is he? Why has Atreus been kept innocent for so long? The complete picture of slaughter now wanders before my eyes, childlessness forced into the throat of the father. My spirit, why are you afraid again, why abate before the deed? It must be dared – do it! He himself will commit the worst wrongdoing in this crime.
>
> SAT. But captured by what tricks will he, led astray, set foot in our traps?)

Atreus describes his deeds in language programmatic of tragedy, indicating his "generic ascent" from elegy to tragedy.[97] He uses the adjectives of magnitude, which are often used of the "heavier" genre of tragedy: *magnus*

[97] As mentioned above, in section 5 of this chapter, Atreus rejects elegy. We will see in Chapter Three how this language of magnitude is also used of Medea, who reflects on her greater age and more serious crimes (pp. 211-4, 263-4).

(267, 274) and *amplus* (267) in their comparative sense, and *grandis* (270) and *immanis* (273) in their absolute sense.[98] The genre of tragedy is also signalled by Atreus' self-conscious naming of himself and Thyestes. In a metaliterary sense, Seneca's Atreus references earlier tragedies known by the titles *Atreus* and *Thyestes*.[99] Metaliterary references to earlier tragedies are also made with the myth of Tereus, Procne and Philomela. By recalling this myth, Atreus conceives of this story as a model for his own deeds. The biographical level on which this story functions is emphasised by Atreus' sympathy with Philomela and Procne (276: *causa est similis*). In addition, this myth was well-known tragic material due to tragedies by Sophocles, Livius Andronicus and Accius.[100] The dual levels on which this mythological reference works are mutually reinforcing.

Atreus' tragic deeds are not only large, but excessive; they go too far. Echoing his earlier statement *aliquod audendum est nefas* (193 discussed above), Atreus again describes his vengeance as *nefas* (265, 285) and something *audendum* (284). As above, this description highlights that Atreus' actions will go too far. There is also a new term brought in to describe Atreus' overmuchness: the transgression of human bounds. He claims his *nefas* will scare even the gods (264-5). Directly following descriptions of the world falling apart – the ground shaking, the sky thundering, the household gods abandoning mankind – Atreus' stated aim to strike fear in the gods goes beyond what is normal and expected. Atreus' provocation of the gods is

[98] Adjectives of magnitude are used of the tragic genre in contrast to elegy in Ovid's *Am.* 3.1: *grandis* at l. 70; *gravis* at 35-6; *magnus* at ll. 24, 64. We will also see this same ascent from "lesser" genres and deeds to "greater" genres and deeds in Chapter Three on Seneca's *Medea*, as Medea takes a similar journey to Atreus (pp. 1211-4).
[99] See above p. 60 n. 94.
[100] Boyle 2017, 127–28.

coincident with – or perhaps even causes – the cosmic apocalypse he describes.[101] Atreus continues with an ascending tricolon of modifiers: *maius*, *amplius*, *supra fines moris humani*. Expanding beyond human bounds, Atreus' actions are superhuman. His hubristic arrogance is also encoded in the verb *tumeo*, whose literal meaning of "to swell" is linked with figurative excess and anger.[102]

Like Atreus, Thyestes is also dehumanised; however, their dehumanisation occurs in opposite directions, with Atreus becoming godlike, at least in his own eyes, (i.e. more than human) and Thyestes becoming bestial (i.e. less than human). Thyestes' bestialisation picks up the thread left by the earlier imagery of him as a sacrificial victim. The description of Thyestes eating his own children is particularly animalistic. The adjective *avidus* works at the intersection of animalistic hunger and human greed for power (as discussed in the introduction to this chapter), recalling the description of Tantalus' *avidum os* at the play's opening (2). The verb *lacero*, in the same sentence, also has animalistic connotations, in the physical violence it implies. The reflexive possessive pronoun *suus* in the clause *suos artus edat* adds to the horror of Thyestes' cannibalism: Thyestes eats not only another human, but his own children. Finally, in this section, Thyestes is bestialised by Atreus' attendant, who characterises him as a hunted animal by imagining

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[101] The cosmic is a focal point for discussions of Seneca's tragedies: e.g. Rosenmeyer 1989; Calder 1983. This is especially because of the cosmic effects of Senecan tragedy's action Mader 2000.

[102] *OLD* 1987 s.v. "*tumeo*" 3a 'to be inflamed with passion or unrest', 4a 'to be swollen with conceit, presumption, or sim., to be puffed up'. Literal and figurative swelling are linked in descriptions of the emotion of anger. As noted by Boyle 2017, 208, Seneca's *De Ira* 1.1.4 describes the physical features of an angered person with the closely related verb *intumesco*: *facies depravantium se atque* ***intumescentium*** (face of someone distorting themselves and swelling). In addition, see *De Ira* 3.27.5: *qualis* (sc. *vita*) *etiam erit semper* ***tumentis****?* (What kind of life will there be for a person always swelling [in anger]?)

him caught in snares (*laqueos*). This image, of Thyestes as a hunted animal, anticipates later extended similes.

The power dynamic between Atreus and Thyestes is becoming reversed. In Atreus' opening sentence, he was emasculated and disempowered by Thyestes' adultery with his wife – potentially implying Thyestes' superior masculinity. In this imagined situation, his vengeance on Thyestes, Atreus plans to assert his masculinity – an assertion figured as superhuman and godlike (at least to his own satisfaction). That Thyestes is the party with lesser power is encoded within the bestial imagery applied to him. In parallel to Atreus' (hyper)masculinity understood through his super/supra-human status, the play begins to establish an identification of Thyestes' bestialisation (i.e. sub-humanisation) and emasculation; the brothers occupy what seem like opposing ends of a spectrum.

Atreus' direction of travel from emasculated elegiac poet to super/supra-human manipulator of Thyestes is, then, a transformation from emasculation to masculinity asserted. However, Atreus' masculinity is not normative, but excessive. Since generic growth from elegy to tragedy has become confused and correlated with masculine activity, the unthinkable deeds which constitute the action of a Senecan tragic protagonist are those very same deeds which constitute Atreus' masculinity. Therefore, the extremity of tragic deeds entails the extremity of masculine deeds to such an extent that Atreus' masculinity is in superabundance, i.e. hypermasculinity. In parallel with Atreus' hypermasculinisation / dominant position is Thyestes' emasculation / effeminisation / subordinate position, encoded in bestial imagery (i.e. sub-human). As we shall see, bestial imagery (bringing with it

these gendered associations) will continue to be employed in the following act, with the generic concerns of elegy moving to the back burner.

The remainder of act two sees Atreus and his attendant finalise the plan, to use Atreus' children as a go-between in order to prove their fidelity to him (and thereby prove their parentage). In the choral ode which acts as transition between acts two and three, the chorus sing of the difficulties and dangers of kingship, and their own preference to stay out of the limelight.

8 Act Three 404-507: Bestial Simile #1

Act three sees the entrance of Thyestes. Summoned by Atreus, he hesitatingly makes his way to Mycenae along with his son, Tantalus (404-489). Thyestes is doubtful of the sincerity of Atreus' invitation of joint rulership, but goes along anyway at the encouragement of his son.

As Thyestes approaches, Atreus narrates with an extended bestial simile (491-503):

> Plagis tenetur clausa dispositis fera:
> et ipsum et una generis inuisi indolem
> iunctam parenti cerno. Iam tuto in loco
> versantur odia. Venit in nostras manus
> tandem Thyestes, venit, et totus quidem. 495
> Vix tempero animo, vix dolor frenos capit.
> sic, cum feras vestigat et longo sagax
> loro tenetur Umber ac presso vias
> scrutatur ore, dum procul lento suem

odore sentit, paret et tacito locum 500
rostro pererrat; praeda cum propior fuit,
cervice tota pugnat et gemitu vocat
dominum morantem seque retinenti eripit.

(The beast is held, enclosed in the nets which were set. I perceive both it and, with it, the stock of that hated race, joined with their father. Now my enmity is on safe ground. At last Thyestes has come into my grasp, he has come outright. Scarcely am I controlled in my spirit, scarcely does torment submit to the bridle. In this way, when a keen-nosed Umbrian hunting dog is tracking beasts and held by a long leash and searching out paths with a lowered head, while it senses from afar a boar by its persistent scent, it obeys and wanders the area with a noiseless snout; but when its prey is closer, it pulls with its whole neck, complains to its delaying master and escapes its restraints.)

In this extended simile, Atreus compares himself to a hunting dog, and Thyestes to his prey. From the space dedicated to the description of the hunting dog, it is clear that Atreus' focus is no longer on bestialising Thyestes (as in the previous act), but now on bestialising himself. Areus' self-characterisation as bestial (i.e. sub-human) is at odds with his self-elevation to quasi-divine (i.e. supra-human) status – a shift in imagery which challenges coherence and comprehension.

Atreus' bestialisation centres particularly on the uncontrolled frenzy of Atreus/dog as Thyestes/prey gets nearer. Not only is Atreus similar to the hunting dog in simile, but there is also, here, a closer level of identification, as Atreus' passions threaten to escape their bridle (496: *frenos*). Atreus' *dolor*

is figuratively becoming uncontrolled and unbridled,[103] but, through the following simile, the literal animalism of Atreus intrudes. Atreus is not just similar to a hunting dog pulling on its leash; he is, in many ways, identical to the hunting dog.

The significance of this section is that Atreus bestialises himself. This is at odds with his earlier self-characterisation as godlike. Unlike the elegiac hunting *topos* which features a human elegiac hunter, Atreus is an animalistic hunting dog. The highly refined and cultivated atmosphere of elegiac poetry is completely absent in this feral landscape. In terms of their relative positions of power, Atreus as hunting dog is still separated from Thyestes, in being dominant over and superior to him as prey. However, Atreus and Thyestes, it is hinted here, are more similar than seemed earlier. Like Thyestes, Atreus is dehumanised by being compared to an animal; both are now conceived of as less than human. The model of binary masculinity and emasculation seems to be breaking down; this breakdown becomes fully realised in the messenger speech of Act Four.

9 Act Three 508-622 Brothers Reunited

Extremities are put on hold as the brothers are reunited. As the trap Atreus sets for Thyestes is the pretence of shared rulership, Atreus feigns fraternal affection. It is this section which features the only occurrence of the word *virtus* in the play, unlike other Senecan tragedies which feature the word *virtus* much more often.[104] Similar to the flash of elegy in Atreus' opening

[103] cf. Sen. *Med.* 591-2: *ira / nec ... patiturue frenos.* (Anger does not submit to the bridle.)
[104] There are more mentions of *virtus* in plays focused on women: three in the *Medea*, two in the *Phaedra*. A play very much concerned with *virtus* and its definition is the *Hercules*

words, which foregrounds the absence of the elegiac voice from the rest of the play, this momentary mention of *virtus* draws attention to its absence elsewhere. Moreover, the employment of *virtus* – a morally upstanding kind of masculinity –[105] as a tool for deception, as empty rhetoric, points to the fact that Atreus is only pretending to be ethically good; at no point in this play does Atreus truthfully exhibit *virtus*.

Atreus tells Thyestes that *virtus* is his motive for recalling him to Mycenae (529):

> habere regnum casus est, virtus dare.
>
> (To have a kingdom is luck, to bestow one is *virtus*.)

An absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence. However, the presence of *virtus* as only a ploy, in a situation where Atreus is explicit about his deception of Thyestes, exposes the verbal absence of *virtus* in the rest of the play – a verbal absence which points towards the absence of the quality of *virtus* in either of the play's protagonists.[106] That Atreus is aware that his employment of *virtus* is insincere, a pretence, shows his awareness that he is not, in this play, demonstrating *virtus*. Atreus does not attempt to defend his actions as *virtus*, as ethically good. This is a play lacking in ethically positive figures.

Furens, which features seventeen instances of *virtus*. By comparison, the almost absence of *virtus* from the *Thyestes* is striking.

[105] The absence of *virtus* from the *Thyestes*, a play which explores gender and masculinity, is especially striking in light of the prominence of *virtus* elsewhere in this thesis. Chapter Two on the *Epistulae Morales* features *virtus* as a masculine ethical ideal. Chapter our on the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, likewise, features the ideal of *virtus*, and discusses the challenge faced in these texts of applying *virtus* to women.

[106] Like elegy earlier in the play, the fleeting presence of *virtus* leaves behind a gaping, pointed absence.

Act three concludes with a choral ode, in which the chorus express their disbelief at Atreus' generous gesture. It seems too good to be true. And, indeed, it is. The interlude of Atreus' deception is over, as act four opens with a messenger's report of events within the palace, featuring a striking combination of supra- and sub-human characterisation.

10 Act Four 623-788: Messenger Speeches, Bestial Similes #2 & #3

Act four consists of a messenger's report of Atreus' murder of Thyestes' sons. This report picks up the earlier figuring of this event as a sacrifice and Atreus as a predatory animal. Where, previously, the metaphor of sacrifice served to bestialise Thyestes, here the murder-sacrifice of Thyestes' sons seems to blur the lines around Atreus' status: in distorting sacrificial rites, Atreus seems to exercise godlike power, but perversion of rites is hardly divine. That extended bestial similes follow closely after the imagery of sacrifice throws further doubt onto Atreus' status: Atreus seems to be simultaneously beast and divinity. The questioning of Atreus' status, and so the questioning of a binary model of masculinity/emasculation, is pushed to the forefront in the messenger speech which presents Atreus as both superhuman and beast at the same time.

Atreus' murder of his nephews is described as a sacrifice, but a sacrifice perverted (685-706):

> NUN. post terga iuvenum nobiles revocat manus 685
> et maesta vitta capita purpurea ligat.
> non tura desunt, non sacer Bacchi liquor

tangensve salsa victima culter mola.

servatur omnis ordo, **ne tantum nefas**

non rite fiat.

CHO. Quis manum ferro admovet? 690

NUN. **Ipse est sacerdos**, ipse funesta prece

letale carmen ore violento canit.

stat ipse ad aras, ipse devotos neci

contrectat et componit et ferro †admovet;

attendit ipse: nulla pars sacri perit. 695

Lucus tremescit, tota succusso solo

nutavit aula, dubia quo pondus daret

ac fluctuanti similis; e laevo aethere

atrum cucurrit **limitem sidus trahens**.

libata in ignes vina mutato fluunt 700

cruenta Baccho, regium capiti decus

bis terque lapsum est, **flevit in templis ebur**.

Movere cunctos monstra, sed solus sibi

immotus Atreus constat, atque **ultro deos**

terret minantes. iamque dimissa mora 705

adsistit aris, torvum et obliquum intuens.

(MESSENGER. After their backs he calls back the noble hands of the young men and ties their mournful heads with purple fillets. The salts are not lacking, nor the sacred liquid of Bacchus, nor the cake touching on the victims. All order is preserved, lest such great nefas occur incorrectly.

CHORUS. Who moves a hand to the sword?

> MESSENGER. He himself is the priest, he himself sings the song with the lethal death prayer from his violent mouth. He himself stands at the altars, he himself touches those devoted to death and places them and administers the sword. He himself attends. No part of the ritual is lost. Light trembles, the whole palace sways on the shaken ground, uncertain to where its weight gives and similar to something hesitating. A star rushes from the left of the sky, drawing out a black path. The wine, poured into the fire, changed from wine, flows as blood. The ornament falls from the head of the king twice, then thrice. The ivory in the temples weeps. Monstrous things move everyone, but Atreus alone remains unmoved by himself, and even terrifies the looming gods. And now, with delay set aside, he stops at the altar, watching keenly and from the side.)

The "ritual" has all the elements of a proper sacrifice, except the victims are people. The messenger lays it on thick that the sacrifice is being done according to religious custom, with the double negative *ne ... non rite*. The deep incongruity of the *nefas* being done properly highlights the extent to which Atreus is defying human boundaries; he is not only doing *nefas*, but he is also perverting the customs which go along with proper religious ritual. Moreover, the replacement of sacrificial beasts with sacrificial humans further contributes to the destabilisation and destruction of the boundaries between humans and beasts.

The messenger goes on to describe the perverted cosmic effects of Atreus' perversion of religious ritual. An earthquake shakes the palace; a star leaves a black trail; wine turns to blood; statues weep. These impossible events are implied to occur in response to Atreus' terrible actions. These

cosmic effects do not stop at the stars, but reach even the gods (704-5: *ultro deos / terret minantes*). The phrase *deos terret*, which also appears at the start of the *Hercules Furens*, in Juno's description of Jupiter's mistresses and offspring who have disturbed (in her view) divine order,[107] highlights Atreus' attempts to transcend human boundaries, to reach godlike status. In threatening the position of the gods, Atreus is like the Giants, who attempt to usurp the authority of the Olympians. The adverb *ultro* emphasises the extent, the degree of Atreus' reach. Having initially usurped the role of priest in performing the religious ritual (690), Atreus is now threatening the gods. In exerting authority over religious ritual, in perverting nature, in affecting the cosmos and the gods, Atreus seems to be supplanting the gods. This is suggestive of his superhuman, godlike status.

Yet, Atreus' quasi-divine status is followed immediately by the messenger with a description of Atreus in two bestial similes. The bestial imagery comes to a striking climax, as Atreus is described in two further extended similes as a tiger and a lion (707-13; 732-37):

> ieiuna silvis qualis in Gangeticis
> inter iuvencos tigris erravit duos,
> utriusque praedae cupida quo primum ferat
> incerta morsus (flectit hoc rictus suos, 710
> illo reflectit et famem dubiam tenet),
> sic dirus Atreus capita devota impiae
> speculatur irae.

[107] *Hercules Furens* 12: it is used of Orion.

> (Just as a hungry tigress in the woods of the Ganges vacillates between two calves, desiring each spoil but uncertain from which it should take a bite first – it turns its jaws on this one, turns back to the other, and holds onto doubting hunger – in this way, terrible Atreus watches the two beings vowed to his impious anger.)

> Silva iubatus qualis Armenia leo
> in caede multa uictor armento incubat
> (cruore rictus madidus et pulsa fame 735
> non ponit iras: hinc et hinc tauros premens
> vitulis minatur dente iam lasso inpiger),
> non aliter Atreus saevit atque ira tumet, …
>
> (Just as, in an Armenian wood, a maned lion, the victor in a great slaughter, sets upon a herd – although its jaws are bloodsoaked and its hunger overcome, it does not put aside its anger, but, pursuing bulls here and there, it threatens calves, now tireless with tired teeth – no differently does Atreus rage and swell with anger…)

The animalistic metaphors develop across the play, showing the progress of the hunting animal. We begin with the image of a hunting dog tracking prey with its master, then move on to the hungry tigress hesitating between two cows, and finally we get the lion still pursuing prey despite being sated. These metaphors closely follow Atreus' own predatory arc, from pursuing Thyestes, to killing two of Thyestes' three sons, and finally, insatiably, killing the final son.

This messenger speech also provides an instance of bestial foreshadowing, which has impact on the first-time reader (presumably familiar with this myth) and even greater impact on the repeat reader. The messenger laments Atreus' preparation of his nephew's bodies for Thyestes' feast, by stating that he would prefer them to be left for wild animals (750-1):

avibus epulandos licet 750

ferisque triste pabulum **saevis** trahat.

(May he drag them out, as wretched nourishment, for feasting by birds and by savage beasts.)

The irony of the messenger's lament is the fact that worse than *saevi feri* are the brothers themselves. The adjective *saevus*, used here of beasts, is used of Atreus and his crime just lines earlier in this same act.[108] And at the climactic point of recognition, as Thyestes enquires about the whereabouts of his sons' bodies, he will express a similar idea in remarkably similar language (1032-3):

utrumne **saevis** pabulum alitibus iacent

an beluis servantur an pascunt **feras**?

(Do they lie as nourishment for savage birds or are they saved for beasts or do they feed beasts?)

[108] The messenger describes the murders as a *saevum scelus* (l. 715), then describes Atreus as *saevus* (l. 726). He also applies the related verb *saevio* to Atreus (l. 737).

Thyestes here accidentally conflated himself with wild birds and beasts. The way in which Atreus and Thyestes both share descriptions with beasts reveals that it is they who are truly bestial.

However, since Atreus is characterised as superhuman and as bestial in quick succession here, we see a further breakdown of the correlation of the masculinised/emasculated and superhuman/bestial binaries. The superhuman/bestial binary, which was initially destabilised by Atreus' self-bestialising simile, is here fully breaking down. Atreus seems to be simultaneously superhuman and beast – and in both senses not human at all. Bestialisation does not emasculate him (as it does Thyestes), but highlights his savagery and, like his superhumanity, his excess of masculinity. For Atreus, hypermasculinity does not entail the excess of effeminacy (as it can and does elsewhere), but he remains firmly masculine. How do we square this?

As the images used of Atreus develop and collide, pushing towards incongruity, the images used of Thyestes are reinforced. The messenger's description of Thyestes eating his children draws on both bestial and banqueting imagery, to emphasise the effeminising nature of this act (778-82):

> **lancinat** natos **pater**
>
> **artus**que mandit ore funesto **suos**.
>
> nitet fluente madidus **unguento** comam
>
> **gravis**que **vino** est; saepe praeclusae cibum
>
> tenuere fauces.

> (The father rends his children and chews his own flesh with terrible mouth.
> His hair drenched with dripping perfume, he shines and is heavy with wine.
> Often his closed off throat holds the food.)

The first sentence of this description recalls verbally and aurally that of Atreus at 277-78 (*liberos avidus pater / gaudensque laceret et suos artus edat*). These sentences have the same subject, Thyestes, referred to by the same noun *pater*. Both sentences also have as direct object *suos artus*. In both instances, the reference to Thyestes as *pater* along with the reflexive possessive pronoun *suus* draws attention to the familial relationship between Thyestes and his meal (i.e. his own children). The verb *lacero* from earlier in the play is aurally echoed by *lancino* in this section, with both verbs being related to the adjective *lacer* (meaning "mutilated", "mangled", "lacerated").[109] That the messenger's description of Thyestes recalls Atreus' earlier description speaks to the reinforcement of Thyestes' earlier characterisation; Thyestes is, again, dehumanised and bestialised.

The bestial imagery of the earlier description is developed further with the image of the banqueter – a figure effeminised and sexualised in the Roman imagination.[110] Thyestes' cannibalism of his own children slips from being the act of the wild beast to the act of the indulgent banqueter – a common figure in satire.[111] Thyestes is dripping in perfume and wine (*unguetum* and *vinum*), features associated with the banqueter, and so also associated with

[109] *OLD* 993 s.v. "*lacer*" 1a.
[110] 'Five areas of activity commonly surface in association with the immoderate feast: excessive eating, drunkenness, the telling of jokes, dancing and singing (including poetry recitation), and various forms of sexual intercourse.' (Corbeill 1997, 104.)
[111] Boyle 2017, 360: 'the portrait is more redolent of satire than tragedy.'

excess and effeminacy.[112] And so, simultaneous to bestialisation, Thyestes undergoes effeminisation, as an excessive and uncontrolled consumer.

11 Act Four 789-884: The "Star Ode"

An interlude between the messenger's description of the banquet and the revelation of the banquet on stage, the chorus describe the cosmic disarray which accompanies Thyestes' cannibalism in, what Boyle has termed, the "Star Ode". As the Sun turns back in the sky and the stars leave their proper places, the chorus also envision the Underworld opening up to release the Giants (805-6). As such, this choral ode brings to the fore the figures of the Giants, who have been implicitly referenced in Atreus' claims to challenge the gods (267-9, 704-4). Whilst the disorder of the sky reflects the moral disorder of Atreus' murder of his nephews and Thyestes' cannibalism of his sons, the Giants are symbolic of the threat to divine hierarchy presented by Atreus. Just as the Giants threatened to overthrow the Olympian gods, Atreus has challenged divinity through his excessive and impious deeds. Particular reference has earlier been made to the fear Atreus has engendered in the gods (266, 704-5). Atreus' rivalry with the gods / Gigantic status is picked up in the final act of the play.

12 Act Five 885-901: Atreus' (Ful)fillment

The messenger's report of Thyestes' consumption of his own children gives way to the representation of this act upon the stage. Overlooking the

[112] On the connections between wine, perfume, excess, effeminacy, and banqueting, see Corbeill 1997, 118–20. On perfume as a sign of men's effeminacy, see Olson 2017, 139–40. See also Wyke 1994, 140–41; Edwards 1993, 68.

product of his plots, Atreus declares himself to have reached superhuman status (885-91):

> **Aequalis astris** gradior et cunctos super 885
> altum superbo **vertice** attingens polum.
> nunc decora regni teneo, nunc solium patris.
> **dimitto superos**: summa votorum attigi.
> bene est, abunde est, iam sat est etiam mihi.
> sed cur satis sit? **pergam et implebo patrem** 890
> funere suorum.
>
> (I step out, equal to the stars and above all, touching the lofty sky with my distinguished head. Now I hold the ornaments of the realm, now the throne of my father. I send away the gods. I have reached the height of my prayers. It is well, it is full, now it is enough even for me – but why should it be enough? I will carry on and I will fill the father with the death of his own.)

He describes himself on an equal level to the stars, as high as the sky, towering over all;[113] in doing so, he supplants the gods themselves (*dimitto superos*). Atreus has, therefore, succeeded in his aim of committing an act to terrify the gods (266: *quod, di, timetis*).[114]

But, for Atreus, rivalling the gods is not enough and he must continue his growth and rise, particularly by encroaching on his brother. The language

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[113] The image of Atreus touching the stars recalls, amongst others, Horace, *Odes* 1.1.35-6: *quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres, / sublimi feriam sidera* ***vertice*** (But if you insert me amongst the lyric poets, I will strike the stars with my lofty head). In following in the footsteps of Horace, Atreus also reaches a climax of creation – albeit the creation of revenge, rather than poetry. For further, see Boyle 2017, 392.

[114] Boyle 2017, 392: this is a realisation of the chorus' earlier Gigantomachic fears (805-12).

of magnitude, earlier used simultaneously of Atreus' actions, character and literary rhetoric (267-86), is picked up again here. Atreus' references to magnitude and growth highlight his insatiability.[115] Unable to get his fill, he states his intention to fill Thyestes (*implebo patrem / funere suorum*). Although grammatically straightforward, it is not entirely clear what Atreus means by this: what does it mean to "fill" Thyestes? Consideration of this question is important to understanding this final act of the play because this is a sentiment Atreus goes on to repeat around 100 lines later (980: *implebo patrem*).

A potential interpretation is the metaphorical filling of Thyestes' mind with the death of his sons, Thyestes' confrontation with this fact.[116] Seneca uses the verb *impleo* in this sense in his *Epistulae Morales*, in reference to the sententious teaching he often offers to Lucilius at the end of a letter: *aurea te stipe implebo* (*Ep.* 14.17: I will fill you with a golden fee). In a less abstract, more concrete sense, the verb *impleo* can be used of filling with food, particularly appropriate within this context as Thyestes will eat his sons.[117]

We can, however, go further with this verb, by looking into its sexual sense, which, although seeming at first glance unlikely in the context of the *Thyestes*, becomes more plausible through looking at intertextual references. Not only used of filling with food, *impleo* is also employed as technical vocabulary for the breeding of animals. Its usage in this sense is particularly evident in the writings of Columella and Pliny the Younger, where this verb

[115] Atreus, like Depeche Mode, just can't get enough.
[116] *OLD* 847 s.v. "*impleo*" 5b 'to provide in full measure (with news, fame, topics of conversation, etc.)'.
[117] See examples in *OLD* 847 s.v. "*impleoI"* 3a.

is used of animals mating and conceiving young.[118] Adams, on sexual vocabulary appropriate to animals, notes that '*impleo* was applied particularly to insemination by the male animal'.[119] Beyond technical writings, *impleo* is used in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to refer to intercourse and conception, often in unusual circumstances. For example, this verb is used of Jupiter's rape of Danaë, in which he takes the form of a golden shower, his rape of Antiope, in which he takes the form of a satyr.[120] The verb is also used in the *Metamorphoses* of human conception, of Iole and Hyllus, and of Thetis and Peleus.[121]

The extension of this sexual sense of *impleo* to the *Thyestes*, which might seem somewhat farfetched, is encouraged by its use in book one of the *Ars Amatoria*, in Ovid's catalogue of *furiosae* – women whose lust had inhuman, monstrous consequences.[122] In quick succession, Ovid gives Pasiphaë and Aerope as examples of such *furiosae* (*Ars Am.* 1.325-30):

Hanc tamen implevit, vacca deceptus acerna, 325
Dux gregis, et partu proditus auctor erat.
Cressa Thyesteo si se abstinuisset amore
(Et quantum est uno posse carere viro?),
Non medium rupisset iter, curruque retorto
Auroram versis Phoebus adisset equis. 330

[118] Columella 6.27.9, 7.6.3, 10.199; Pliny, *Naturalia Historia* 8.172, 8.1999, 9.107.
[119] Adams 1982, 207.
[120] *Met*. 4.698 (Danaë), 6.111 (Antiope).
[121] *Met* 9.280 (Iole and Hyllus), 11.265 (Thetis and Peleus).
[122] Fuller discussion of this passage can be found in Fabre-Serris 2016.

> (Nevertheless he, the leader of the herd, filled her [Pasiphaë], deceived by the maple cow, and the progenitor was betrayed by the offspring. If the Cretan woman [Aerope] had held off from Thyestean love – and how great a feat it is, to be able to lack even one man – the middle of the journey would not have broken and Phoebus, after redirecting his chariot, would not have gone towards dawn on his turned horses.)

The verb *impleo* is used of the bull, the object of Pasiphaë's lust, who impregnates her with the Minotaur. Again, *impleo* refers to sexual intercourse with emphasis on conception. This example also capitalises on the technical use of *impleo* of animal breeding; in applying the technical language of animal breeding to the inter-species union of Pasiphaë and the bull, Ovid emphasises the bestial aspect of Pasiphaë's transgressive lust.

The example which directly follows Pasiphaë is Aerope's adulterous lust for Thyestes (her husband's brother), which, Ovid claims, causes the sun to turn back in the sky. However, the monstrous act which results in the unnatural abandonment of the sky by the sun was not the adultery of Aerope and Thyestes, but Atreus' vengeance upon Thyestes for his adultery – namely the unwitting cannibalism of his own children. It is clear that Ovid, here, is manipulating mythology in order to suit his own purposes. Seneca, in turn, seems to be "correcting" Ovid's manipulation of mythological material, pointing out that the monstrous act is not the adultery of Aerope and Thyestes, but Thyestes' resulting cannibalism of his own children.[123] In this way, Seneca makes the spectre of Pasiphaë intrude on the character of Thyestes,

[123] Trinacty notes some Senecan "corrections" which work in similar ways: Trinacty 2014, 22–23, 75, 179–80.

transferring the idea of sexual filling, with a resulting monstrous pregnancy, from Pasiphaë to Thyestes.[124]

In summary, the verb *impleo* has a multiplicity of meanings with which Seneca plays in applying it to Atreus and Thyestes. Firstly, Atreus metaphorically fills Thyestes with the death of his sons by forcing him to confront their deaths. Secondly, Atreus also fills Thyestes by making him unwittingly ingest his sons. Finally, in a rather twisted sense, Atreus fills Thyestes in a sexual sense, resulting in his "pregnancy", the "conception" of his sons as they enter his insides. The close proximity of the myth of Thyestes to the verb *impleo* in the *Ars Amatoria* is just one reason why the sexual sense of the verb *impleo* cannot be overlooked. For any readers especially sceptical of *impleo* having a sexual sense, I point ahead to Thyestes' repeated references (999, 1041; discussed below on pp. 95-7) to disturbances in his *viscera*, a word which can refer to the womb (in addition to its more general meaning of "innards" or "organs").[125] As observed by Littlewood, this sense of *viscera* creates the image of a pregnant Thyestes, through the confusion of stomach and womb, food and foetus;[126] my discussion of the sexual sense of *impleo* builds on Littlewood's analysis of the ambiguity of *viscera*. With the verb *implebo*, Atreus states his intention to "fill" Thyestes, both stuffing him with food and impregnating him.

Atreus' priapic intent also has retrospective significance. A re-reader of the play, aware of Atreus' priapic and sexual conceptualisation of Thyestes' forced cannibalism, may find hints of this earlier in the play. First

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[124] The similar use of bestiality to connote monstrosity in Senecan tragedy is discussed by Paschalis 1994.
[125] *OLD* 2076-7 s.v. "*viscus*[1]" 1b, 3b.
[126] Littlewood 2008, 251–52.

and foremost, Thyestes, in his sustained characterisation as a greedy banqueter, is effeminised and sexualised;[127] the banqueter is often a sexualised figure, associated with uncontrollable sexual appetite.[128] Atreus' later statement of penetration shines a different shade of light on Thyestes' earlier characterisations as a satiric banqueter – and vice versa. In other words, Thyestes' roles as submissive, penetrated sexual partner and as effeminate, uncontrollable banqueter work together to form a whole greater than the sum of their parts. A re-reader can see how Thyestes' characterisation as a stereotypical banqueter – greedily consuming food and wine, and bathed in luxurious perfume – will develop into an even larger and fuller image of effeminisation, as Thyestes is sexually dominated by his brother, forced to orally take in his own children.

It is in descriptions of this forced cannibalism earlier in the play that a re-reader might find additional priapic hints. For example, in Atreus' discussion with his attendant in Act Two, in which he details the vengeance he will take on Thyestes, he describes Thyestes as *gaudens* as he rends his own children (277-8). This verb is, in sexual contexts, used of the experience of sexual pleasure, and often that of women.[129] Later in this same speech, Atreus describes Thyestes' confrontation with bereavement through the

[127] 277-8: *liberos* ***avidus*** *pater /* ***gaudens****que laceret et suos artus edat.* (previously quoted and translated on pp. 63-4)
778-81: *lancinat natos pater / artusque mandit ore funesto suos./ nitet fluente madidus* ***unguento*** *comam / gravisque* ***vino*** *est.* (previously quoted and translated on pp. 78-9)

[128] 'Five areas of activity commonly surface in association with the immoderate feast: excessive eating, drunkenness, the telling of jokes, dancing and singing (including poetry recitation), and various forms of sexual intercourse.' (Corbeill 1997, 104.)

[129] For discussion of the verb *gaudeo* and related noun *gaudium* with respect to sexual pleasure, see Zuckerberg 2018, 132–33; Ingleheart 2021, esp. 320-28. For instances of *gaudeo*/*gaudium* of female sexual pleasure (for which I am indebted to Joe Watson), see: Ov. *Am*. 2.3.2; Mart. 1.34.4, 9.41.8, 11.26.5; Petron. *Sat*. 87, 132; Auson. *Ep*. 115.15; Calp. *Ecl*. 1.14.

phrase *ingesta orbitas in ora patris* (282-3). The verb *ingero* initially seems rather innocent. However its rare conjunction with the noun *os* makes this phrase quite unusual. Excepting the example in the *Thyestes*, this only occurs three other times, all of them in Seneca.

One of these three other usages describes the ingestion of food and drink.[130] In *Ep.* 95, Seneca, in explaining that women engage in vices similar to those of men, describes eaten food as *ingesta per os*.[131] As often occurs elsewhere in Seneca and Latin more generally, *ingero* here is used in *Ep.* 95 of excessive eating and drinking.[132] A second collocation of *ingero* and *os* refers to an intrusion upon someone's attention.[133] As part of a negative *exemplum* in the *De Beneficiis*, Caligula's arrogance is demonstrated by his allowing a man whose life he granted to show him gratitude only by kissing his foot.[134]

The final use of *ingero* with *os* in extant Latin is in Seneca's account of Hostius Quadra and his sexual perversions in book one of the *Naturales Questiones*.[135] Discussing light, sight and mirrors, Seneca uses the phrase *ingero in os* to describe the combination of ocular and anal penetration

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[130] *OLD* 907 s.v. "*ingero*" 1c 'to pour into the body, take in, or cause to take in (food or drink, esp. in large amounts)'.
[131] *Ep*. 95.21: *aeque invitis* ***ingesta*** *visceribus* ***per os*** *reddunt et vinum omne vomitu remetiuntur*. (Equally [to men], they [women] send up through their mouths what was ingested by unwilling bellies and they reimburse all the wine by vomiting.)
[132] Sen. *Ep*. 47.3, 83.18; Sen. *Oed*. 196; Cels. 3.9.3; Plin. *Nat.* 29.23; Pers. 5.6.
[133] *OLD* 907 s.v. "*ingero*" 3b 'to obtrude on a person's notice or attention (a sight, fact, etc., usu. unwelcome).'
[134] *De Ben.* 2.12.2: *Parum enim foede furioseque insolens fuerat, qui de capite consularis viri soccatus audiebat, nisi* ***in os*** *senatoris* ***ingessisset*** *imperator epigros suos.* (For the arrogant man existed in a way too little base and enraged – he who, while slippered, heard the case of a man of consular rank – if he, the emperor, had not shoved the nails of his shoes into the face of a senator.)
[135] The broader role played by this account in the *Naturales Quaestiones* is discussed by G. D. Williams 2012, chap. 2.

enjoyed by Hostius.[136] In a verbal play, Seneca describes how the mirrors allow Hostius to take in his shameful action not only with his mouth, but also with his eyes. This verbal play relies on the slippage between the two aforementioned meanings of *ingero*: on the one hand, penises are physically taken in by Hostius' mouth (*in os*); on the other hand, penises (as they penetrate) are visually taken in by Hostius' eyes (*in oculos*). A similar double-meaning can be applied to *ingesta in ora patris* in the *Thyestes*, reliant on the two meanings of *ora* as mouth and face.[137] On the one hand, Thyestes is confronted by his childlessness by his cooked children placed on a table before him.[138] On the other hand, Thyestes fills his mouth with his children by eating them. The combination of these two senses, found in Seneca's account of Hostius Quadra, can be applied to the *Thyestes*, as the childlessness with which Atreus emasculates Thyestes stands in for Atreus' phallic penetration of Thyestes' mouth. For a re-reader, Thyestes' later characterisation as the orally penetrated victim of priapic vengeance encourages this sexual interpretation of *ingesta in ora patris*.[139]

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[136] *NQ* 1.16.3: *Foeda dictu sunt quae portentum illud ore suo lancinandum dixerit feceritque, cum illi specula ab omni parte opponerentur, ut ipse flagitiorum suorum spectator esset et, quae secreta quoque conscientiam premunt quaeque sibi quisque fecisse se negat,* ***non in os tantum sed in oculos suos ingereret***. (They were things shameful to speak of – the things which that monstrosity, who should be manged by his own mouth, said and did – when mirrors were set up for him on all sides, so that he himself could be a spectator of his own disgraceful acts and so that he could thrust not only upon his mouth but also upon his own eyes the private things which press on the conscience and which any man would deny even to himself that he has done.)

[137] *OLD* 1272-3 s.v. "*os*" 1a 'the mouth', 6a 'the front part of the head, the face'. This ambiguity noted by both Boyle 2017, 213.

[138] The sense of forcing another to notice something is also found in Seneca's *Medea* 132 (*funus ingestum patri* 'death thrust upon the father'), where Medea describes her murder of her own brother and her scattering of his mutilated limbs in the sea in order to distract her father from pursuing her.

[139] Further to the idea of sexual penetration is discussion by Segal 2008, 151–55 on the boundary violation which Thyestes experiences in this play, as the Tantalids' insatiable hunger for power is manifested in Thyestes' cannibalism of his own children.

Simultaneously, from another angle, the sexual interpretation of *ingesta in ora patris* foreshadows the sexual sense of *impleo*.

13 Priapic Penetration + Elegiac Vulnerability = Catullan Masculinity

Having suggested the potential of *impleo* to contain a sexual sense, I pause progression through the play to briefly explore the possible implications of this sexual sense of *impleo*. I focus specifically on the priapic colouring of Atreus' statement, *implebo patrem funere suorum*, and the poetic model(s) of masculinity this statement brings with it.

The threat of sexual violence or rape as punishment (particularly for adultery) is a distinctly priapic form of masculine dominance.[140] Atreus' use of the fairly unusual first-person future form adds to the strength of this priapic voice; this grammatical form, in the context of a threat, frequently occurs in priapic poetry.[141] Atreus' adoption of the priapic poetic voice, like his earlier adoption of an elegiac poetic voice, brings along its own model of masculinity. Where the elegiac voice exhibits a vulnerable, emasculated form of masculinity, the priapic voice is aggressive and obtrusive in its phallic, penetrative masculinity. This priapic stance accords with Atreus' already

[140] As discussed by Richlin 1983, 62–63: 'And the best model for this kind of staining [sexual degradation] in Roman satire is the model of Priapus in the garden, threatening potential thieves with rape. To expose victims as sexually abnormal – men as pathic homosexuals, women as promiscuous – is to imply sexual power over them, to threaten them as Priapus threatens thieves.'

[141] Some examples of the threatening future tense in the *Carmina Priapea*. 5.3: ***prendam** te tamen et **tenebo** prensum* (yet I shall seize and hold onto you, having been seized). 11.1-2: *prenso nec fuste **nocebo**, / saeva nec incurva vulnera falce **dabo**: / **traiectus** conto sic extendere pedali* (I shall not harm you with a held cudgel, nor deal wounds with a curved sickle: but pierced with a pike you will be stretched in this way). 35: ***Pedicabere**, fur, semel; sed idem / si deprensus eris bis, **irrumabo**. / quod si tertia furta molieris, / ut poenam patiare et hanc et illam, / **pedicaberis irrumaberis**que* (You will be pedicated once, thief; but if you are caught twice, I will irrumate you. And if you try three thefts, so that you suffer both the first and second punishment, you will be predicated and irrumated). 44.3-4: *deprensos ego ter quaterque fures / omnes, ne dubitetis, **irrumabo*** (so that you do not doubt me, I shall irrumate all thieves even caught three or four times before).

established (hyper)masculine dominance over the emasculated Thyestes.[142] It seems, then, that across the course of this play, from his entry in act two to this proclamation in act five, Atreus has transformed from emasculated elegiac poet to prominently phallic priapic figure. However, there is more to this shift in poetic voices than first meets the eye.

The masculinity of the priapic voice is far from straightforward. Priapus' over-the-top aggression has been described as 'more overexaggerated and farcical than … virile or even normal'.[143] His persistent statements of penetration make him less a figure of normative masculinity and more an object of ridicule.[144] Beyond the masculine aggression for which he is most well-known, Priapus also displays less "active" and more vulnerable traits. There are poems which see him outdone, his statue form being stolen or burnt.[145] Priapus can also be found bemoaning his limitation to his garden, his exemption (despite his divine status) from the heights of the Olympians.[146]

The priapic voice, then, displays self-awareness of its own limitations, as a figure of ridicule, a physical object subject to damage and a divinity trapped in a bounded domain. In other words, the priapic voice reveals itself as a pose of masculinity which lacks in actual potency. Transferring this fuller picture of the priapic voice to the *Thyestes*, Atreus seems rather lacking in self-awareness. Atreus adopts the masculinity of the priapic voice without understanding that it is only a pose; he misunderstands priapic threats, which

[142] As discussed on pp. 63-7.
[143] Uden 2007, 9.
[144] Uden 2007, 9 gives *Carmina Priapea* 10 as an example of Priapus' experience of such ridicule.
[145] On which, see Uden 2007, 9.
[146] On which, see J. L. Watson forthcoming.

are hyperbolic, metaphorical and unrealistic, and seeks to enact them concretely and literally. As such, Atreus' use of priapic statement to conceptualise his masculine dominance over Thyestes makes him less a figure of normative masculinity, and more a figure of ridiculous hypermasculinity. In other words, in shifting from an emasculated elegist to a japing Priapus, from an extreme of effeminacy to an extreme of hypermasculinity, Atreus does not evade vulnerability altogether.

Rather, Atreus' attempt to leave behind the voice of the elegiac poet-*amator* by taking up the voice of priapic poetry is foiled by a poetic voice which combines emasculation and priapism – namely that of Catullus.[147] In order to illustrate this combination of voices in Catullus' poetry, I point to Catullus 37, a poem which describes Catullus' reaction to Lesbia's sexual relations with other men.[148]

On the one hand, Catullus 37 exemplifies how priapism is employed as a display of masculinity, in response to accusations of inferiority or lacking

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[147] Whilst Seneca's explicit, linguistic interaction with Augustan poetry has been explored at length, linguistic parallels with Catullus are fewer and farther between. In his commentary on Seneca's *Medea*, Boyle 2014 notes similarities between Seneca's Medea and Catullus' Ariadne: e.g. Medea's and Ariadne's references to broken *fides* at *Med.* 11-12 and Cat. 64.132 (p. 109); invocation of the Furies at *Med.* 13-26 and Cat. 64.192-201 (p. 110); sea imagery used of internal turmoil at *Med.* 939-43 and Cat. 64.62 (p. 362). On the *Oedipus*, Boyle 2012 notes parallels between choral odes and Catullus' poems; there are echoes of Cat. 11 in the choral ode at 110-23 (p. 145) and of Cat. 51 at *Oed.* 180-92 (p. 157). Trinacty 2014, 172–74 discusses links between Seneca's *Troades* and Cat. 64. Other work which addresses intertextual links between Seneca and Catullus: Degl'Innocenti Pierini 2018; Luque Moreno 2018; Pieri 2018; Ficca 2019.

[148] It is widely agreed that Catullus 37 is a "Lesbia poem"; Wiseman 1985, 130 identifies the *puella* in Catullus 37 (and 8) as Lesbia, and Skinner 1992 discusses Catullus 37 alongside 11 and 58 as a poem on the breakdown of his relationship with Lesbia. The description of the *puella* at 37.12-3 is not dissimilar to the sentiments of 58.2-3: *illa Lesbia quam Catullus unam / plus quam se atque suos amavit omnes* ... (that Lesbia whom, singularly, Catullus loved more than himself and his own relatives). Nevertheless, it is not necessary for the reader to agree that the *puella* is Lesbia in poem 37. What is more important is that the *puella* in 37 is identified with the *puella* of poem 8 – this is clear from the phrasing of 37.12, which repeats 8.5.

virility;[149] Catullus threatens to orally rape the *contubernales* who accuse him of inferior masculinity and scrawl phallic graffiti on the front of their tavern (37.6-10).[150] On the other hand, Catullus' heartfelt description of Lesbia in lines 11-13 highlights his heartache and vulnerability;[151] moreover, these lines echo Catullus 8.4-5,[152] part of a poem showing the poet at the deepest depths of vulnerability, making a personal self-address to stand firm in the face of heartbreak.[153] Catullus 37, then, demonstrates a distinct shift in tone, a combination of priapism and vulnerability, as threats of sexual violence give way to the heartache of the jilted lover. [154] The poetic voice, purporting to unman his rivals, is himself unmanned. The motivation for his hypermasculine, priapic, sexual aggression reveals the poet to be a vulnerable, emasculated figure. Claiming to sexually dominate and

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[149] According to Catullus, the clients of the *taberna* from which Lesbia operates consider themselves alone to be endowed with penises and allowed to have sex with girls (37.3-5). In contrast to the exclusive virility of the *contubernales*, manifested in sexual prowess, Catullus is described as an unattractive goat (37.5).

[150] Cat. 37.6-10: *an, continenter quod sedetis insulsi / centum an ducenti, non putatis ausurum / me una ducentos irrumare sessores? / atqui putate: namque totius vobis / frontem tabernae sopionibus scribam.* (Or, because you sit in a row, one or two hundred of you dowds, do you think I wouldn't dare to face-fuck all two hundred patrons at once? But now, think again: I will mark the whole front of the tavern for you with dicks.) The impossibility of carrying out the threat of irrumation is noted by Wray 2001, 82: it is 'physically impossible of literal realization.'

[151] Cat. 37.11-13: *puella nam mi, quae meo sinu fugit, / amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla, / pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata,…* (Because my girl, who fled from my embrace, loved as much as no other girl will be loved, for whom I have fought great wars, …)

[152] Cat. 8.4-5: *cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat / amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla.* (when you followed, time and again, wherever she led, that girl who was loved by us as much as no other girl will be loved.)

[153] This divergence of tones is discussed by Wray 2001, 82–87; Lavigne 2010. Discussions of Catullus 8: Skinner 1971; Connor 1974; Fitzgerald 1995, 121–23. These discussions focus on the Catullus' likeness to the lovelorn *adulescens* of New Comedy. What is relevant for my discussion of the *Thyestes* is Catullus' expression of vulnerability and powerlessness, and the fact that this professed vulnerability is taken up by Seneca's Atreus by way of the elegists. Like Catullus, elegy also has roots in New Comedy; see James 2012.

[154] This vulnerability is noted by Krostenko 2001, 269. On the emasculation of Catullus more generally, see Skinner 1998; Greene 1998, chap. 1.

emasculate the patrons to prove his own superior masculinity, Catullus instead (or simultaneously) reveals his own vulnerability.

In short, the poetry and poetic voice of Catullus demonstrate the combination of priapic, masculine aggression and emasculated vulnerability. Catullus' adoption of priapism capitalises on the priapic voice's awareness of its vulnerability, revealing even more explicitly the fact that masculine aggression is merely a pose.[155] In switching from elegiac vulnerability to priapic aggression, Atreus, then, seems to have unwittingly adopted a Catullan mode.[156] Indeed, in his statement **PE***rg(am) et* ***I****mple****BO***, he seems to distinctly echo the opening line of Catullus 16 ***PE****dicab(o) ego vos et* ***I****rruma****BO*** in sound and elision.[157] Atreus' literary trajectory forms something of a generic "regression" from elegy to Catullus and a temporal "regression" from the Augustan age to the late Republic. This appropriation of different poetic voices, which display different modes of masculinity and originate from different political circumstances, invites a reader to question the utility or applicability of the aggressive and active masculinity taken up by Atreus.

Atreus' eventual adoption of a priapic poetic voice, alongside his (self-)characterisation as quasi-divine and bestial hunter, makes him

[155] In the words of Wray 2001, 86: 'the line cut from Poem 8 has been pasted into a context where it reads less like an anguished lover's proclamation of a love that will go down in history, and more like a smuttily hypermasculine boast in the manner of Henry Miller, or of Catullus' note to Ipsitilla (Poem 32).'
[156] I add to this a further Catullan aspect of Atreus, namely, his propensity to self-name. The combination of self-deprecation and self-naming present in Atreus' opening sentence (ll. 176-80, discussed in §3 of this chapter) finds a corollary in Catullus 8. In addition, Catullus is highly wont to self-name; Ingleheart 2014, 52 notes that Catullus names himself twenty-five times in his 116 poems.
[157] Catullus 16 is another poem in which the poet-narrator also rebuts an allegation of effeminacy with a sexual threat; in Catullus 16, this allegation is founded on the effeminate content of the poet's poems.

aggressive, dominant and masculine. In contrast, Thyestes in this play has been characterised as emasculated and effeminised, through his conceptualisation as a hunted beast,[158] luxurious banqueter,[159] and victim of priapic violence. Atreus' extreme masculinity and Thyestes' effeminisation culminate in their respective characterisations as superhuman and pregnant in the final hundred lines of the play, to which we now return.

14 Act Five 901-1112 Atreus Deified, Thyestes' Effeminised

The close of the play features full culmination of Atreus and Thyestes in their respective roles. Atreus describes the scene he has created, characterising Thyestes as a luxurious banqueter – as in the messenger's earlier speech ll. 700-2, 778-82, discussed on pp. 72-80) – and characterising himself as a quasi-divine, superhuman figure (909-912):

> resupinus ipse **purpurae** atque **auro** incubat,
> vino gravatum fulciens laeva caput. 910
> eructat. o me **caelitum excelsissimum**,
> **regumque regem**! vota **transcendi** mea.
>
> (That very man, sprawling, reclines on purple and gold, supporting his head, heavy with wine, with his left hand. He belches. Ah me – highest heavenly one and king of kings! I have gone beyond my prayers.)

[158] See §7 and §10 of this chapter.
[159] See §10 and §12 of this chapter.

Thyestes is, again, described as a luxurious banqueter, reclining in a typical banqueting position.[160] Luxury is further connoted by the colours gold and purple.

As a counterpoint to Thyestes' figuring as banqueter, Atreus describes himself as superhuman (*caelitum excelsissimum*). Atreus' self-positioning as top-dog is also clear from his self-description as *regum regem* (king of kings). The verb *transcendo* indicates Atreus' growth to superhuman status; he has expanded beyond his own expectations. Echoing his opening words of this act (885-888), Atreus has reached the pinnacle of his achievements, and in doing so has exceeded humanity and become god-like, superhuman. Whereas Thyestes is excessive in effeminacy and bestiality, Atreus is excessive in his superhumanity and, indeed, his statements of his superhumanity.

As the revelation approaches, Thyestes' multiple associations – as banqueter, as pregnant person, as passive penetrated partner – are reinforced; simultaneous to this, Thyestes expresses symptoms of emotional turmoil or conflict. Following Atreus' speech, Thyestes narrates, in lyric metre, his change in fortune, from exile to his return to Argos (920-969). Thyestes' characterisation as an overindulgent banqueter is reinforced by his following self-description; Thyestes describes himself bedecked with flowers and roses (945, 947: *decens flos* and *vernae rosae*), his hair covered in perfume (948: *pingui madidus crinis amomo*), his robes of Tyrian purple (955-6: *Tyrio saturas ostro vestes*). Despite the bounty of his situation, he also expresses involuntary anxiety: he wants to weep (943-4) and lament (954-7) without knowing the cause. In the back and forth which follows between Atreus and

[160] On which, see Dunbabin 2003, chap. 1

Thyestes, Thyestes asks Atreus again and again where his sons are (975, 997). Atreus repeats his earlier desire to reunite Thyestes and his sons (978-980). He repeats the sinister phrase *implebo patrem* (980), reminding the reader of Thyestes' literal consumption and figurative pregnancy at Atreus' hands.

The most notable of Thyestes' physical symptoms, in its effeminising power, is the disturbance of his *viscera*. This occurs first before he learns the cause (999-1000):

> Quis hic tumultus **viscera** exagitat mea?
>
> quid tremuit intus?
>
> (What is this disturbance rousing my organs? What trembles within me?)

As mentioned above,[161] the ambiguity of *viscera*, as 'innards' or 'womb', creates the image of Thyestes pregnant through the ingestion of his children.[162] Closely following these lines, Thyestes, unsettled by his feelings, calls for his children (1002); it is, of course, highly ironic that the discomfort causing him to long for his children is the same discomfort caused by them – or rather his ingestion of them.

Thyestes repeats these feelings of discomfort in his *viscera* after confirmation that his meal was the flesh of his children (1041-44):

> volvuntur intus **viscera** et clusum nefas
>
> sine exitu luctatur et quaerit fugam:

---

[161] See p. 85.

[162] The ambiguity of the noun *viscera* here is discussed by Littlewood 2008, 251–52. See also *OLD* 2076-7 s.v. "*viscus*[1]" 1b, 3b.

> **da, frater, ensem** (sanguinis multum mei
>
> habet ille): **ferro liberis detur via.**
>
> (They turn inside my organs, and my enclosed wrongdoing wrestles without a way out and seeks flight. Brother, give me your sword – that one which has much of my own blood. Let a path for my children be granted by steel.)

Having ingested his children, Thyestes wants to expel them from his body by cutting them out of his abdomen. This image is effeminising in two ways. Firstly, in a more literal sense, this image is evocative of childbirth via caesarean section. Secondly, in a more abstract and symbolic sense, Thyestes desires a sword, phallically symbolic, to penetrate him, with the result that he gives birth to his children.[163] The image of Thyestes cutting his children from his abdomen effectively evokes ideas of pregnancy and birth. Thus, for a repeat reader of the play, this image has retrospective significance, affecting interpretation of earlier statements by Atreus or interactions between Atreus and Thyestes.[164]

As the play closes, the superhuman status of Atreus, as counterpoint to Thyestes' powerlessness, is referenced once more. Thyestes calls on the gods to take vengeance on Atreus, like they did the Giants (1082-5). However, the gods remain absent in this play, supplanted by Atreus.[165] This is demonstrated by the exchange in the final three lines of the play (1110-12):

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[163] Such phallic symbolism of swords in Senecan tragedy is discussed by Segal 1986, 130–36. As *comparandum* to Thyestes, for Seneca's Phaedra the sword is the tool by which she imagines consummating her love for Hippolytus (*Phaed.* 704-14).

[164] I give here some examples. Thyestes' description as *gaudens* (l. 278) can be considered to feminise him, through its use of the female orgasm. Atreus' statement *implebo* (ll. 890 and 980) can be interpreted as his intention to impregnate Thyestes.

[165] Cf. the absence of gods at the end of the *Medea* (ll. 1026-7, discussed on pp. 284-5).

THY. vindices aderunt dei:

his puniendum vota te tradunt mea.

ATR. te puniendum liberis trado tuis.

(THY. The avenging gods will be present. My prayers consign you to be punished by them. ATR. I consign you to be punished by your children.)

Full realisation of Thyestes' emasculation/effeminisation has occurred, and concurrently Atreus' masculinisation. The play, then, presents the audience with two very different kinds of masculinity; however, neither of these figures constitutes anything resembling the ideal of *virtus*.[166] Indeed, despite their differences, these two characters turn out (as implied throughout the play and discussed in the following section) to be remarkably similar to each other.

15 Atreus and Thyestes Conflated

My discussion of this play has highlighted the ways in which Atreus and Thyestes come to be conceptualised as gendered opposites, through the use of poetic voices, sub-/supra-human characterisation and the imagery of the luxurious banqueter. With the linear analysis concluded, the following section goes back through the play to highlight that, despite their oppositional differences, Atreus and Thyestes are often conflated with or confused for each other, particularly in reference to their commitment of crimes against each other. This conflation is indicative of their interchangeable positions of perpetrator and victim, and, by extension, the interchangeability of their positions of gender.

[166] As mentioned above in §9, *virtus* is distinctly absent from this play, employed by Atreus only as a ruse.

In act one, the Fury's forecast for the Tantalids highlights the similarities of Atreus and Thyestes (32-36):

Superbis fratribus regna excidant

repetantque profugos; dubia uiolentae domus

fortuna reges inter incertos labet;

miser ex potente fiat, ex misero potens, 35

fluctuque regnum casus assiduo ferat.

ob scelera pulsi, cum dabit patriam deus

in scelera r**edeant**, sintque tam inuisi omnibus

quam sibi…

(Let kingship slip from arrogant brothers and bring back exiles. Let the wavering fortune of this violent house totter between uncertain kings. Let a wretched man arise from a powerful man, let a powerful man arise from a wretched man, and let chance convey the kingdom by its perpetual wave. Let those driven away because of crimes return to crimes when a god gives back their fatherland, and let them be as hateful to themselves as to all…)

The cyclicity of Atreus' and Thyestes' positions is clear from the *re-* suffix of the verbs *repeto* (33) and *redeo* (38). The repetitive structure of line 35 also indicates their exchange of positions. The brothers are not differentiated by name, also highlighting their similarity, the possibility of mistaking one for the other in the grand scheme of events.

In act two, Atreus imagines Thyestes wanting Atreus' crimes as his own (194-5);[167] the work of comparison here is done by the adjective *talis* (194). In his delayed prologue, Atreus also envisions their vying for power (201-4). The mixture of active and passive verbs in line 202 (*petatur* and *petat*) draws attention to the brothers' potential to exchange positions; the verbs *perdet* and *peribit* work in a similar way (203), one denoting killing in an active sense, the other in a passive sense. Even to Atreus, he and Thyestes occupy the same space; they are interchangeable. Others also perceive Atreus and Thyestes interchangeably when it comes to their crimes. In act four, when the messenger enters the stage, the chorus wonder which of the two brothers committed the crimes (640: *non quaero quis sit sed uter*). It seems that, to the chorus, either Atreus or Thyestes could be the perpetrator of the crimes.

In summary, at points throughout the play, Atreus and Thyestes are conflated or confused with each other, particularly in reference to the commitment of crimes. Their equal potential to perpetrate crimes against each other translates to an equal potential to occupy the opposingly gendered positions of hypermasculinity and effeminacy; considered in this way, Atreus' and Thyestes' conflation invites reflection on the similarity between binary opposites of gender, and hints at the non-essentialism of gender.

It appears that the extremes of hypermasculinity and effeminacy ultimately collapse in on each other. Nevertheless, I note here the extent and degree to which these two kinds of masculinity are diametrically opposed throughout the play. Either brother could be the aggressive perpetrator of crimes against the other, but the categories of hypermasculinity and

[167] Quoted above on p. 54.

effeminacy remain distinct. Hypermasculinity, whether construed through priapic aggression, bestial predation or supra-humanity, is always clearly differentiated from effeminacy or emasculation; the vulnerability behind priapism and the disruption of correlations between gender and supra-/sub-humanity serve to create questions about conceptualisations, but do not create confusion about whether Atreus actually aspires to hypermasculinity.

Indeed, Atreus' overall characterisation as undoubtedly hypermasculine is at odds with more usual descriptions of tyrants. The figure of the tyrant typically exemplifies extremes of aggression coordinate with inordinate lack of self-control; in the words of Langlands: 'In Roman culture, the figure of the tyrant was not seen as "hypermasculine" in his dominance over others; rather tyranny is seen as a dominance that manifests a kind of weakness, an inability to control oneself that lays one vulnerable to all kinds of forces of desire.'[168] In other words, tyrants are usually, in their excessive assertions of dominance, characterised by a lack of self-control, and so effeminacy. We can find such an image of the tyrant in Seneca's *Ep.* 114.24. In contrast, Seneca's vision of Atreus does not connect his aggressive assertions of dominance over others with either the indulgence of pleasure, a lack of self-control, or effeminacy. In forsaking this more typical conceptualisation, Seneca's *Thyestes* offers an alternative understanding of tyrants, through the hypermasculinity usually accorded to figures such as the Giants and centaurs.[169]

[168] Langlands 2006, 292.
[169] Some scholarship for further discussion. Syropoulos 2018 discusses the transgressive and barbarous associations of Giants (pp. 20-27) and centaurs (pp. 60-70). The significance of the Giants and Gigantomachy in Roman literature is discussed by Hardie 1986, chaps. 2 and 3.

16 Concluding Ideas

Having reached the end of the play, I now draw together the threads running through my discussion. This chapter's introduction promised exploration of the *Thyestes'* engagement with three conceptualisations of masculinity, namely changing literary models, sub-/supra-human imagery, and the binary opposition of effeminisation and hypermasculinity. Each of these ways of thinking about masculinity is called into question, inviting the reader to reflect on gendered conceptualisations. I summarise how this questioning takes place, across each of the broad categories I have discussed.

The poetic models employed by Atreus evolve throughout the play. At his entrance in Act Two, Atreus takes up the voice of an elegiac poet-*amator* through the use of language programmatic to elegiac poetry. As an elegiac narrator, Atreus is emasculated, inactive and vulnerable. As Act Two continues, Atreus quickly throws off this emasculated voice, undergoing generic ascent as he encourages himself to the masculine action appropriate to the genres of epic or tragedy. This generic ascent is bolstered by Atreus' claimed ascent to supra-humanity, to godlike status. The final transformation of poetic voice occurs at the opening of Act Five, where Atreus expresses priapic intent over Thyestes. Considered as a transformation of voices, Atreus' use of priapism has the effect of pushing even further Atreus' masculinity to an explicit and extreme statement of (sexual) dominance over Thyestes. However, considered in combination and in retrospect, Atreus' use of poetic voices can have a different effect. Together, the combination of elegiac vulnerability and priapic domination has a potential reference point in

Catullus. As discussed in section 13, priapism, itself an over-the-top source of ridicule, is explicitly revealed as a pose in Catullan poetry. Where Atreus thinks he has replaced elegiac vulnerability with priapic dominance, he has, rather, gone too far, venturing into priapic poetry's ridiculous hypermasculinity or Catullus' masculine pose to cover up his vulnerability. By presenting multiple poetic voices of masculinity, which can be interpreted in different ways, Seneca opens up broader questioning of conceptualisations of masculinity.

Conceptualisations of masculinity are also questioned by the use of sub-/supra-human imagery in the *Thyestes*. Atreus initially, in Act Two, characterises himself as supra-human in his generic ascent from elegy to tragedy/epic, aligning generic ascent with quasi-deification, as well as with masculinisation. In opposition to his own supra-humanity and masculinisation, Atreus puts Thyestes in a position of sub-humanity and effeminisation, characterising him as a wild beast. This neat alignment of sub-humanity to effeminacy and supra-humanity to masculinity breaks down in Act Three, where Atreus is also described as bestial, in his predation over Thyestes. Further confusion of these categories occurs in Act Four, with Atreus characterised in quick succession as a supra-human threat to the divine and a fierce, feral predator. Act Five sees Atreus firmly self-characterising as supra-human; however, even as he claims to oust the gods (888: *dimitto superos*), the bestial spectre of Pasiphaë and the bull hangs over Atreus' intent to fill Thyestes (890: *implebo patrem*). By contradicting, in Acts Three and Four, the precise alignment of sub-/supra-humanity with

effeminacy/masculinity created in Act Two, Seneca invites interrogation of sub-/supra-human metaphors for concepts of gender.

Finally, as discussed briefly in section 15, the oppositionality of effeminacy and masculinity is itself questioned, through the conflation of Atreus and Thyestes, which highlights their interchangeable positions. Despite taking up opposing kinds of masculinity, their positions of predator and prey, dominance and submission could have easily been reversed. This interchangeability invites reflection on the binary opposition of effeminacy and masculinity – if Atreus or Thyestes could have taken up these opposing positions so easily, how oppositional are these positions really? Pushed even further, the potential of Atreus and Thyestes to be either predator or prey, masculine or effeminate, hints at the non-essentialism of gender – an idea rather unusual within typically rigid Roman thought on positions of gender.

In exploring and questioning conceptualisations of masculinity, the *Thyestes* has as its focal point an extreme response to a threat of effeminacy. This exploration of an extreme situation is facilitated, in part, by the abstract and distant setting of mythical Greek tragedy. As counterpoint to the extreme and abstract situation presented in the *Thyestes*, the next chapter on the *Epistulae Morales* deals with a much more measured and concrete response to potential effeminisation. In contrast to Atreus' entirely unconstrained retort to the emasculation of cuckoldry, Chapter Two and the *Epistulae Morales* deal with the constraint of actions in the face of potential effeminacy, via the concept of *patientia*. Like Chapter One, Chapter Two also focuses on interrogating conceptualisations of masculinity, as I explore how Seneca navigates the concept of *patientia*, an idea central to Stoic ethics but with

effeminising potential, for masculinity and *virtus*. I, again, take an approach which centres on reader response, considering Seneca's pedagogical focus in sequence of letters from Book 7 of the *Epistulae*.

Chapter Two. Rehabilitating *Patientia* in the *Epistulae Morales*.

1 Masculinity and *Patientia*

This chapter explores the masculinisation of constrained action and inaction in the face of potential effeminacy, in Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*. In this way, the *Epistulae* are texts which can be understood as responding, at least in conceptual terms, to Atreus' entirely unconstrained actions (and masculinity) in response to emasculation. We will see that, whereas the *Thyestes* presents an extreme kind of masculinity – Atreus' hypermasculinity which is constituted of unconstrained actions – the *Epistulae* offer up a much more measured sort of masculinity – *virtus* which is constituted of the inactivity of *patientia*.

This chapter addresses the conceptualisation of masculinity within Seneca's philosophical works, with focus on the terms *patior* and *patientia* within the *Epistulae*. The issue at hand in this chapter is the potential disconnect between masculinity and *patientia*, which results from the contrast between potentials for extremely ethically positive and extremely ethically negative evaluations of *patientia*. On the one hand, within the active-passive framework underpinning Roman versions of Stoic philosophy, *patientia* as "endurance" or "tolerance" is evaluated positively as self-control and/or willing acceptance of difficult circumstances, and so a sign of masculinity and classified as a *virtus* – this threefold connection is indicated in Figure 2.1

(below).[170] On the other hand, within a traditional Roman ethical framework (which itself features significant areas of overlap with Stoic ethics), *patientia* as "passivity" or "submission" is evaluated negatively as weakness, and so a sign of effeminacy. This evaluation puts under threat the connections between *virtus* and *patientia*, and *patientia* and masculinity, as indicated by the red, dashed arrows in Figure 2.2 (below). This disconnect has the potential not only to produce a point of ideological friction between Roman and Stoic ethical ideas, but also to exacerbate inconsistencies within Roman ethical thought.[171]

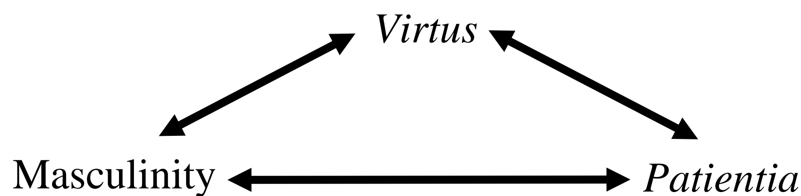

Figure 2.1: Connections between masculinity, virtus, and patientia.

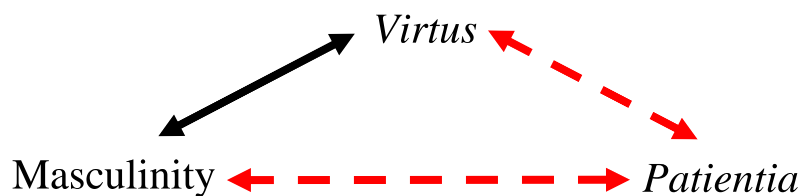

Figure 2.2: Connections between virtus and patientia, and masculinity and patientia potentially problematised.

[170] On the basic dichotomy of active and passive, which extends from sexual role to gendered identity, see C. A. Williams 1999, 177–245. On the particular association of *patior* and *patientia* with passivity, see Adams 1982, 189–90.

[171] As will be seen too in Chapter 4 on the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, the success of Seneca's Stoicism is in its exploitation of the overlap between conservative Roman ethics and Stoic ideas.

In short, this chapter is motivated by the significance of the concept of *patientia* both within the framework of active-passive Roman ethics, which is itself underpinned by an ideal of “real MANliness”, and within the framework of Stoic ethics, in which acceptance of one’s circumstances is key. In this chapter, I discuss how Seneca attempts to overcome this potential tension between *patientia* and masculinity, in essence solidifying the red, dashed arrow between them, in order to defend *patientia* and, by extension, Stoic *virtus* and render both suitable for his Roman readers. In more specific terms, I examine how the concept of *patientia* is dealt with in the *Epistulae* in order to show how Seneca navigates the difficulties posed by this idea, which is potentially effeminising, yet fundamental to a Stoic understanding of *virtus*. Unlike Atreus’ (hyper)masculinity in the *Thyestes*, which is relatively straightforward in conceptual terms, real-life *virtus* is more conceptually complex, requiring Seneca to lead his reader through an obstacle course of ideas. Before discussing the *Epistulae*, I lay out some of the existing discussion on Seneca, masculinity and *patientia*, as well as pre-Senecan Stoic ideas on the idea of endurance.

2 Scholarly Background

The negative role of Stoic passivity in the conceptualisation of the philosopher has been touched upon by Bartsch, in her 2005 article, “Eros and the Roman Philosopher”. Bartsch’s main focus remains the reasons for the characterisation of the philosopher as sexually passive. By beginning from a point of tension within Seneca’s own writings, between masculinity and *patientia*, I build on Bartsch’s work and demonstrate Seneca’s own awareness

of his philosophy's vulnerabilities within Roman society and his methods for bolstering his ethical teachings, i.e. how Seneca adapts Stoic philosophy to early Imperial Roman society.[172] More recently, and of relevance to this chapter, there has been particular focus on the use of metaphors from Roman ethical frameworks within Seneca's Stoicism. Both Asmis and Bartsch, in their contributions to *Seneca and the Self*, highlight how metaphors from Roman ethical frameworks are grafted onto Stoic ethical thinking. Asmis focuses on the reconceptualisation of *Fortuna* as an enemy to fight against.[173] Bartsch considers more broadly how Seneca uses different metaphors of the self as pedagogical tools.[174] My analysis in this chapter applies some of the tools at work in Asmis' and Bartsch's work, with particular focus on how the term *patientia* is (re)shaped by its contexts within the *Epistulae*.

3 The *Epistulae Morales*

Seneca's *Epistulae Morales* survive as an incomplete 20 book collection of 124 letters addressed to Lucilius, about whom little is known beyond what Seneca tells us. The *Epistulae* were written later in Seneca's life, between his withdrawal from political life in 62 and his death in 65.[175] There is scholarly consensus that these letters are fictional, in the sense that they were not the actual correspondence of Seneca to Lucilius in the manner of

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[172] The relationship between Roman society and Stoicism has been variously discussed. Habinek 1998 shows how Roman hierarchies and systems are brought into Seneca's conceptualisation of Stoic philosophy. Roller 2001 highlights how Seneca integrates Stoicism into Roman ethical thought, as a way of reevaluating more traditional Roman ethical ideas. Reydams-Schils 2005 discusses the social embeddedness of the Roman Stoics, as those who 'had to come to terms with the sociopolitical challenges of imperial Rome' (p.3) and who mediated between philosophical life and political life.
[173] Asmis 2009.
[174] Bartsch 2009.
[175] Setaioli 2014, 191–92

Cicero's letters to Atticus.[176] This is not to say, however, that epistolary features of Seneca's *Epistulae* are superfluous or insignificant because they are not authentic letters.[177] Studies have, indeed, highlighted the contribution of epistolary features to Seneca's wider philosophical project,[178] to instruct and encourage their reader on philosophy. Seneca's *Epistulae* take as their model the philosophical letters of Plato, Aristotle, and, most importantly, Epicurus.[179] In this way, the epistolary form of Seneca's *Epistulae* create a philosophical friendship across time and space with their reader, in the place of whom Lucilius stands.

Whilst it would be possible to examine the conceptualisation of masculinity elsewhere in Seneca's philosophical writings, the *Epistulae* are particularly useful owing to their metaphilosophical focus, which is complemented by their epistolary genre. These letters function for their addressee and reader not only as an introduction to Stoicism, but also as a didactic tool which teaches them how to do philosophy. The fact that they provide not only a statement of what is ethically good, but also explanation of why this is the case, makes them useful for our understanding both what the ethical ideal he promotes is and how this ethical idea is supposed to work in practice.

My motivation for examining the *Epistulae* also stems from the presentation of this metaphilosophical material within the epistolary form,

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[176] See overview in Griffin 1976, 416–19. See also, Wilson 1987, 62: 'The role of Lucilius is more like that of
Memmius in the work of Lucretius, than Atticus in the letters of Cicero.'
[177] See, e.g. Setaioli 2014, 194: 'If we deny their authenticity, we give up the opportunity to understand their specific literary and philosophical import, which we shall now try to elucidate.' On the status of Lucilius, see discussion in Mollea 2019.
[178] Edwards 2015 has discussed how the epistolary form of the letters creates a philosophical friendship between Seneca and his wider readership.
[179] Inwood 2007b, 136

with Lucilius, an elite Roman man, as their addressee. The key fact here is not whether these letters constituted genuine or fictitious communication from Seneca to Lucilius, but, regardless of their authenticity as correspondence, rather that they are written as public facing texts.[180] Seneca himself notes that he writes to benefit posterity, i.e. these letters are not only to be read by Lucilius, but by others too.[181] Moreover, although there are instances in which Seneca does divulge information about Lucilius' life,[182] much of the philosophical content of the *Epistulae* remains general and applicable to any elite Roman man, allowing a reader to put themselves in Lucilius' shoes, as though they themselves are Seneca's addressee. The letters' epistolary form also allows for philosophical progression – as the letters continue, they increase in complexity; likewise, as the reader progresses through the collection, they are assumed to have progressed philosophically. This collection is suitable for a budding Stoic of any level of experience. This particular didactic stance, directed towards a somewhat "everyday" elite man, is useful for observing and analysing the strategies Seneca uses to adapt his philosophy to his socio-political context. The joint metaphilosophical-didactic-epistolary endeavour of the *Epistulae*, therefore, is a suitable place for making sense of what the ethical ideal of Senecan philosophy is, how this ethical ideal works, and how Seneca presents this ethical ideal to the Roman public.

[180] Whether the *Epistulae* were genuine letters has been much discussed, with arguments in support of both sides. For a comprehensive overview, see Mazzoli 1989, 1846–50.
[181] *Ep.* 8.2: *posterorum negotium ago. illis aliqua quae possint prodesse conscribo* (I am doing the business of those in the future. I write something which can be of benefit to those men.)
[182] E.g. Lucilius' career (*Ep.* 19.4, 31.9), his hometown of Pompeii (49.1, 53.1, 70.1). For more on Lucilius and his identity, see: Griffin 1976, 91; G. D. Williams 2014, 135.

It is now necessary to consider the ethical ideal presented in the *Epistulae*, and its masculine assumptions. On the one hand, philosophy in the *Epistulae* is purportedly a pursuit for everybody, with the shadowy Lucilius standing in for a generic philosophical subject. In the *Epistulae*, Seneca highlights that those of any status are capable of achieving ethical excellence and practising philosophy (*Ep.* 31.11; *Ep.* 44.2):

> quaerendum est quod non fiat in dies peius, cui non possit obstari. quid hoc est? animus, sed hic rectus, bonus, magnus. quid aliud voces hunc quam deum in corpore humano hospitantem? **hic animus tam in equitem Romanum quam in libertinum, quam in servum potest cadere.**
>
> (You should seek that which will not become worse with time, to which there can be no hindrance. What is this? A mind, but this upright, good, great one. What would you call it other than god dwelling in a human body? This mind can occur as much in an equestrian Roman as in a freedman or in a slave.)

> bona mens **omnibus** patet, **omnes** ad hoc sumus nobiles. nec reicit quemquam philosophia nec eligit: **omnibus** lucet.
>
> (A good mind is available to all; in this sense we are all well-born. Philosophy neither rejects nor chooses anyone; it shines for everyone.)

In the first of these examples Seneca specifies that *equites*, *libertini* and *servi* are equally capable of achieving ethical excellence. In the second, the repetition of *omnibus* (everyone), in juxtaposition with *nec quemquam* (no

one), draws attention to the all-encompassing embrace of philosophy and philosophical excellence. Likewise, in the *ad Marciam*, Seneca makes clear that philosophy is equally accessible to women, as well as men (*ad Marciam* 16.1):[183]

> quis autem dixit naturam maligne cum mulierum ingeniis egisse et virtutes illarum in artum retraxisse? par illis, mihi crede, vigor, par ad honesta, libeat, facultas est; dolorem laboremque ex aequo, si consuevere, patiuntur.
>
> (But who has said that nature has dealt with the qualities of women unfairly and withdrawn their virtues into confinement. Believe me, there is equal strength for them, equal ability for honourable things, if they want. They suffer grief and toil in the same way, if they are accustomed to do so.)

Yet, it is clear that the main readership the *Epistulae* implies is elite and male. Lucilius does not stand in for everybody, but is an everyMAN. He is a member of the Roman elite, the concerns Seneca discusses with him are those of an elite Roman man, such as the relationship one should have with political life, how one should treat their slaves, and what kinds of friendships to engage in.[184]

Moreover, the ethical ideal Seneca encourages Lucilius towards is unmistakeably masculine. The word *virtus*, which refers to ethical excellence,

[183] This quote from the *ad Marciam* suggests the potential for radicalism in Seneca's philosophy; as will be discussed in Chapter 4, this is a radicalism which will be qualified and tempered in order to accord with more traditional and conservative Roman ethical thinking.
[184] To give a few examples of "manly" topics: *amicitia* (3, 9), political career (8.4, 14.7, 14.11, 44.1), business (17.1, 20.7), having wives (9.17, 22.9-10, 59.2), owning enslaved people (47, 107).

is etymologically related to the word *vir*, meaning man. That the Romans were aware of this connection is clear from Varro's *De Lingua Latina* (Varro 5.73):

> Virtus ut Viritus a virilitate.
>
> (*Virtus*, as in *Viritus*, is from *virilitas* (manliness).)

Likewise, Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes* makes the same connection between *virtus* and *vir* (*Tusc. Disp.* 2.43):

> appellata est enim ex viro virtus; viri autem propria maxime est fortitudo, cuius munera duo sunt maxima: mortis dolorisque contemptio. utendum est igitur his, si virtutis compotes vel potius si viri volumus esse, quoniam a viris virtus nomen est mutuata.
>
> (For *virtus* gets its name from man (*vir*). However, courage is most fitting for man, of which there are two greatest functions: scorning death and scorning pain. Therefore we must exercise these, if we want to possess *virtus*, or, rather, if we want to be men, since *virtus* has derived its name from *vir*.)

At the beginning and end of this passage, Cicero notes the etymological derivation of *virtus* from *vir*. He also states that man's particular *virtus* is *fortitudo* (courage) – a statement which is pertinent later in this chapter. A final point worth noting is Cicero's clarification, *potius si viri volumus esse*;

scorning death and pain makes one not only a possessor of *virtus*, but a *vir*, a "real man".[185]

This gendered ethical ideal, this idealised masculinity, is also evident in Seneca's own work. As Gunderson writes (bold emphasis mine):

> 'The hierarchical antithesis between the genders is leveraged in the service of other hierarchies. Of course, men are hardly free from vice in Seneca's world. Indeed, they are the most likely persons to meet his critical eye. But it is also not the case that men are asked to get beyond their gender in order to improve their souls. **They are instead asked to live up to that which is best about virtue itself and in so doing be true to their own virility: the good *uir* evinces *uirtus*.**'[186]

In short, men achieve *virtus* by living up to their gender, by being "real men".[187]

I now give some examples of the virility of the ethical ideal in Seneca's *Epistulae*, in order to illustrate the challenges Seneca faces in integrating *patientia*, with its effeminising potential, into his masculine philosophy. When instructing Lucilius that hard work should not be shunned, Seneca explains that it is not one's reasons for undertaking *labores* which

[185] See discussion of this passage by McDonnell 2006, 24–25; in addition Douglas 1990, 71: 'what distinguishes a "real man" as opposed to woman or child, C. alleges, is physical courage, *fortitudo*, which is therefore the essential "manliness", *virtus*, and the other virtues somehow acquired the same name.'

[186] Gunderson 2015, 88–89.

[187] Note that the "real manliness" of *virtus* and of living up to the term *vir* is not manifested in Atreus and his hypermasculinity. The extreme, sexualised aggression of Atreus is very much at odds with being a *vir* and possessing *virtus*.

makes them ethically good or bad, but the attitude one takes when undertaking them (*Ep.* 31.7):

> **laborem** si non recuses, parum est: posce. 'quid ergo?' inquis '**labor** frivolus et supervacuus et quem humiles causae evocaverunt non est malus?' non magis quam ille qui pulchris rebus inpenditur, quoniam animi est ipsa tolerantia quae se ad dura et aspera hortatur ac dicit, 'quid cessas? **non est viri timere sudorem**'.
>
> (If you were to refuse work, it is too little; demand it. "But why?" You say, "Is worthless and empty work, which insignificant causes demand, not bad?" No more than that which is expended for showy things, since it is that tolerance of the mind, which encourages itself towards harsh and rough things and says: "Why do you delay? It is not characteristic of a man to fear sweat.")

This ethically good attitude, which is identified with *tolerantia*, encourages itself to action via gendered terms; such *tolerantia* is associated with manliness, by the use of the genitive of characteristic *viri*. This self-exhortation to behave like a *vir* (as opposed to a *homo*) carries with it the implication of behaving like a "real man".[188] Such correspondences between

[188] On the specifically moral connotations of the word *vir*, as opposed to *homo*, see Santoro L'Hoir's 1992 study; Santoro L'Hoir 1992, 2: 'Since aristocratic life centered upon loyalty and service to the Republic, *vir* and *femina* became identified with its virtues, especially patriotism, frugality, generosity, and defense of the Senate and the conservative State religion. The nouns, therefore, could be, and were, employed as terms of praise. Conversely, *homo* and *mulier*, because of their use to indicate members of the lower orders, including slaves and freedmen, many of whom were foreigners, came to connote foreign vices, avariciousness, luxury, association with the mob, conspiracy, or participation in an innovative peregrine cult. Consequently, *homo* and *mulier* can represent the antithesis to the oligarchic ideal. Used as terms of abuse, they figure prominently in invective against members of the aristocracy.'

masculinity and hard work, and masculinity and the ethical good are also evident in *Ep.* 86, when Seneca describes the hard work of those of *prisci mores*, of earlier times, such as Scipio Africanus (*Ep.* 86.12):

> nec multum eius intererat an sic lavaretur; veniebat enim ut **sudorem** illic ablueret, non ut **unguentum**. quas nunc quorundam voces futuras credis? 'non invideo Scipioni: vere in exilio vixit qui sic lavabatur.' immo, si scias, non cotidie lavabatur; nam, ut aiunt qui **priscos mores** urbis tradiderunt, brachia et crura cotidie abluebant, quae scilicet sordes opere collegerant, ceterum toti nundinis lavabantur. hoc loco dicet aliquis: 'liquet mihi inmundissimos fuisse'. **quid putas illos oluisse? militiam, laborem, virum.**
>
> (It was not of much interest to him [Scipio] whether he washed in this way, for he came there to wash off sweat, not perfume… What do you believe would now be the words of some? "I do not envy Scipio. He truly lived in exile, he who washed in this way." Indeed, if you knew, he did not wash everyday. For, as those who hand down the ancient habits of the city say, they washed their arms and legs everyday, which obviously gathered dirt from work, and they washed the rest every nine days. At this point someone says: "It is clear to me that they were very unclean." What do you think those men smelt of? Of military service, of hard work, of man.)

As in *Ep.* 31, sweat, here of Scipio, is associated with masculinity;[189] this is particularly clear from the opposition of *sudor* to *unguentum*, particularly

[189] Connection also noted by Edwards 2019, 248 Sweat and masculinity discussed by Bradley 2015.

associated with effeminacy.[190] The moral superiority of the "good old days" is symbolised by their smell (*oluisse*), a conceptualisation foreshadowed by the concern in *Ep.* 86 with bathing, and the contrast of *sudor* and *unguentum*.[191] This smell is summarised in three words: *militia*, *labor*, *vir*. Military service is an undoubtedly masculine pursuit, and *labor* also evokes a sense of manliness, as in *Ep.* 31.7 quoted above.[192] The climax of this tricolon at *vir* solidifies the connections between masculinity and hard work, and masculinity and the ethical good. Unlike men of the present day, men from the "good old days" were "real men" who worked hard and had the smell to show for it. The ethical ideal Seneca presents, therefore, is one in which men fulfil their status as "real men".

These references in Seneca's *Epistulae*, to behaving like a *vir*, a "real man", as the height of morally good conduct in general, find themselves amplified in Seneca's conception of the philosophical excellence of Stoicism as masculine. Seneca's valorisation of Stoicism is particularly evident in how he defines Stoicism in contrast to Epicureanism. In *Ep.* 33, Seneca opposes the masculinity of Stoic philosophy to the reputed effeminacy of Epicurean philosophy (*Ep* 33.1-2):

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[190] On perfume as a sign of men's effeminacy, see Olson 2017, 139–40. See also Wyke 1994, 140–41; Edwards 1993, 68.

[191] Both Henderson 2004, 115 and Rimell 2013, 9 touch on the use of sensory imagery as a mode of transportation to the past.

[192] On the connection between *labor* and *viri*, see speech by Marius in Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum* 85.40: *nam ex parente meo et ex aliis sanctis viris ita accepi, munditias mulieribus, viris laborem convenire* ... (For from my parent and from other moral men, I received the following: that cleanliness is fitting for women, hard work for men …). Discussion by Santoro L'Hoir 1992, 54 on this passage. Edwards 2019, 249 makes a connection between *militia* (military service) and *labor* (agricultural labour) as complementary aspects of the Roman ideal for men.

> desideras his quoque epistulis sicut prioribus adscribi aliquas voces nostrorum procerum. non fuerunt circa flosculos occupati: totus contextus illorum **virilis** est. inaequalitatem scias esse ubi quae eminent notabilia sunt: non est admirationi una arbor ubi in eandem altitudinem tota silva surrexit. eiusmodi vocibus referta sunt carmina, refertae historiae. itaque nolo illas Epicuri existimes esse: publicae sunt et maxime nostrae, sed <in> illo magis adnotantur quia rarae interim interveniunt, quia inexpectatae, quia mirum est fortiter aliquid dici ab homine **mollitiam** professo.
>
> (You desire that other words from the leaders of our school are added to these letters, as to earlier ones. They were not busied about little ornamentations, but their whole fabric is virile. You may know that there is unevenness where there are noteworthy things which stand out. One tree is not a source of admiration where it rises to the same height as a whole wood. Poems are stuffed with sayings of this kind, as are histories. And so, I do not want you to think that those sayings are Epicurus'. They are public and, most of all, ours, but they are more distinguished in that man because they come up rarely and unexpectedly, because it is a wonder that something is said bravely by a man who has acknowledged his softness.)

The contrast made between the philosophical writings of earlier Stoics and Epicurus is between constant excellence and occasionally noteworthy sayings. For this reason, Stoic philosophy is characterised as *virilis*, whereas Epicurus is associated with *mollitia*. Although Seneca does go on to defend the "virtues" of Epicurus' philosophy, it is clear that there is an interdependent definition of Stoicism as masculine and Epicureanism as

effeminate which underlies this section.[193] Seneca's definition of his philosophical school within this gender binary reveals the virility which underpins his conception of the ethical ideal. The gendered framework of Roman ethical evaluation is here transferred to the characterisation of different philosophical schools, as better and worse, as masculine and effeminate.[194] A similar sentiment can be found elsewhere in Seneca's philosophical works (*De Constantia* 1.1):

> tantum inter Stoicos, Serene, et ceteros sapientiam professos interesse quantum **inter feminas et mares** non inmerito dixerim, cum utraque turba ad vitae societatem tantundem conferat, sed altera pars ad obsequendum, altera imperio nata sit. ceteri sapientes molliter et blande, ut fere domestici et familiares medici aegris corporibus, non qua optimum et celerrimum est medentur sed qua licet: Stoici virilem ingressi viam non ut amoena ineuntibus videatur curae habent, sed ut quam primum nos eripiat et in illum editum verticem educat qui adeo extra omnem teli iactum surrexit ut supra fortunam emineat.
>
> (I would say, Serenus, not undeservedly, that there is as much between the Stoics and other seekers of wisdom as there is between male and female, since each crowd brings the same amount to the community of life, but one part is born for submitting, the other for ruling. The other wise men heal softly and sweetly, like household and family doctors to ill bodies, not in the way which is best and quickest, but in the way which is pleasing. Stoics,

[193] On the gendering of Epicurus/Epicureanism as effeminate, see Gordon 2012, which discusses this passage in particular at p. 162.

[194] Likewise at *Ep.* 108.7, a lack of substance is associated with effeminacy; those who are roused by the emotion of a speaker rather than the content of the speech are compared to *Phrygii semiviri*, the Galli, eunuch priests of Cybele.

> having entered the manly way, have no regard for care that the way seems sweet to those coming in, but that it tears us away as quickly as possible and leads us towards that lofty peak which has risen to such an extent beyond all hurling of darts that it stands out above *Fortuna*.)

There are also other instances of this masculine ideal in other parts of Seneca's philosophy. For example, at the start of the *De Providentia*, Seneca characterises the love of the Stoic god as the stern approach of a father, in opposition to the coddling of a mother (*De Providentia* 2.5-6):

> non vides quanto aliter patres, aliter matres indulgeant? illi excitari iubent liberos ad studia obeunda mature, feriatis quoque diebus non patiuntur esse otiosos, et sudorem illis et interdum lacrimas excutiunt; **at matres fovere in sinu**, continere in umbra volunt, numquam contristari, numquam flere, numquam laborare. **patrium** deus habet adversus **bonos viros animum** et illos **fortiter amat** et 'operibus' inquit 'doloribus damnis exagitentur, ut verum colligant robur.'
>
> (Do you not see by how much fathers and mothers differently indulge their children? Fathers order their children to be roused to studies to be done early, and they do not allow them to be idle even on festival days, and they shake out their sweat and sometimes even their tears. But mothers pamper them in their laps, they want to keep them in the shadows, to never be saddened, never cry, never toil. God has the mind of fathers towards good men and he loves them bravely and he says, "Let them be driven by labours, pains, damages, so that they gather true strength.")

Both the Stoic god and men are figured as masculine within Seneca's conception of theology. The Stoic god is said to act like a father (*animum patrium*) in his treatment of men (*bonos viros*). The Stoic god loves *fortiter*, in contrast to mothers' coddling (*fovere*); this adverb *fortiter* is associated with courage, and therefore masculinity.

The *Epistulae*, then, present a masculine ethical ideal to a male philosophical pupil. In addition to these manly concerns, it is worth making more explicit the homosocial aspect of the *Epistulae*. As mentioned above,[195] the *Epistulae* portray the friendship between Seneca and Lucilius; this friendship should be understood not in the modern terms of voluntary affiliative relationships, but, rather, in terms of the Roman concept of *amicitia*,[196] the social bonds between Roman citizen men. In other words, Seneca's discussion of masculine *virtus* with his male addressee is part of a practice of manly *amicitia*; certainly *amicitia* between women is of little or no interest or concern to elite Roman male writers Moreover, in presenting a conversation between men about a masculine philosophical ideal, the *Epistulae* show how men can relate to each other and form masculinity cooperatively. This is in sharp contrast to the highly adversative relationship and masculinity we saw presented in the *Thyestes*. Where the *Thyestes* shows an aggressive and hostile approach to masculinity and masculine relationships, with Atreus and Thyestes at odds and in contest for superior masculinity, the *Epistulae* portrays the cooperation and collaboration of men who develop their masculinity alongside each other.

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[195] See p. 110.

[196] On the Roman concept of *amicitia*, and its political importance, see Konstan 1997, 122–48.

It is clear so far, therefore, that Seneca's philosophy and the *Epistulae Morales* are committed to the manliness and virility of *VIRtus*. The *Epistulae* provide suitable ground for analysing masculinity within Senecan philosophy, from a generic and philosophical point of view. Within this masculine-directed setting, *patientia* presents a threat, in its potential passivity and effeminacy. The following section provides some preliminary discussion of *patientia* and its associations.

4 *Patientia* as Ethically Evaluated Inaction

In its most general sense, the verb *patior*, etymologically related to *patientia*, has a range of meanings concerning, for example: to experience, endure, tolerate, suffer, allow.[197] The noun *patientia*, correspondingly, is the quality possessed by those *patientes*, or the act of endurance (particularly of unpleasant things).[198] What is key amongst these basic meanings of *patior* and *patientia* is the idea of inaction, of being acted upon, rather than acting. As Kaster writes: 'Most obviously, most literally, and most generally, *patientia* is the quality entailed in being the recipient, not the generator, of action or experience… the opposition, of course, is among the most familiar binary simplifications of life, framing existence as either active or passive, as a matter of doing or being done to.'[199] That the base meaning of *patior*

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[197] *OLD* 1309-10 s.v. "*patior*". *TLL* 10.1.1 s.v. "*patior*" 719.46-51: *patior* is defined generally as '*sive sustinendo sive subeundo sive sinendo ferre*' and corresponds to the Greek πάσχω.
[198] *OLD* 1309 s.v. "*patientia*" 1 'ability or willingness to endure', 2a 'ability or willingness to endure hardship, pain'. *TLL* 10.1.1 s.v. "*patientia*" 709.42-4 '*de patientia potius eorum, qui fere fortiter, voluntarie, constanter sive sustinent mala, incommoda, res adversas sim. sive perseverant in laboribus, actionibus arduis, molestis sim*'.
[199] Kaster 2002, 135.

involves inactivity is clear from its use as an oppositional complement to *ago* and *facio*.[200]

Closer consideration of the meanings of *patior* and *patientia* raises questions about the ethical placement of the concept of inactivity. On the one hand, the inaction encoded within *patientia* seems oppositional to masculinity, and so is evaluated, in Roman gendered conceptualisations of ethics, as ethically negative. Demonstrative of this are the meanings of *patior* and *patientia* which refer, in sexual contexts, to being the passive, penetrated partner – [201] on which I say more later. On the other hand, the quality of *patientia* is often listed alongside positive moral qualities (e.g. *continentia*, *fortitudo*, *perseverantia*, *virtus*);[202] indeed, its identification with or as part of *virtus* seems to put it firmly on the ethically positive side of the scale. The concept of *patientia* is, therefore, in need of further examination.

The complexities of the term *patientia* have been discussed by Kaster.[203] Kaster's explanation of *patientia* forms a starting point for my own discussion of *patientia* in Seneca. The key observation on *patientia* made by Kaster is how it is embedded within a discourse concerning power relations and hierarchy:

> '[How much to tolerate] was a crucial question for the men who were neither at the top nor at the bottom of the social pyramid, neither

[200] E.g. Horace *Odes* 3.24.43; Livy 24.38.2, 3.53.9.

[201] *OLD* 1309 s.v. "*patior*" 2c '(of a female) to submit to or experience sexual intercourse with'. *OLD* 1309 s.v. "*patientia*" 3b 'submission to sexual intercourse (by prostitutes or catamites)'. Examples also given at *TLL* 10.1.1 s.v. "*patior*" 731.64-732.25.

[202] To give but one example from Cicero's *De Finibus*: *virtutis, magnitudinis animi, patientiae, fortitudinis fomentis dolor mitigari solet* (Pain is accustomed to be lightened by the alleviations of *virtus*, strength of soul, *patientia* and courage). For further examples, see *TLL* 10.1.1 s.v. "*patientia*" 709.18-35.

[203] Kaster 2002.

possessing the vast forbearance that the most powerful could afford nor able to afford the infinite passivity that was the lot of the infinitely powerless. Such men had to find a hard path between the different but equally unacceptable models of the female and the servile.'[204]

In short, the large variety of meanings of *patior* and *patientia* is a result of the potential to ethically evaluate inaction as either positive or negative, as indicative of either self-control or passivity. In this way, *patior* and *patientia* function within the activity-passivity framework of Roman ethical thought as indicators of one's position within hierarchies of gender and social status. Just as sexual roles, of penetrator and penetrated, do not map straightforwardly onto masculine and effeminate, the inaction represented by *patior* and *patientia* is not evaluated straightforwardly as morally negative. Williams, for example, highlights how, within the activity-passivity framework of Roman ethical thought, labels of sexual role are concerned less with actual sexual acts than with assertions of gender and social status, and an excess of activity can be viewed as a lack of self-control and thus a failure of masculinity.[205]

In the same way as words of sexual aggression extend beyond the sexual to indicate power relations – what Foucault refers to as 'the principle of isomorphism between sexual relations and social relations' –[206] the term *patientia* crosses similar conceptual boundaries between the sexual and the social to make sense of hierarchical relations. Whilst *patientia* is less sexually

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[204] Kaster 2002, 144.
[205] C. A. Williams 1999, 103–76, cf. e.g. Walters 1997, in which a much more straightforward equivalence of sexual activity and masculinity is presented.
[206] Foucault 1985, 215. The hierarchising power of statements of sexual aggression has been discussed in Chapter One.

direct than words like *irrumatio*, the same crossover between sexual activity/passivity and social hierarchy occurs, especially at the negative end of the *patientia* spectrum. Yet at the positive end of the *patientia* spectrum, there is a different aspect of *patientia*, which it shares with *clementia*: namely that it indicates one's superior power in showing restraint where there is the potential to harm another person.

Here, it is also important to note that *patientia* is most applicable to a particular social class, to men amongst the elite classes, but not those at the highest echelons of power, whose absolute power places them beyond, e.g., bodily suffering. In contrast to the elite everyman discussed in this chapter, Seneca's Atreus (discussed in Chapter One) is precluded by his kingly status from the kind of submissive *patientia* to suffering which Seneca discusses in the *Epistulae* – at least in theory. From the angle of the male readership of the *Epistulae*, the concept of *patientia*, as masculine restraint, will be shown to be a much more accessible (and desirable) response to external, uncontrollable circumstances than the hypermasculine, unconstrained actions of Seneca's Atreus.

Such multivalence of *patior*/*patientia* is clear from the cases in which *patientia* is applied unproblematically, cases in which the position of the *patiens* within social hierarchy is not contestable. To summarise Kaster. On the one hand, *patientia* can be considered as negative inaction. The quality of *patientia* in enslaved people is what makes them slave-like; by possessing no autonomy of their own, slaves are *patientes*, subordinate to a master. Likewise, women are (or ought to be) passive to their husbands, with especially sexual connotations. On the other hand, *patientia* can be considered

as positive endurance or tolerance. Women are considered *impatientes* in their inability to endure passions. Humans' endurance of the harshness of the natural world figures as *patientia*. A superior asserts his greater power through *patientia* of injuries done to him by a subordinate. In summary these terms, *patior* and *patientia*, carry with them implications for the gender and social status of their subject.

In addition, *patientia* figures as a Roman and Stoic virtue, as a kind of "aggressive passivity" in situations where there is no option other than endurance and acceptance of pain or suffering. Kaster explains this succinctly: '*patientia* says not only "I am" but also "I choose," against experience that seems to threaten existence and nullify choice.'[207] It is in this sense that Valerius Maximus aligns *patientia* with *fortitudo* (3.3.pr.)

> egregiis virorum pariter ac feminarum operibus **fortitudo** se oculis hominum subiecit **patientiamque** in medium procedere hortata est, non sane infirmioribus radicibus stabilitam aut minus generoso spiritu abundantem, sed ita similitudine iunctam, ut cum ea vel ex ea nata videri possit.
>
> (By the excellent deeds of men and women equally, bravery lays itself before the eyes of humans and encourages *patientia* to advance into the open, which certainly has not been fixed on weaker roots and does not overflow with less noble spirit, but which has been joined with bravery in similarity in such a way that it could seem to have been born with it or from it.)

[207] Kaster 2002, 137.

The connection between *fortitudo* and *patientia* is apparent in the fact that *fortitudo* draws out *patientia*, as almost a prerequisite to *patientia*. Valerius takes care to emphasise the equivalence of the two qualities. Underlying the specification through negatives (*non infirmioribus radicibus*; *minus generoso spritu*) that it is a quality equal to (or literally no lesser than) bravery (*fortitudo*) is the potential that *patientia* could be considered lesser than bravery. The *exempla* Valerius reports in this section are those who endure physical pain (e.g. Mucius Scaevola who burns his own hand in a fire, Zeno's, Anaxarchus' and Theodotus' torture). As we will see, Mucius is a figure also used by Seneca to demonstrate the combination of *patientia* and *fortitudo*.[208]

Like Valerius, Cicero, in the second book of the *Tusculanae Disputationes*, which focuses on enduring pain, also aligns *fortitudo* and *patientia* (*Tusc. Disp.* 2.33, 2.43):

> non ego **dolorem dolorem** esse nego – cur enim **fortitudo** desideraretur? – sed eum opprimi dico **patientia**, si modo est aliqua **patientia**.
>
> (I do not deny that pain is pain – for why would bravery be desirable otherwise? – but I say that pain is pressed down by *patientia*, only if there is some *patientia*.)

> inter omnis igitur hoc constat, nec doctos homines solum sed etiam indoctos, **virorum** esse **fortium** et magnanimorum et **patientium** et humana vincentium toleranter **dolorem pati**.

[208] Below, p.164.

> (This is agreed amongst everyone, not only learned people but also unlearned, that it is characteristic of men who are brave, magnanimous, enduring, and conquering human things to suffer pain tolerantly.)

In both passages, the object of *patientia* is pain (*dolor*). From the first passage, it is clear that *patientia* of pain is a result of *fortitudo*. By figuring this *patientia* as *fortitudo*, a form of bravery, inactivity becomes a form of resistance and the subject is thereby valorised. This valorisation becomes the more explicit masculinisation of *patientia* in the second passage here, where it is a mark of masculinity to undergo *patientia* of pain, emphasised by the clear distinction between *homines* and *viri*. All people (*homines*) agree on the fact that it is characteristic of men (*viri*) to endure pain; there is a contrast between these two nouns, the former referring to people in general, the latter to men, particularly idealised, noble, virtuous men – as discussed above.[209] Moreover, these men are described as *fortis* (brave), another indication of their masculinity.

5 *Patientia* as a Stoic Virtue

Where Valerius Maximus' work is written from the perspective of a traditionally Roman understanding of *virtus*, the interlocutors of Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes* have a more recognisably Stoic outlook. It is clear, therefore, that *patientia* is considered a virtue not only within a Roman context, but also within the context of Stoic philosophy. As I now show, this ethical *patientia*, or endurance, is also evident in earlier Stoic thought. In the

[209] See p. 116 n. 188.

second half of his biography of Zeno, Diogenes Laertius notes some of the philosophical positions of the Greek Stoics. On virtues, Diogenes writes (7.126):

> κεφαλαιοῦσθαί θ' ἑκάστην τῶν ἀρετῶν περί τι ἴδιον κεφάλαιον, οἷον τὴν **ἀνδρείαν περὶ τὰ ὑπομενητέα**, τὴν φρόνησιν περὶ τὰ ποιητέα καὶ μὴ καὶ οὐδέτερα· ὁμοίως τε καὶ τὰς ἄλλας περὶ τὰ οἰκεῖα τρέπεσθαι.
>
> ([They say] each of the virtues characterises itself around some particular topic: **as courage around things to be endured**, practical judgement around things to be done or not to be done or neither. Similarly, the other virtues are concerned with their own matters.)

What is key to observe in this passage is the association of the virtue of courage with endurance. Plutarch writes similarly of Zeno (*De Virt. Mor.* 441A):

> ἔοικε δὲ καὶ Ζήνων εἰς τοῦτό πως ὑποφέρεσθαι ὁ Κιτιεύς, ὁριζόμενος τὴν φρόνησιν ἐν μὲν ἀπονεμητέοις δικαιοσύνην ἐν δ' αἱρετέοις σωφροσύνην ἐν δ' **ὑπομενετέοις ἀνδρείαν**.
>
> (And Zeno of Citium seemed to be carried towards this in the same way, determining practical judgement in things to be assigned to be justice, in things to be chosen to be moderation, in things to be endured to be courage.)

The same word, ὑπομενετέος, is used in Plutarch's account, and again this endurance is associated with courage (ἀνδρεία).[210] Plutarch also reports Cleanthes' similar words on the subject (*De Stoic. Rep.* 1034D):[211]

> 'ἡ δ' ἰσχὺς αὕτη καὶ τὸ κράτος, ὅταν μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς φανεῖσιν ἐμμενετέοις ἐγγένηται, ἐγκράτειά ἐστιν, ὅταν δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς **ὑπομενετέοις**, **ἀνδρεία**·
> (This force and strength, when it arises in matters seeming to need persistence, is self-control, when it arises in matters needing to be endured, it is courage.)

Although these accounts by Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch are not specifically concerned with the relationship between courage and endurance, they do highlight, through the attribution of similar ideas to both Zeno and Cleanthes, the fact that endurance featured in Stoicism, as part of the virtue of courage, ἀνδρεία.

6 *Patientia* in Seneca

Both ethically negative and ethically positive meanings of *patientia* occur in Seneca's writings. On the one hand, *patientia* is used in descriptions of those who transgress sexual norms as transgressive of ethical norms; on the other hand, Seneca attributes *patientia* to the Stoic sage as a *virtus*.

[210] The close association of the idea of endurance with the Greek ἀνδρεία points to its masculinity. Like the Latin *virtus*, the Greek ἀνδρεία is similarly gendered, literally meaning "manliness".

[211] Although, in this work, Plutarch's discussion is on the contradictions between different Stoic philosophers, the main takeaway for this chapter is that endurance forms a part of the conception of ethical goodness, via courage.

The association of women with *patientia* is clear in *Ep.* 95, which expresses horror at the moral corruption of women, as they transgress their gender and act like men, staying up late, drinking heavily, and wrestling.[212] In addition, women are described as sexually transgressive (*Ep.* 95.21):

> libidine vero ne maribus quidem cedunt: **pati natae** (di illas deaeque male perdant!) adeo perversum commentae genus inpudicitiae viros ineunt.
>
> (Indeed, they match even men in their lust. Although born to be passive – may gods and goddesses ruin them! – they devise a perverse kind of immodesty and penetrate men.)

As Adams notes: '*Patior* was the technical term of the passive role in intercourse.'[213] Therefore, whilst women are born to be sexually passive – *pati natae* – they transgress by taking an active role, indicated by the active verb *ineunt* governing the accusative *viros*. On the flipside, men who are sexually passive are equally morally base. In his account of Hostius Quadra in the *Naturales Quaestiones*, Seneca focuses on Hostius' performative and spectacular passivity, described with the words *patior* and *patientia*.[214] To take just one example (*NQ* 1.16.5):

> nonnumquam inter marem et feminam distributus et toto corpore **patientiae** expositus spectabat **nefanda**.

[212] On which see Gazzarri 2014.
[213] Adams 1982, 189–90. Quote from 189.
[214] Hostius is becoming a recurring character; for more on his effeminate doings, see discussion in Chapter One (pp. 87-8).

(Sometimes, spread out between a man and a woman and exposed to passivity with his whole body, he watched the unspeakable things.)

Such *patientia* by Hostius is clearly shameful, aligned with *nefanda*. Moreover, Hostius' *patientia* is clearly bodily (*toto corpore*) and sexual. The emasculating aspect of *patientia* is also clear from a passage in the *De Providentia* (3.13):

> quanto magis huic invidendum est quam illis quibus gemma ministratur, quibus exoletus omnia **pati** doctus exsectae virilitatis aut dubiae suspensam auro nivem diluit!
>
> (By how much more is this man [Socrates taking his own life] to be envied than those men to whom a jewelled cup is presented, for whom an *exoletus*, taught to suffer everything, with virility either cut off or doubtful, mixes snow suspended in a gold cup.)

Here, Seneca describes those whose positions are less preferred than that of Socrates taking his own life, whose luxurious lifestyles would, according to popular opinion, be preferred. The figure of the *exoletus* serves to emphasise luxuriousness, alongside the bejewelled and golden drinking vessels and the rare commodity of snow or ice. Although it is not always clear what kind of person *exoletus* refers to, here Seneca seems to be describing a eunuch or an effeminate man (*exsectae virilitatis aut dubiae*).[215] The effeminacy of the *exoletus* is also conveyed through the phrase *omnia pati doctus*, which

[215] On the figure of the *exoletus*, see Butrica 2005, 225–30.

indicates his sexual passivity. Here, therefore, we get the coincidence of *patientia* and emasculation; the *exoletus*, who is well-versed in *patientia*, lacks *virilitas*. Therefore, the gendered aspect of *patientia* is clear: the *patientia* which is inherent for women is shameful for men; the active role which is appropriate for men is shocking when taken up by women.

And in the *De Vita Beata*, Seneca compares the effeminate reputation yet "noble teachings" of Epicureanism to a man in female dress (*De Vita Beata* 13.3):

> hoc tale est, quale vir fortis stolam indutus; constat tibi pudicitia, virilitas salva est, nulli corpus tuum **turpi patientiae** vacat, sed in manu tympanum est!
>
> (This is just like a strong man dressed in a *stola*: your chastity remains, your virility is safe, your body is free from any base *patientia*, but there is a tambourine in your hand!)

Whilst the man dressed in women's clothing appears to be effeminate, his *pudicitia* and *virilitas* remain intact. The adjective *fortis* serves to emphasise the masculinity of the *vir*, in juxtaposition with the *stola*, a garment worn specifically by women. Alongside the abstract qualities possessed by the *vir*, *pudicitia* and *virilitas*, his body is free from *turpis patientia*. Whilst the negative meaning of *patientia* as suffering is certainly possible here – to denote bodily suffering – within the context of gendered behaviours (with *virilitas* present and *patientia* absent), it seems much more likely that, in this case, *patientia* refers to an act of sexual penetration.

Yet, *patientia* and *patior* are also attributed positively to the Stoic sage, as a virtue. For example, in the *De Providentia* (2.3-4):

> athletas videmus, quibus **virium** cura est, cum fortissimis quibusque confligere et exigere ab iis per quos certamini praeparantur ut totis contra ipsos **viribus** utantur; caedi se uexarique **patiuntur** et, si non inveniunt singulos pares, pluribus simul obiciuntur. marcet sine adversario **virtus**: tunc apparet quanta sit quantumque polleat, **cum quid possit patientia ostendit**.
>
> (We see that athletes, who are concerned with their strength, contend with whoever is strongest and demand from those, through whom they are prepared for contests, that they use their whole strength against them. They endure being cut and injured and, if they do not find individuals equal to them, they are set before many men at the same time. *Virtus* shrivels without an opponent. Then it is clear how much it is and how much it thrives, when it shows through *patientia* what it is capable of.)

Like athletes who display their strength (*vis*) through testing against opponents (including enduring blows), the philosophical subject displays his *virtus* through testing against opponents (likewise including *patientia*). It seems, therefore, *patientia* is a requirement for the upkeep of *virtus*, as shown by the analogy to athletes, whose strength requires testing and training. The aural similarity of *vis* and *virtus* strengthens this analogy. Likewise, in *De Providentia* 4.12, *patientia* is training, to strengthen the philosopher against *Fortuna*.

> verberat nos et lacerat fortuna: **patiamur**. non est saevitia, certamen est, quod <quo> saepius adierimus, **fortiores** erimus: solidissima corporis pars est quam frequens usus agitavit. praebendi fortunae sumus, ut contra illam ab ipsa duremur: paulatim nos sibi pares faciet, contemptum periculorum adsiduitas periclitandi dabit.
>
> (Fortune strikes and mangles us: let us suffer. It is not savagery, it is a contest – the more often we approach it, the braver we will be. The most solid part of the body is that which frequent use rouses. We should be given over to Fortune, so that we are hardened against her by her herself. Gradually she will make us equal to herself; the continual occurrence of being in danger will grant contempt of dangers.)

Undertaking *patientia* is a contest with *Fortuna*, by which one is made *fortior*. Although *virtus* is not explicitly mentioned, *fortis* does make an appearance – an adjective of courage, therefore associated with masculinity. Not only is *patientia* associated with courage, masculinity and *virtus*, it is also listed by Seneca amongst other *virtutes*.[216]

In short, Seneca uses the term *patientia* in both morally positive and morally negative ways. The morally negative senses are those particularly associated with effeminacy, excess and indulgence. Yet, at the same time, *patientia* is not just a morally positive quality, but one associated with the ethical pinnacle of *virtus*, a concept derived from ideas of proper masculinity. With this framework in mind, the remainder of this chapter focuses on

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[216] E.g. *De Vita Beata* 25.6: *An dubium est quin escendat nitatur obluctetur* ***patientia fortitudo perseverantia*** *et quaecumque alia duris opposita* ***virtus*** *est et fortunam subigit?* (Is it doubted that *patientia*, courage, perseverance and any other *virtus*, which is pitted against hard things and drives down *fortuna*, ascend and press forward and contend?)

Seneca's pedagogic strategies for dealing with *patientia* in the *Epistulae*, and how Seneca rehabilitates *patientia* for *virtus* and masculinity.[217]

7 *Patientia* in the *Epistulae Morales*

Of 132 instances of *patientia* or *patior* in the *Epistulae Morales*, the vast majority are concerned more with ideas of "suffering" or "enduring" than the more morally neutral idea of "allowing".[218] With *patior/patientia* so pervasive throughout the collection (as shown by Figure 2.3, below), and often used fairly inconsequentially, it is necessary to focus on areas which allow us to get to *patientia*, to understand how Seneca conceives of *patientia*. The graph below shows a sharp increase in frequency of *patior*/*patientia* per letter around *Ep.* 65. I give a more detailed graph of *Ep.* 53-80 (Books 6-9), to take a closer look at this area (see Figure 2.4). For this chapter, it is important to note that there are five instances of *patientia* in 65, seven in 66 and nine in 67. The most instances of *patior*/*patientia* in a single letter are in *Ep.* 74, with ten. Whilst these statistics are potentially superficial on their own, they do indicate some possibilities for finding out how Seneca deals with *patientia*. This potential is particularly borne out in *Ep.* 66 and 67, which centre on the counterintuitive idea that suffering is desirable.

[217] This eventual conceptualisation of *patientia*, as manly passive suffering and self-restraint, is very much in contrast with the hypermasculine excess and lack of restraint displayed in Seneca's *Thyestes*, discussed in Chapter One.

[218] There is obviously some overlap in these categories, and statistics can depend largely on interpretation of a particular passage. Where there is any ambiguity, where there could be any sense of a power differential being described, I have opted to include these instances under "suffering / enduring" rather than "allowing". Using this system of categorisation, only 25 of the 135 instances are concerned with only the idea of "allowing".

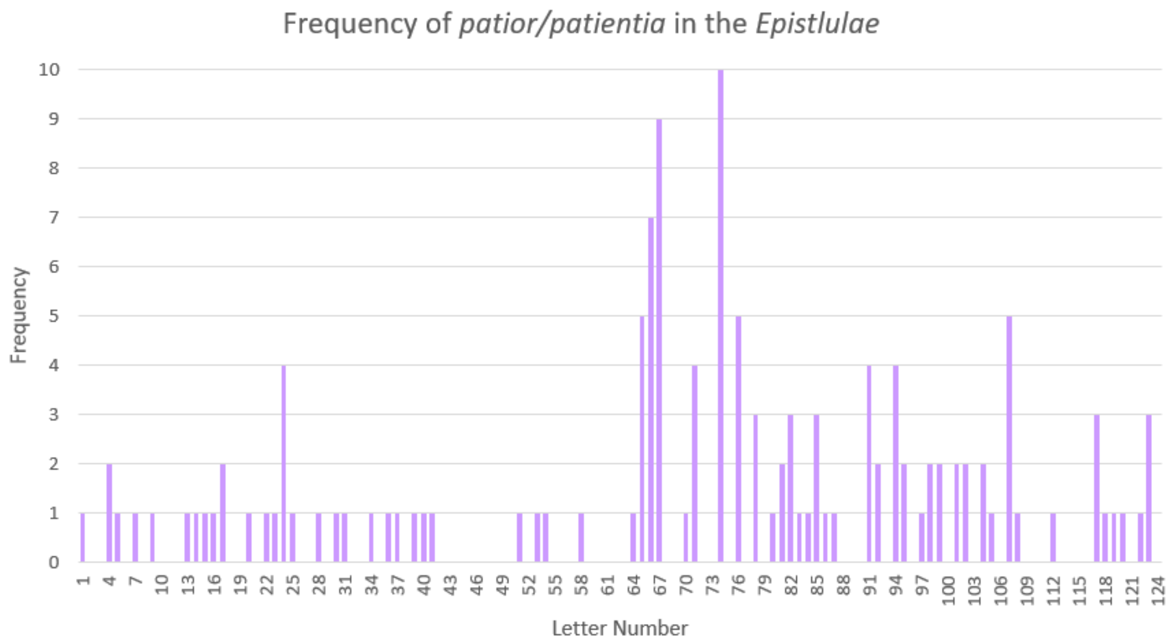

Figure 2.3: Graph showing the frequency of patior/patientia *in the* Epistulae Morales

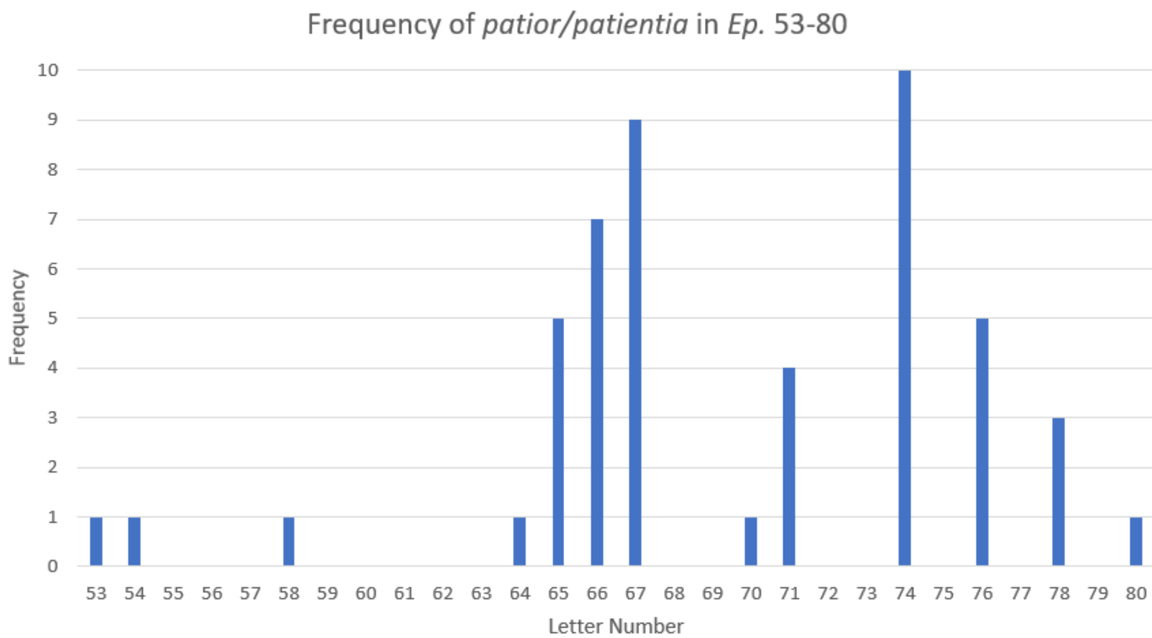

Figure 2.4: Graph showing the frequency of patior/patientia *in* Ep. 53-80

Before discussion of these *Epistulae*, it is worth noting that these particular letters occur fairly late on in the collection as it survives – over halfway through. Prior to *Ep.* 64, *patientia*, suffering and endurance are rarely central topics of discussion. The most prominent discussion of *patientia*

before *Ep.* 64 is in *Ep.* 9, a letter which highlights the difficulties of construing Greek philosophical ideas in Latin. This letter gives us some indications that this word, *patientia*, is not straightforward to grasp (9.1-2):

> hoc obicitur Stilboni ab Epicuro et iis quibus summum bonum visum est animus **inpatiens**. in ambiguitatem incidendum est, si exprimere **ἀπάθειαν** uno verbo cito voluerimus et inpatientiam dicere; poterit enim contrarium ei quod significare volumus intellegi. **nos eum volumus dicere qui respuat omnis mali sensum: accipietur is qui nullum ferre possit malum.** vide ergo num satius sit aut invulnerabilem animum dicere aut animum extra omnem patientiam positum. hoc inter nos et illos interest: noster sapiens vincit quidem incommodum omne sed sentit, illorum ne sentit quidem.
>
> (This [that the wise man is self-sufficient] is set by Epicurus against Stilbo and against those for whom the greatest good seems to be an unfeeling mind. It must fall into ambiguity, if we want to express *apatheia* in just one verb and to say *inpatientia*; for that word could be understood as the opposite to what we want to mean. We want to talk about him who spurns feeling anything bad. But it will be received as he who cannot bear anything bad. Consider, therefore, whether it is more fitting to speak either of an invulnerable mind or a mind set beyond all suffering. This is the difference between us and them: our wise man conquers everything troublesome but still feels it, but the wise man of those men does not even feel.)

The precise details of the philosophical argument are not in themselves relevant to the larger point in question here. What is more important, for my

purposes, is the fact that Seneca draws attention to the difficulties of pinning down the meaning of *(im)patientia*. As Seneca explains, the word *impatientia* can refer either to not being affected by bad things or an inability to endure bad things.[219] In accordance, *patientia* has a similar range of ambiguous meanings: either suffering (i.e. being at the whim of bad things) or enduring bad things (i.e. being persistent and unaffected in the face of bad things). In other words, it is context that ultimately determines meaning. Extrapolating from this, without the necessary foundations, the Stoic *proficiens* will not be able to fully understand *patientia*.

After addressing the difficulties of (*im*)*patientia* in *Ep.* 9, Seneca leaves *patientia* (as a central topic of discussion) unmentioned until *Ep.* 64-67. This is, I suggest, one of his pedagogical strategies for dealing with this complex idea. The concept of *patientia* is not fully explained until later in the collection, when the Stoic *proficiens* is appropriately equipped to deal with it.[220] My discussion of *Ep.* 64-67 involves two strands which work concurrently towards communication about *patientia*: firstly, the examination of the content of the concept, i.e. what *patientia* is, as Seneca explains it to the reader; secondly, the ways in which Seneca communicates what *patientia* is, how he educates his reader in *patientia*. It will become apparent, through the pedagogical strategies Seneca uses, that *patientia* is a more advanced

[219] See also *OLD* 840 s.v. "*impatientia*" 1 'inability or unwillingness to endure', 2 'freedom from emotion, impassivity'.
[220] A similar approach is taken by Gloyn 2017 in her discussion of the family in the *Epistulae*; quoting p. 63: 'While the family is practically absent from the early letters, it eventually moves from playing a role in cautionary tales to illustrating truths of Stoic doctrine. In this way, on a microcosmic level it elucidates how the collection handles external factors in general. By this careful method of removal and gradual reintroduction, Seneca gives the family its proper place in the ethical thinking of a Stoic *proficiens*.'

concept, for a reader further along their philosophical journey.[221] After analysing *Ep.* 64-67, I briefly discuss the sequence up to 74 (the letter with the most *patientia*), showing how Seneca continues to engage with the concept of *patientia* after its primary delineation in *Ep.* 64-67.

At the heart of this chapter, and at the heart of Seneca's *Epistulae* as they survive, are *Ep.* 64, 65, 66 and 67. The main topic discussed amongst these four letters is "the good", and how Lucilius himself can achieve it. These letters are part of Book 7 of Seneca's *Epistulae*, running from *Ep.* 63-69.[222] This book represents a significant point of pedagogical shift. Anticipated by *Ep.* 58, a letter which discusses Platonic metaphysics, Stoic responses, and the value of such philosophical debates/discussions,[223] philosophical complexity is increased in this book, which features further debate about Platonic (and Aristotelian) ideas, as well as important philosophical arguments about the nature of the Stoic good.

The four letters which are my focus are thematically unified by their metaethical outlook; Lucilius is not told what he should do, but how he can work out for himself what he should do. And this development of Lucilius the pupil is reflected in the other letters in the book. *Ep.* 68 and 69 both concern Lucilius' retirement from politics and withdrawal from public life, which he has now decided on, but to which, in earlier letters, Seneca had been encouraging him.[224] A final uniting aspect of the book is *Fortuna*, a fairly

[221] As Wagoner 2014, 260 argues of logic within the *Epistulae*: 'Only when one has come to have the right dispositions will one be able to understand the importance of advanced theory.'
[222] In discussing the structure of a book of the *Epistulae*, I follow in the footsteps of Soldo 2022, whose commentary on Book Two discusses how Seneca's teaching across the course of the book 'is meant to shake up Lucilius and get him out of his "comfort zone"' (p. xxi). For further on the book structure of the *Epistulae Morales*, see Soldo 2022, xvii–xxi.
[223] In depth discussion of these letters can be found in Inwood 2007a.
[224] E.g. *Ep.* 17, 18, 22.

constant presence throughout all of Seneca's *Epistulae*, but an important presence to note, especially due to the externality of circumstances which require *patientia*.

I begin by summarising the content of these letters and mapping my analysis of these letters, before moving on to discuss each of these letters in detail.

- ***Ep.* 64** advises Lucilius on the importance of philosophical ancestry for the contemporary philosopher; Lucilius should be learning by reading and engaging with earlier philosophers (notably male). This metaphilosophical advice – how Lucilius should do philosophy – indicates Lucilius' more advanced status. Within this letter, Seneca also touches upon the concept of *patientia*, as a way of displaying *virtus*, which is also identified with militaristic conquering. These identifications, which could seem rather contradictory, especially to an uncooperative reader, are introduced in this letter for development in subsequent letters.
- ***Ep.* 65** reports in detail a debate on causes, and argues for the relevance of physics to understanding ethics. After outlining the theories of causes of Aristotle and Plato, Seneca responds to a complaint he puts into the mouth of Lucilius, that physics is just high-minded distraction from the realities of self-improvement. Lucilius' complaint in this letter, that Seneca is not doing philosophy properly, is another indicator of his philosophical progression. Seneca responds to Lucilius by explaining that understanding the world allows us to

understand our own position within the world, therefore to understand what is and is not important – allowing the true freedom of the mind (as opposed to the servitude to suffering of the body). Just as matter is subject to god, the body is subject to the mind – relations described by the verb *patior*. This concept of *patientia* is shown, therefore, to be pervasive throughout the universe, and not just applicable to humans (as it was used in *Ep.* 64). The *patientia* of individuals is integral to *Ep.* 66 and 67.

- ***Ep.* 66** argues for the equality of all virtues and all goods. Seneca explains that primary, secondary and tertiary goods are all equal, insofar as the *virtus* they display. He then goes on to argue that the *patientia* of injuries is perhaps even preferable, since it allows one to actively practise and display one's *virtus*.
- ***Ep.* 67** addresses the question of whether pain is desirable [if "the good" is exhibited in pain, and if "the good" is desirable, then is pain desirable?]. The subjects of the previous three letters – the encouragement of earlier philosophers, the re-evaluation of things from studying physics, the equality of all goods – culminates in Seneca's discussion in this letter. This is a letter which highlights the relationship between *patientia* and gender, and between *patientia* and *fortitudo* – the latter of which Seneca takes pains to hammer home. In this sense, together *Ep.* 66 and 67 form a kind of defence of inaction in response to one's circumstances, via the ethically good sense of *patientia*.

In summary, *Ep.* 64 is the first instance where *patientia* is suggested to be a *virtus*. In *Ep.* 65, the reader learns about *patientia* on a cosmic scale, making the concept seem more attractive on an individual level. *Ep.* 66 defends the equality of suffering (as *patientia*) as a display of *virtus*, in comparison with other, more preferable goods. *Ep.* 67 then takes this idea further, arguing that, since suffering (as *patientia*) is formally a part of *virtus*, it is actually more desirable than not suffering. The lengths Seneca goes to in order to explain *patientia*, in addition to the reader's implied philosophical progress by this point, demonstrates that it is a highly complex philosophical idea.

8 *Ep.* 64: (Re-)Introducing *Patientia*

I begin from *Ep.* 64. Although there is only a single instance of *patior/patientia* in this letter, it is an important instance to analyse for understanding how Seneca communicates about *patientia.* This occurrence of *patior* starts to set up its alignment with *virtus*. In *Ep.* 64, Seneca teaches Lucilius about philosophical ancestry – how he should engage with the work of earlier philosophers. There are two main ideas which are relevant to my discussion of *patientia* and *virtus* within *Ep.* 64-67: firstly, that Seneca's encouragement of Lucilius to engage with his philosophical ancestry demonstrates Lucilius' philosophical development; and secondly, that Seneca's alignment of *virtus* and *patientia* foreshadows later discussion of *patientia*. In order to show a reader's route through *Ep.* 64, I discuss relevant passages in the order in which they appear in the letter.

Seneca begins this letter, like many others, anecdotally, with a report of a social gathering with his friends and Lucilius, where the writings of

Quintus Sextius were read. Seneca glorifies Sextius; he is singular amongst all philosophers in the exhortatory energy of his writing (*Ep.* 64.2-5):

> [§2] lectus est deinde liber Quinti Sextii patris, **magni**, si quid mihi credis, **viri**, et licet neget, Stoici. [§3] quantus in illo, di boni, vigor est, quantum animi! hoc non in omnibus philosophis invenies: quorundam scripta clarum habentium nomen exanguia sunt. instituunt, disputant, cavillantur, non faciunt animum quia non habent: cum legeris Sextium, dices, **'vivit, viget, liber est, supra hominem est**, dimittit me plenum ingentis fiduciae'. [§4] in qua positione mentis sim cum hunc lego fatebor tibi: **libet omnis casus provocare, libet exclamare, 'quid cessas, fortuna? congredere: paratum vides'.** illius animum induo qui quaerit ubi se experiatur, **ubi virtutem suam ostendat**,
>
> > spumantemque dari pecora inter inertia votis
> >
> > optat aprum aut fulvum descendere monte leonem.
>
> [§5] **libet aliquid habere quod vincam, cuius patientia exercear.**
>
> (Then the book was read of Quintus Sextius the elder, if you believe me, a great man, and, although he denies it, a Stoic. How much force there is in that man, good gods, how much spirit! You will not find this in all philosophers. The writings of some men who are well-known are bloodless. They set up, they argue, they quibble, they do not make a spirit since they do not have one. When you have read Sextius, you will say: he is alive, he flourishes, he is free, he is above humans, he sends me away full of great assurance. I will confess to you in what state of mind I am when I read this man. It is pleasing to call forth all situations, it is pleasing to shout: "Why

> do you yield, *Fortuna*? Fight me! You see I am prepared." I don the mind of that man who seeks where he can test himself, where he can display his *virtus*: 'amongst the untrained flocks he desires with prayers that a foaming boar be given or that a tawny lion come down from the mountain.' It is pleasing to have something which I will conquer, by the endurance of which I will be trained.)

In his praise of Sextius, Seneca describes Sextius as a *magnus vir*, highlighting the implicit masculinity of the ideals in his letters.[225] Seneca's praise of Sextius is also clear from the exclamation at the beginning of §3; this exclamation is made more emphatic by the repetition of *quantus*/*quantum*. Seneca not only differentiates Sextius from other philosophers (*hoc non in omnibus philosophis invenies*), but he also elevates Sextius' status through words he puts into Lucilius' mouth (*supra hominem est*).

The reason for Seneca's praise of Sextius is the effect of his writings. Sextius' writings have an exhortatory effect on Seneca due to their lifelikeness; by creating a sense of their author's presence (*vivet, viget*), Sextius' writings inspire Seneca to action, in particular to the display of his own *virtus*. This display of *virtus* is an undertaking identified with two other actions: calling upon *Fortuna* to battle and exercising *patientia*. Seneca seems to be equating these two aspects of *virtus* – particularly evident from *libet* ***aliquid*** *habere* ***quod*** *vincam,* ***cuius*** *patientia exercear*. Both relative pronouns (*quod* and *cuius*) share the antecedent *aliquid*. This identification of

[225] See earlier discussion on the masculinity of the *Epistulae* (pp. 112-23) See also Edwards 2019, 208: Seneca's phrasing indicates that 'this is masculine writing'. This phrasing will be picked up again in §9 of this letter.

the display of *virtus* with both of these is also clear from the repetition of *libet* in the sentences concerning these actions, sentences which, in terms of order, surround the statement that these are displays of *virtus*.

However, these two actions could be considered to be rather paradoxical. On the one hand, Seneca conceives of the display of *virtus* as something active: a contest with *Fortuna*, described in verbs with militaristic colouring (e.g. *provoco*, *congredior*, *vinco*), and a hunt, conveyed through a quotation from the *Aeneid* (*Aen*. 4.158-159).[226] On the other hand, Seneca also identifies demonstrating *virtus* with something (potentially) passive: the training of oneself through *patientia*. Upon coming across the clause *cuius patientia exercear*, the reader could focus on the training aspect, which fits easily into the military context brought to mind by the other metaphors and images used. A less cooperative reader, however, can find contradictions in Seneca's equation of displaying *virtus* with training through *patientia*. Not only does *patientia* have connotations of passivity, but also, at this point, Seneca uses a passive verb (*exercear*); even if taken with a middle-passive sense (i.e. I train myself), there is still a noticeable contrast between the grammatical passivity of *exercear* and the grammatical and semantic activity of *vincam*.

Whilst it has not been uncommon in the preceding letters of the collection to conceive of *virtus* as a battle with *Fortuna*,[227] it is rather odd to

[226] On the militaristic colouring of Seneca's vocabulary: *provoco* (*OLD* 1507 s.v. "*provoco*" 3 'to call out (to an individual fight or other contest), challenge. to follow the profession of a *provocator*. to cause to come out and fight (by provocative action).'; *TLL* 10.2.2 s.v. "*provoco*" 2353.43-55, 2355.63-2356.8); *congredior* (*OLD* 405 s.v. "congredior" 2 'to approach in order to fight, join battle, come to grips'; *TLL* 4 s.v. "*congredior*" 286.45-287.67); *vinco* (*OLD* 2064 s.v. "*vinco*" 1 'to inflict a military defeat on, conquer, overcome').
[227] E.g. *Ep*. 8.4, 13.2, 16.5, 18.6, 36.6, 39.3, 51.8.

see the equivalence of victory in this battle with *patientia*. Earlier letters which mention *patientia* within a militaristic context emphasise the suffering of one subjugated to a more powerful force – the images employed do not depict a particularly victorious subject – e.g. *Ep.* 4.9, 17.6-7, 24, 37. At this point, the uncooperative reader is left asking: how do I actively conquer something, whilst also enduring/suffering it in order to train myself? And how is it that both of these lead me to display my *virtus*?[228]

The reader is not allowed much chance to contemplate this, as Seneca continues, explaining to Lucilius that attaining both *virtus* and the *beata vita* is possible, especially with the help of inspirational teachers like Sextius. Seneca's respect for earlier philosophers such as Sextius is conveyed through religious and familial language (*Ep.* 64.7, 9-10):

> **veneror** itaque inventa sapientiae inventoresque; adire tamquam multorum hereditatem iuvat. mihi ista adquisita, mihi laborata sunt. sed agamus **bonum patrem** familiae, faciamus ampliora quae accepimus; maior ista **hereditas** a me ad posteros transeat.
>
> (And so, I worship the discoveries and discoverers of wisdom. It is pleasing to approach them as if the inheritance of many people. For me those things are acquired, those things are prepared. But let us play the part of a good father of the family, let us make greater the things which we have received. Let that greater inheritance go across from me to descendants.)

[228] Asmis 2009 shows that, by practising philosophy, the philosophical subject conquers *Fortuna* and discusses some motivations behind the use of this imagery – both as a metaphor and as representative of the real forces of political power which could affect a contemporary elite Roman man. Where I diverge from Asmis is in my focus on the term *patientia*, rather than the military conception of the Stoic's approach to *Fortuna*.

> suspiciendi tamen sunt et **ritu deorum colendi**. quidni ego **magnorum virorum** et **imagines** habeam incitamenta animi et **natales celebrem**? quidni ego illos honoris causa semper appellem? quam **venerationem** praeceptoribus meis debeo, eandem illis praeceptoribus generis humani, a quibus tanti boni initia fluxerunt. si consulem videro aut praetorem, omnia quibus honor haberi honori solet faciam: equo desiliam, caput adaperiam, semita cedam. quid ergo? Marcum Catonem utrumque et Laelium Sapientem et Socraten cum Platone et Zenonem Cleanthenque in animum meum sine dignatione summa recipiam? Ego vero illos **veneror** et tantis nominibus semper adsurgo.
>
> (Yet they should be looked up to and they should be worshipped by rites of the gods. Why should I not have images of great men and incitements of my mind and why should I not celebrate their births? Why should I not always call upon those men for the sake of their honour? What veneration I owe to my teachers, the same to those teachers of the human race, from which the beginnings of such great good flow. If I see a consul or praetor, I will do everything for which his office is accustomed to be regarded as source of honour. I will dismount from my horse and I will uncover my head and I will yield the path. So what? Will I take back Marcus Cato, each of them, and Laelius Sapiens and Socrates with Plato and Zeno and Cleanthes in my mind without greatest respect? Indeed I venerate those men and I always rise to such great names.)

Seneca uses religious language of his stance towards earlier philosophers: for example, *veneratio*, *veneror*, *ritu deorum colendi*. He also describes these

earlier philosophers with familial language (e,g, *bonus pater*, *posteri*, *hereditas*). Together, this use of language indicates that Seneca's respect for earlier philosophers is akin to his respect for his own ancestors and for figures typically important to the Romans. In addition, as Edwards notes, the references to *imagines* and the celebration of birthdays (*natales celebrem*) also highlight Seneca's ancestral, familial respect for earlier philosophers.[229] The elevation of these earlier philosophers is also achieved by their description as *magni viri* – a phrase used earlier of Sextius. This phrase, again, implies the masculinity of Seneca's philosophy. Seneca's creation, for his reader, of philosophical ancestry highlights how key, within Seneca's approach to philosophy, an awareness of earlier thinkers and philosophers is.

Seneca makes clear why earlier philosophers are important for the contemporary philosopher. Firstly, earlier philosophers provide knowledge which the contemporary philosopher can either build on or apply – all the knowledge in the world still requires application to individual situations and so becomes the purview of the contemporary philosopher. Secondly, earlier philosophers' writings, such as Sextius', provide the contemporary philosopher with encouragement to action. As Seneca explains to Lucilius how to engage with earlier philosophers, it becomes clear that Lucilius has developed pedagogically;[230] Seneca is no longer teaching Lucilius Stoic content, but teaching Lucilius to teach himself. The reader, therefore, has gained more pedagogical independence from the teacher.

[229] Edwards 2019, 211.
[230] Cf. Seneca's approach to philosophical predecessors in *Ep.* 80.1.

The reader's pedagogical independence is key for understanding how Seneca deals with *patientia*. *Ep.* 65 and its focus on the technicalities of Stoic physics indicates that the reader is required to be at an advanced level of philosophical understanding. That Seneca uses physics to explain *patientia* is indicative of the contentiousness of the concept. By calling on the support of physics, Seneca will start the process of valorising *patientia*, in order to show that some kind of restraint is a part of *virtus*.[231]

9 *Ep.* 65: Macrocosmic *Patientia*

Seneca's purported motivation for writing *Ep.* 65 is, again, anecdotal: he writes to Lucilius in order to ask him to arbitrate a debate about causes which he was having with his friends. The philosophical technicalities of this letter, especially with relation to Platonism and Aristotelianism, have been comprehensively analysed by Inwood.[232] The relevance of this letter to my argument is not its technical content, but rather what can be found out about ethics and obtaining *virtus* – since Seneca argues for the relevance of physics to ethics. After outlining in detail the theories of causes of Aristotle and Plato, Seneca responds to a complaint he puts into the mouth of Lucilius, that physics is just high-minded distraction from the nitty-gritty of self-improvement. Seneca explains that understanding the world allows us to understand our own position within the world, understand what is and is not important – therefore allowing the true freedom of the mind (as opposed to the servitude to suffering of the body). As with *Ep.* 64, there are two

[231] This restraint of *patientia* contrasts with the lack of restraint demonstrated in the *Thyestes*.
[232] Inwood 2007a, 136–55. See also Boys-Stones 2013 on Platonism in Seneca's *Epistulae*.

intermingled themes to discuss: the pedagogical aspects of the letter, and what we can learn about the concept of *patientia*.

Ep. 65 makes clear that Lucilius has progressed pedagogically, that he is being given more responsibility over his own learning, even seeming to take a teacherly role to Seneca. That Seneca asks Lucilius for his opinion on this debate shows that Lucilius is being tasked to think for himself.[233] Moreover, that Seneca has Lucilius respond sassily to the debate highlights the interlocutory function of the epistolary addressee in Seneca's letters. Lucilius does not question what Seneca has said, but whether Seneca's own philosophical study in this area is even worthwhile (65.15):

> 'quid te' inquis 'delectat tempus inter ista conterere, quae tibi nullum adfectum eripiunt, nullam cupiditatem abigunt?'
>
> (You say: "Why is it pleasing for you to wear away your time with these things, which do not snatch your feelings from you, which do not drive away any desire from you?")

Lucilius' direct challenging of Seneca's philosophical approach is evidence of his philosophical development. Where, in earlier letters, Lucilius queried other aspects of Seneca's letters (such as their philosophical content, how he should progress, what exactly Seneca's point is), here, he questions Seneca's whole approach to his own ethical progress, in a metaphilosophical sense. His very direct address to Seneca, through second person pronouns (*te*, *tibi*) highlights his questioning of Seneca's own actions, as though he is Seneca's

[233] 65.2: *Te arbitrum addiximus* (We declared you as judge).

teacher. His scorn is particularly evident from the pronoun *ista*, which, within this context, conveys a contemptuous tone. Lucilius' derision at Seneca's timewasting brings us back to *Ep.* 1, in which Seneca exhorts Lucilius to preserve his time for himself (*Ep.* 1.1: *tempus ... collige et serva*). Lucilius, therefore, seems to echo Seneca's own words back to him.

The reason for Lucilius' adamance that physics is a waste of time is that physics is not useful for Seneca's philosophical development. By referencing the erasure of one's passions (*adfectus*, *cupiditas*), Lucilius' focus is shown to be ethical. Lucilius assumes that the only purpose of Seneca's interest in physics is pleasure, and that this interest, by implication, lacks utility; this is clear from the verb *delecto*. In earlier letters, Seneca associates *delecto* with *voluptas*, and uses this verb to contrast pleasure with utility.[234] In *Ep.* 108, he criticises those who attend philosophy lectures for entertainment, as though going to the theatre for the sake of pleasure (108.6: *ad delectandas aures*). It is clear, therefore, that actions and objects which cause pleasure (*delecto*) do not necessarily contribute to, and can even be at odds with, philosophical progress. Just as Seneca criticises those who attend lectures for pleasure, Lucilius, in *Ep.* 65, criticises Seneca for studying physics for pleasure. From Lucilius' perspective, at this point in the letter, the study of physics is like the study of logic, as described by Seneca in *Ep.* 48 – namely a waste of time and a distraction from ethical learning and progression. Seneca will go on to demonstrate in *Ep.* 65 how Stoic physics

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[234] The association of *delecto* and *voluptas* at *Ep.* 23.5: *Haec quibus* ***delectatur*** *vulgus tenuem habent ac perfusoriam* ***voluptatem*** (These things, by which the crowd are delighted, have a thin and superficial pleasure). The contrast of utility and pleasure at *Ep.* 45.1: *lectio certa prodest, varia delectat* (Specific reading is beneficial, wavering reading delights).

can be employed by the philosopher productively, despite its potential to confuse and distract.

In *Ep.* 65, therefore, Seneca constructs a Lucilius who has progressed philosophically. He is asked for his opinion on a philosophical debate and he momentarily takes the role of teacher, questioning whether Seneca is doing what is best for himself and echoing Seneca's own teachings. Through characterising Lucilius in this way, Seneca implies that the reader of this letter is more philosophically advanced than he was earlier in the collection. By extension, the content of this letter is likely to be more complex.

After Lucilius' brief foray into the role of teacher, Seneca firmly puts him back in his place. Seneca directly addresses Lucilius, like Lucilius did him (65.16):

> ne nunc quidem tempus, ut existimas, perdo.
>
> (Not even now am I, as you think, wasting time.)

To Lucilius' derision at his study of physics, Seneca retorts with equal ridicule. The parenthetical *ut existimas* pointedly prefaces his refutation of Lucilius' stance, with the second person verb making this statement accusatory. His rebuttal is further emphasised by the particles *ne ... quidem*, which strengthen the negation of this sentence and of Lucilius' position. Seneca, therefore, reasserts his role as Lucilius' teacher, going on to correct his misunderstanding of physics.

Seneca's defence of physics relies on macrocosm-microcosm analogies and incorporation of the concept of *patientia*. I now show how

patientia is used in *Ep.* 65, demonstrating the variety of levels on which it operates, between which Seneca makes analogies. What becomes clear from the following overview of *patientia* in *Ep.* 65 is its diversity of uses, but its primary use (at least here) is as a concept which functions on a physical and cosmic level (as opposed to a human and ethical level). *Ep.* 65 shows that *patientia* works on the cosmic level, as well as the human level introduced to the reader in *Ep.* 64. The "natural" aspects of *patientia* in *Ep.* 65 make the concept more attractive, as something which pervades the workings of the universe. In addition, Seneca's treatment of *patientia* from a macrocosmic, physical point of view requires a certain advanced level of knowledge of the reader – hence instruction on *patientia* is left until this mid-late stage of the collection of letters. The detailed discussion of Stoic physics and Lucilius' capacity to question his teacher highlight that *patientia* is a more advanced topic, for which the reader is only now, over 60 letters into the collection, prepared to tackle.

In short, I show that the reader learns three things from Seneca's discussion of *patientia*. Firstly, that physics is useful to the study of ethics – which is the main teaching signalled within the letter. Secondly, that the usefulness of physics to ethics relies on, to some extent, macrocosm-microcosm analogy. Thirdly, that *patientia* is a concept which functions on the cosmic level, which is necessary for the universe to exist; by analogy, human *patientia* is implied to be equally natural and necessary. This third teaching serves to mitigate the reader's potential doubt about human *patientia*, to which *Ep.* 64 alluded and to which *Ep.* 66 and 67 return. I turn, now, to show how the second teaching – by which the third works – is clear

from Seneca's usages of *patientia* in *Ep.* 65 – these will be grouped in terms of analogy, culminating, as Seneca does, in the relevance of physics to ethics.

Matter is subject to god just as material is subject to a craftsman (65.3; 65.23):

> statua et **materiam** habuit quae **pateretur** artificem, et artificem qui materiae daret faciem.
>
> (A statue has both material, to allow a craftsman, and a craftsman, to give form to the material.)

> potentius autem est ac pretiosius quod facit, quod est deus, quam **materia patiens** dei.
>
> (However, that which makes, that which is god is more powerful and more valuable than the matter passive to god.)

The same noun, *materia*, is used to refer to the material from which the craftsman makes a statue and the matter from which the Stoic god creates the universe. In both cases, this noun is the subject of the verb *patior*, the *materia* is inactive to the active force – either the craftsman or god. There is an active force – the craftsman and god – which prevails over some receptive passive matter. Whilst, in the case of the craftsman, the human is active, in the case of god and universal *materia*, the human is passive as part of the *materia* which is subject to god. The Roman ethical understanding of active-passive

relations is subverted, in favour of a Stoic physical understanding of the necessity of both active and passive parts of the universe.[235]

The wise man suffers mortality just as the body suffers injury (65.18; 65.21):

> et ita formatus est ut illi nec amor vitae nec odium sit, **patiturque** mortalia quamvis sciat ampliora superesse.
>
> ([The wise man] is formed in such a way that he has neither love nor hatred of life, and he endures/suffers mortality although he knows that more abundant things remain.)

> quidquid in me potest iniuriam **pati** hoc est.
>
> (This [body] is whatever in me is able to endure/suffer injury.)

In both cases, the object of *patior* (*mortalia*, *iniuriam*) is something which causes harm to the subject (the wise man, the body). The subject jointly suffers and endures the harm caused by the object because of a knowledge of "a greater good". The wise man endures mortality because he knows that life and death are indifferents, because of his understanding of physics. Likewise, Seneca's body can endure injury because he knows that his mind cannot be injured. On the other side of this coin, like the impenetrable mind (and unlike the body), the form (or concept) of humanity (as opposed to humans) does not suffer at all (65.7):

[235] For further on active and passive principles in Stoic physics, see Long and Sedley 1987, 1: 268-272.

> itaque homines quidem pereunt, ipsa autem humanitas, ad quam homo effingitur, permanet, et hominibus laborantibus, intereuntibus, illa nihil **patitur**.
>
> (And so humans die, but humanity itself, towards which man is fashioned, persists, and although humans toil and die, humanity suffers nothing at all.)

Seneca, therefore, layers analogies upon each other. Between the largest scale (god and the universe) to the smallest scale (the individual mind and body), there are other relations (craftsman and statue, humanity and human, mortality and wise man) which are described by the verb *patior*; some of these subject other things, some of these are subject to other things. What Seneca shows his reader is that *patientia*, some kind of receptive inactivity in relation to something else, is pervasive on all levels, from the universal to the individual.

Seneca's use of analogy is also key to his primary aim, defending his study of physics, because of its relevance to ethical understanding, the conclusion to which he comes at the end of the letter (65.24):

> quem in hoc mundo locum deus obtinet, hunc in homine animus; quod est illic materia, id in nobis corpus est. **serviant ergo deteriora melioribus; fortes simus adversus fortuita;** non contremescamus iniurias, non vulnera, non vincula, non egestatem.
>
> (What place in this world god holds onto, this is the soul in humans. Material in the world is like our body in us. Therefore, let worse things serve better things, let us be strong against fortuitous things, let us not be afraid of injuries, wounds, chains, or hunger.)

Through a process of analogy – that the Stoic god is to matter what the mind is to the body – Seneca understands the greater value of the mind over the body (as the Stoic god has greater value over matter). This frees the mind from concerns, since the body acts as a defence for the mind (65.21). An understanding of physics, specifically of causes and the origin of the universe, allows the philosopher to understand his own place within the universe, as both a product of the Stoic god and analogous to the Stoic god. For the philosopher, the worse (*deteriora*) is the body, which is in service to the better (*meliora*), the mind. In order to explain the importance of physics to ethics, Seneca uses macrocosmic-microcosmic analogy. By extension, *patientia* undergoes the same analogic transformation, a transformation which is explicated in the following two letters.

Before moving on to discuss these letters, I recap what the reader has learnt so far about *patientia*. In *Ep.* 64, the reader was introduced to *patientia*, that it is an action through which one displays *virtus*. And in *Ep.* 65, Seneca has shown the pervasiveness of this force throughout different relations within the universe, through the use of analogy. Now, it is microcosmic *patientia*, the endurance of the body for the sake of the mind, which Seneca has touched on in *Ep.* 65, which will be the subject of *Ep.* 66 and 67. It will be shown in what follows that Seneca seeks to defend *patientia* from potential misunderstanding, to which it is vulnerable because of its potential ethical negativity and the reader's pedagogical independence.

10 *Ep.* 66: All Goods (Including *Patientia*) Are Equal

Like *Ep.* 64 and 65, *Ep.* 66 reports an anecdote, a conversation between Seneca and his old friend, Claranus. The main body of the letter concerns the fact that all goods are equal, the topic of debate between Seneca and Claranus. As with a number of Seneca's letters, the anecdotal scene-setting is relevant to the topic. Seneca describes that Claranus' weak body does not affect the beauty of his soul;[236] in a similar move, Seneca will go on to show that unfortunate situations do not affect one's *virtus*, since all goods are equal. Although I do not discuss the exactitudes of the philosophical argument of this letter, the broad strokes are important to be aware of; Inwood sets out Seneca's philosophical argument in this letter as follows:[237]

1. Reason is divine.
2. Everything good has reason.
3. Therefore everything good is divine.
4. There is no distinction of value among divine things.
5. Therefore there is no distinction of value among goods.

My discussion of this letter focuses not on the intricacies of this philosophical argument, but on how Seneca convinces his interlocutor – who, at various points in the letter, expresses his doubt about Seneca's teaching – that *patientia* is equally a good thing, a part of *virtus*.[238] I show how this letter

[236] 66.4: *Claranus mihi videtur in exemplar editus, ut scire possemus non deformitate corporis foedari animum, sed pulchritudine animi corpus ornari.* (Claranus seems to me to have been born into this exemplar, so that we can know that a soul is not sullied by the deformity of the body, but that a body is adorned with the beauty of the soul.)
[237] Inwood 2007a, 164.
[238] On the content of this letter, Inwood 2005, 264 notes: 'as rhetorically complex as this is, the basic argument is clear enough.' It is the rhetorical complexity of this letter with which I am concerned.

begins from a quandary which is explained through analogy – ideas which are clearer to the reader are used to explain those which the reader is less certain about. The initial philosophical question – how all goods (in particular, *patientia* and *gaudium*) can be equal – is explained using the principle of the equality of all divine things and the *exempla* of Scipio and the Numantians. This clearer, more obvious example is reinforced by supporting adjectives to describe *patientia*, in order to establish the masculinity of *patientia*. This formulation of *patientia* is then used to support less clear ideas – such as the fact there is *virtus* in *patientia* of illness or torture. This results in Seneca's concluding teaching – that such *patientia* is even desirable, an idea which is interrogated in the following letter, *Ep.* 67.

In short, *Ep.* 66 explains how *patientia*, which has previously been explained as a cosmic concept, works on an individual human level through the pedagogical technique of analogy which was also used in the previous letter. By transferring cosmic ideas on *patientia* to an individual level, Seneca shows that *patientia* as individual suffering is a part of the natural order, thereby aiding his eventual teaching that *patientia* is masculine and part of *virtus*. This makes *patientia*, constraint in the face of external circumstances, desirable, a particularly poignant idea for Seneca's elite male readership for whom the unconstrained hypermasculine responses of Atreus are not available.

The main philosophical point of *Ep.* 66 is that all goods are equal; in this long and technical letter, Seneca explains the equality of goods on a variety of levels and refutes objections from an interlocutory voice. In the

beginning of the main body of this letter, Seneca draws distinctions between (a) primary, (b) secondary and (c) tertiary goods (66.5-6):

> §5 hoc primo die quaesitum est, quomodo possint paria bona esse, si triplex eorum condicio est. quaedam, ut nostris videtur, (a) prima bona sunt, tamquam **gaudium**, pax, salus patriae; (b) quaedam secunda, **in materia infelici expressa**, tamquam **tormentorum patientia et in morbo gravi temperantia**. illa bona derecto optabimus nobis, haec, si necesse erit. (c) sunt adhuc tertia, tamquam modestus incessus et compositus ac probus vultus et conveniens prudenti viro gestus. §6 quomodo ista inter se paria esse possunt, cum alia **optanda** sint, alia aversanda?
>
> (On the first day this, the following, was sought, how goods can be equal, if their state is threefold. Some, as seems to us, are primary goods, such as joy, peace, the safety of the fatherland. Some are secondary, exhibited in unfortunate material, such as endurance of torture and self-control in serious illness. The former goods will be desirable to us directly, the latter, only if it will be necessary. There are still tertiary goods, for example modest gait and appearance, chaste face and gesture befitting a careful man. How could those things be equal amongst themselves, when some are to be desired, others to be avoided?)

Here, we get the first mention of *patientia* in this letter, with *tormentorum patientia* listed alongside *in morbo gravi temperantia* as an example of a secondary good. Although standing apart as separate examples, *temperantia* clarifies that *patientia* is used in the sense of 'endurance' or 'restraint'. Both

patientia and *temperantia* seem to refer to some kind of receptive inactivity despite a negative situation (i.e. torture and illness) beyond the subject's control. As Seneca notes, secondary goods are those displayed in such unfortunate circumstances (*in materia infelici expressa*). From a pedagogical perspective, this content, the *materia* of goods, is suitably placed after *Ep.* 65, in which the relationship of *materia* to agent is explained. In §6, Seneca reiterates the difference between primary and secondary goods, that the former are *optanda*, whereas the latter are *aversanda*. The gerundive *optanda* harks back to the *Aeneid* quote at *Ep.* 64.4, in which Ascanius desired something to hunt. This verb *opto* is something of a buzzword at the end of *Ep.* 66, pre-empting the debated desirability of *patientia* to be discussed in *Ep.* 67.

When *patientia* turns up next, it is in a statement of its equality with *gaudium* (66.12):

> paria itaque sunt et gaudium et **fortis atque obstinata tormentorum perpessio**; in utroque enim eadem est **animi magnitudo**, in altero remissa et laxa, in altero **pugnax** et **intenta**.
>
> (In such a way these (goods) are equal: both joy and brave, stubborn endurance of tortures. For, in each there is the same magnanimity, in the one relaxed and loose, in the other combative and threatening.)

Seneca equates *gaudium* and *fortis obstinata tormentorum perpessio*. The noun *perpessio* is related to *patior* via the verb *perpetior* (= *per* + *patior*).[239]

[239] *OLD* 1350 s.v. "*perpessio*", "*perpetior*"; *TLL* 10.1.2 s.v. "*perpessio*" 1626.22, "*perpetior*" 1626.74-5.

Where *tormentorum perpessio* picks up *tormentorum patientia* from amongst the secondary goods in 66.5, *gaudium* is likewise repeated from amongst the primary goods. This is the first statement that primary goods – those in accordance with nature, naturally desirable – are equal to secondary goods – those contrary to nature, naturally avoidable.

Seneca's statement is so controversial that he immediately assumes his interlocutor will be doubtful or uncertain of it. He attributes to his interlocutor an uncooperative stance and counters this stance with a military *exemplum* (66.13):

> quid? tu non putas parem esse virtutem eius qui **fortiter** hostium moenia **expugnat**, et eius qui obsidionem **patientissime sustinet**? [et] **magnus** Scipio, qui Numantiam cludit et conprimit cogitque invictas manus in exitium ipsas suum verti, **magnus** ille obsessorum animus, qui scit non esse clusum cui mors aperta est, et in complexu libertatis expirat. aeque reliqua quoque inter se paria sunt, tranquillitas, simplicitas, liberalitas, constantia, aequanimitas, tolerantia; omnibus enim istis una virtus subest, quae animum rectum et indeclinabilem praestat.
>
> (What? Do you not think that their *virtus* is equal, that man who bravely attacks enemy walls, and that one who tolerates a siege most enduringly. Scipio is great, who enclosed Numantia and pressed on and forced invincible hands to be turned to their own destruction; and the spirit of the besieged is great, which knew that there was no closing for that to which death is laid open and which died in the embrace of liberty. Equally the other (goods) are also equal amongst themselves: tranquillity, simplicity, freedom,

> consistency, calmness, tolerance. For one *virtus* underlies all these, one *virtus* which exhibits a right and unchangeable mind.)

Here, in the rhetorical question at the start of this quoted section, Seneca confronts his interlocutor with their supposed assumption that there is a distinction between the *virtus* of those who *fortiter expugnat* and those who *patientissime sustinet*; Seneca then goes on to undermine this distinction in the interlocutor's mind. By assuming this stance by his interlocutor, Seneca makes him an uncooperative reader who considers there to be an opposition or inconsistency between attacking bravely and patiently enduring. The assumed lack of cooperation by the reader is highlighted by Seneca's separation of *fortiter*/*fortis* and *patientissime*/*patientia*. Where *fortis* was, in the previous section (§12), applied to *perpessio* (cognate of *patientia*), the two ideas are now put in opposition with each other, as though the two are at odds with each other. Thus the constructed interlocutor doubts that *patientia* can be *fortis*, thereby stating his doubt about the *VIRtus* of *patientia*: is *patientia* masculine, is *patientia* a *virtus*? By assuming this uncooperative stance of his interlocutor, Seneca opens himself up to the opportunity to defend his counterintuitive position, that *patientia* is a *virtus*, is masculine.

Seneca's response takes the form of an *exemplum* which illustrates that both offensive and defensive parties display equal *virtus*. Both Scipio and the Numantians are described as *magnus*. Through using this word, Seneca recalls his earlier, more abstract statement that in both *gaudium* and *patientia* there is the same *magnitudo animi* (66.12); Seneca also recalls his description of Sextius as *magnus* (*Ep.* 64.2). The concept of magnanimity in 66.12 is of

particular relevance to Stoic ethics, associated with courage and considered broadly as 'rising above external circumstances, notably adversity or misfortune'.[240] Different Stoic philosophers understand the relations between magnanimity, courage and virtue differently. However, what is key to note for my purposes is that magnanimity is associated with courage and virtue.[241] Through the adjective *magnus*, both Scipio and the Numantians are shown to display equal *virtus*; both are *magnus*, equally courageous. The militaristic setting of this *exemplum*, of these two different displays of *virtus*, accords with the masculine assumptions of Seneca's conception of *virtus*. By applying the same masculine concept to the besieged, those more conventionally considered as ethically negatively "passive", within this militaristic context, Seneca asserts their masculinity, and the masculinity of *patientia*. It is this militaristic example which provides the scaffolding for thinking about *patientia* as a masculine quality.

To facilitate Seneca's repetition of his point in a more general sense, the interlocutor responds by questioning Seneca's stance in direct speech (66.14):

> §14 'quid ergo? nihil interest inter **gaudium** et **dolorum inflexibilem patientiam**?' nihil, quantum ad ipsas virtutes: plurimum inter illa **in quibus virtus utraque ostenditur**; in altero enim naturalis est animi remissio ac laxitas, in altero contra naturam dolor. itaque media sunt haec quae plurimum intervalli recipiunt: **virtus in utroque par est**.

[240] Gill 2019, 51.
[241] For discussion of this Stoic virtue, see Gill 2019; and with place in Roman context, see Gauthier 1951, 165–76.

> ("So what? Is there no difference between joy and immoveable endurance of pain?" None at all, as much as concerns the *virtutes* themselves, but very much between those things in which each *virtus* (of two) is shown. For, in one there is a natural relaxation and laxity of spirit, in the other there is pain against nature. And so these are middle things (indifferents), which receive much difference between them, but *virtus* is equal in each case.)

In §14, the interlocutor parrots back Seneca's ideas to him: is there really no difference between joy and the endurance of pain? The interlocutor picks up the words *gaudium* and *patientia*. How is it, though, that joy and endurance are equal? Seneca explains to us that in both there is a display of *virtus*, grouping the *virtus* of each together with the pronoun *uterque*. Seneca repeats this sentiment, that both *gaudium* and *patientia* are equal in *virtus*, just a couple of sentences later (66.14): *virtus in utroque par est* (the *virtus* is equal in each case).

There is a difference, however, between joy and endurance (*gaudium* and *patientia*); the magnanimity of the former is relaxed, whereas that of the latter is aggressive and combative. This is clear from the adjectives associated with *patientia/perpessio*: from §12 *fortis*, *obstinata*, *pugnax* and *intenta*, and from §14 *inflexibilis*. These adjectives protect the masculinity of *patientia*. Both *fortis* and *pugnax* are militaristic terms, thus having an obviously masculine colouring. The masculinity of *patientia* is also bolstered by *intentus* which, although a passive participle from *intendo*, is semantically active – "intent", "attentive".[242] The others of these adjectives, *obstinata* and

[242] *OLD* 938 s.v. "*intentus*[1]" 1a 'having the mind keenly occupied, intent', 2a 'intensely serious, earnest'.

inflexibilis, suggest immovability, that the object of *patientia* does not affect the subject. These adjectives, therefore, clarify the kind of *patientia* being discussed. This is not any kind of concession, let alone any kind of sexual passivity; rather, the *patientia* Seneca refers to in this letter is rigid, masculine, active endurance, an immunity to outside forces.

As the letter continues, Seneca reiterates the active aspect of endurance. In 66.17, endurance is not merely a passive pursuit, but an active orientation towards the world. This is clear from Seneca's description of how to behave honourably (66.17):

> Itaque qui honeste aliquid facturus est, quidquid opponitur, id etiam si incommodum putat, malum non putet, **velit, libens faciat**. Omne honestum **iniussum incoactum**que est, sincerum et nulli malo mixtum.
>
> (And so he, who will do something honourably, even if he thinks that, whatever is placed against him, inconvenient, should not think it bad, should want it, should do it willingly. Everything honourable is unordered and unforced, is genuine, is mixed with no bad.)

Virtuous things, good things, are actively pursued, despite their inconvenience or discomfort (*etiam si incommodum*). The activity involved in enduring *incommoda* is clear from the description that the philosopher does them willingly, indicated by the verb *volo* and adverb *libens*. Moreover, despite the potential passivity of *patientia*, as submission, Seneca emphasises the active choice made by the ethical subject, who is *iniussum* and *incoactum*;

the *patientia* of honourable behaviour is not subjection or submission, but an exercise of intention and choice.

Seneca has now established the terms of *patientia*: it is active and intentional, it is associated with courage; in short, it is masculine. Although (or because) Seneca has described in great detail the active and combative aspects of *patientia*, his interlocutor expresses his doubt about *patientia* when it comes to physical torture. For the third time in this letter, Seneca has his interlocutor question his own teaching (66.18):

> Scio quid mihi responderi hoc loco possit: 'hoc nobis persuadere conaris, nihil interesse utrum aliquis **in gaudio** sit an **in eculeo** iaceat ac tortorem suum lasset?'
>
> (I know what could be responded to me at this point: "Do you try to persuade us of this, that there is no difference between whether someone is in joy or lies on a rack and tires out his own torturer?")

That Seneca assumed his interlocutor is uncooperative is, again, communicated by the use of a question. The lack of cooperation of the interlocutor is also indicated by his extrapolation of Seneca's teaching to its most vivid and extreme point. Seneca, thus far in the letter, has only mentioned torture – the most extreme example of subjugation to the will of another – twice, in abstract senses and in fleeting ways;[243] the interlocutor goes into a far more detailed description of physical torture than Seneca

[243] 66.5: *patientia tormentorum*; 66.15: *in illis cruciatibus*.

himself has so far. In doing so, the interlocutor reveals his lack of cooperation with Seneca's teaching.

The phrasing of the interlocutor's question also demonstrates that he has not understood what Seneca is saying. He focuses not on the act of endurance (e.g. of torture), but on the act of being tortured; his description is not of a tortured man taking immoveable stance in the face of physical distress, but lying on the rack and being subject to the torturer. The interlocutor's misunderstanding is particularly clear from his use of the parallel phrases *in gaudio* and *in eculeo*. He does not compare responses to *gaudium* and torture, but the states of being *in gaudio* and *in eculeo*. The interlocutor mistakes the endurance of torture with being tortured. To the interlocutor's disbelief, that there is no difference between joy and torture, Seneca responds with the even more counterintuitive stance of Epicurus, who claims that a tortured man will say of his torture: *dulce est* (66.18: it is sweet). Epicurean responses to physical distress, the idea that physical distress may be desirable, is something to which I (and Seneca) return later.

The interlocutor's reference to the actualities of physical torture allow Seneca to, in the remainder of the letter, address the issue of *patientia* and torture more directly. With the terms of *patientia* firmly established – its activity, its immovability, its courageousness, its masculinity – Seneca can now address the more difficult topic of physical torture more concretely and directly. In detail, Seneca describes the actions of a good man (*vir bonus*) when faced with torture (66.21):

> Hoc ut scias ita esse, ad omne pulchrum vir bonus **sine ulla cunctatione procurret**: stet illic licet **carnifex**, stet **tortor** atque **ignis**, perseverabit **nec quid passurus sed quid facturus sit** aspiciet, et se honestae rei tamquam bono viro credet; utilem illam sibi iudicabit, tutam, prosperam. Eundem locum habebit apud illum honesta res, sed tristis atque aspera, quem vir bonus pauper aut exul <aut exilis> ac pallidus.
>
> (So you know that this is how it is, a good man rushes forth to everything beautiful without any hesitation. Although an executioner stood there, the torturer and fire stood there, nevertheless he will persist and he will not look at what he will suffer, but what he will do, and he will entrust himself to the honourable matter as if to a good man. He will judge that matter useful to himself, safe, favourable. The matter, which is honourable but sad and rough, will have the same place with that man, as a good man, who is poor or an exile and pale, will have with that man.)

Seneca refers explicitly to the instruments of physical torture: *carnifex, tortor, ignis*. In spite of these, the *vir bonus* willingly and actively approaches them: *sine ulla cunctatione procurret*. The active and oppositional mindset of the *vir bonus* is effectively described by his regard not for what he will suffer or endure (*nec quid passurus*) but for what he will do (*sed quid facturus*). The contrast between the verbs *patior* and *facio* indicate the active stance of the *vir bonus* in the face of physical torture; he will conceive of his endurance as an action, rather than a passive state. The same active *patientia* of the Numantians, besieged by Scipio, is undertaken by the *vir bonus*, faced with physical torture. Seneca applies the associations of *patientia*, which he has

already established through more clear-cut examples, to this less clear-cut, more ambiguous example, thereby using analogy as a pedagogical strategy.

Between 66.22 and 66.35, *patior* and *patientia* do not turn up verbally. We do, however, see more of Seneca's pedagogical strategy at work. Seneca explains the equality of all displays of *virtus* in reference not to physical pain, but to poverty and ill-health, qualities more firmly established as indifferents, things which do not matter in ethical terms. Giving the example that a parent does not love a healthy son more than a sick son, a taller son more than a shorter son, Seneca demonstrates that, just as these qualities are indifferent for a parent, similar qualities are, likewise, indifferent for *virtus* (66.26). Seneca tells his reader that good men (*viri boni*) are equal in their goodness, even if one is older and one is younger (66.43). Again, Seneca uses analogy as a pedagogical strategy.

When *patientia* returns later in the letter, Seneca continues to bolster the concept with supportive adjectives and adverbs, similar to those seen earlier. In 66.36-37, when described as a secondary good, *patientia* (via the verbs *patior* and *perpetior*) is supported by the adverbs and adverbial phrases: ***aequo animo*** *pati* (66.36), ***fortiter*** *obstare… et perpeti* (66.37). By using these adverbs, Seneca continues to assert the active, courageous and masculine aspects of *patientia*. In contrast, it is notable that a presented straw man does not use such supportive adverbs (66.40):

> 'Non est dubium' inquit 'quin felicior res sit inconcussa valetudo quam ex gravibus morbis et extrema minitantibus in tutum vi quadam et **patientia** educta. Eodem modo non erit dubium quin maius bonum

sit gaudium quam obnixus animus ad **perpetiendos** cruciatus vulnerum aut ignium.'

He says, "There is no doubt that unshaken health is a happier matter than health led back to safety from serious illness, threatening death, by some force and suffering. In the same way, there will be no doubt that rejoicing is a greater good than a mind striving towards enduring the tortures of wounds and fire."

Here this voice claims that it is better to have never undergone suffering (in the forms of illness or torture). Whilst doing so, he does not qualify *patientia* in the same way as Seneca, but uses *patientia* and *perpetior* independently. Seneca shows to the reader that this straw man is not clued into the proper conceptualisations and definitions of *patientia*.

After reassuring the reader, again by analogy with the ethical indifferents of age, sickness and manner of death, that all displays of *virtus* – primary goods and secondary goods – are equal (66.41-44), Seneca supports this argument further with the example of Epicurus. Epicureanism, like Stoicism, purports that there are not lesser and greater degrees of goods, but that the goodness of something ethically good is an absolute state (66.45-46). Moreover, Seneca says that even Epicurus and Epicureanism, with their central tenet of pleasure, promote the endurance of physical unpleasantness (66.47):

Dabo apud Epicurum tibi etiamnunc **simillimam** huic nostrae **divisionem bonorum**. Alia enim sunt apud illum quae malit

> contingere sibi, ut corporis quietem ab omni incommodo liberam et animi remissionem bonorum suorum contemplatione gaudentis; alia sunt quae, quamvis nolit accidere, **nihilominus laudat et conprobat**, tamquam illam quam paulo ante dicebam malae valetudinis et dolorum gravissimorum **perpessionem**, in qua Epicurus fuit illo summo ac **fortunatissimo** die suo. Ait enim se vesicae et exulcerati ventris tormenta **tolerare** ulteriorem doloris accessionem non recipientia, esse nihilominus sibi illum **beatum** diem.
>
> (I will give to you from Epicurus a further division of goods which is most similar to this of ours. For there are some things, according to that man, which he prefers to happen to him, such as the peace of the body, free from all inconvenience, and the relaxation of the soul rejoicing in contemplation of its own goods. And there are other things which, although he does not want them to happen, nevertheless he praises and approves of them, such as that endurance, which I spoke about just before, of bad health and the worst pains, in which Epicurus was on that final and most fortunate day of his. For, he said that he tolerated the tortures of his bladder and stomach ulcers, tortures not receiving a further addition of pain, but nevertheless that that was the happiest day for him.)

Seneca first notes the similarity of Epicureanism to Stoicism when it comes to conceptualising primary and secondary goods (*simillimam divisionem bonorum*). Concerning secondary goods, the endurance of physical suffering (*malae valetudinis et dolorum gravissimorum perpessionem*), Seneca says that Epicureanism not only allows for them, but promotes them. The verbs *laudo* and *conprobo* indicate the active approval or consent of the ethical

subject; like Stoicism, Epicureanism does not simply allow suffering to happen, but encourages an active stance towards physical suffering. This counterintuitive acceptance of physical suffering is epitomised by Epicurus' description of his time enduring physical suffering as happy and pleasant (*fortunatissimus* and *beatus*). Seneca's invocation of Epicurus in this letter (in §18 and §45-7) further shores up the masculinity of *patientia*. Even Epicureanism, a school which, earlier in the collection, is associated with *mollitia* and characterised as effeminate, and which is caricatured as hedonistic in contemporary Roman thought, has room for physical suffering.

After describing Epicurus' and Epicureanism's endurance of suffering, Seneca progresses to an even more counterintuitive position – namely that secondary goods, those usually considered undesirable, are actually desirable. This idea is touched on at the end of *Ep.* 66, then taken up as the topic of *Ep.* 67. In order to set up this idea at the end of *Ep.* 66, Seneca uses highly gendered language, moving from the idea that doing *patientia* is not effeminising (and just as masculine as not doing *patientia*) towards the idea that doing *patientia* is more masculine and more desirable than not doing it. I now quote, at length, the end of *Ep.* 66, in order to analyse Seneca's heavy masculinisation of *patientia* (66.49-53):

> [§49] Permitte mihi, Lucili virorum optime, **aliquid audacius** dicere: si ulla bona maiora esse aliis possent, haec ego quae **tristia** videntur **mollibus illis et delicatis** praetulissem, haec maiora dixissem. Maius est enim difficilia perfringere quam laeta moderari. [§50] Eadem ratione fit, scio, ut aliquis felicitatem bene et ut calamitatem fortiter

ferat. Aeque esse **fortis** potest qui pro vallo **securus** excubuit **nullis hostibus castra temptantibus** et qui **succisis poplitibus in genua** se excepit nec arma dimisit: 'macte virtute esto' sanguinolentis et ex acie redeuntibus dicitur. Itaque haec **magis laudaverim bona exercitata et fortia et cum fortuna rixata**. [§51] Ego dubitem quin **magis laudem truncam illam et retorridam** manum Mucii quam **cuiuslibet fortissimi** salvam? Stetit hostium flammarumque contemptor et manum suam in hostili foculo destillantem perspectavit, donec Porsina cuius poenae favebat gloriae invidit et ignem invito eripi iussit. [§52] Hoc bonum quidni inter prima numerem tantoque maius putem quam illa secura et intemptata fortunae quanto rarius est hostem amissa manu vicisse quam armata? 'Quid ergo?' inquis 'hoc bonum tibi **optabis**?' Quidni? hoc enim nisi qui potest et **optare**, non potest facere. [§53] An potius **optem** ut **malaxandos** articulos **exoletis** meis porrigam? ut **muliercula** aut **aliquis in mulierculam ex viro versus** digitulos meos ducat? Quidni ego feliciorem putem Mucium, quod sic tractavit ignem quasi illam manum tractatori praestitisset? In integrum restituit quidquid erraverat: confecit bellum inermis ac mancus et illa manu trunca reges duos vicit. vale.

([§49] Allow me, Lucilius, most excellent of men, to say something more daring. If there were able to be any goods greater than others, I would have presented these, which seem to be wretched things, before those soft and luxurious things, I would have said that these are greater. For, it is greater to break through difficult things than to govern happy things. [§50] By the same reason it happens, I know, that someone bears luck well and misfortune bravely. He is able to be equally brave, he who safely lies down in front of

> a rampart with no enemies attacking the camp, and he who, since his knee has been cut through, supports himself on his knees and does not abandon his weapons. "Let him be with blessed *virtus*" is said to the one bloodstained and returning from battle. And so I would have praised more these goods which have been practised, which are brave, and disputing with Fortune. [§51] Should I doubt that I praise more that mutilated and burned-up hand of Mucius than the safe hand of any most brave man? He stood as a scorner of enemies and flames and looked at his own hand in the enemy hearth, melting away, until Porsenna envied the glory of the man whose punishment he was delighting in and ordered the fire to be taken from the unwilling man. [§52] Why shouldn't I count this good amongst primary goods and think it greater by so much than those free from care and untried by Fortune, by as much as it is rarer to have conquered an enemy with a lost hand than an armed one? "So what?" you say. "Will you desire this good for yourself?" Why? For no one is able to do this except he who is able to desire it. [§53] Or should I rather want that I stretch out my knuckles to be softened by my male slaves? That some girl or someone turned from a man into some girl takes my fingers. Why shouldn't I think Mucius more lucky, because he treated the fire in this way, as if he had presented his hand to a massager? He restored whatever mistakes he had made to wholeness. He finished the war unarmed and maimed, and he conquered two kings with that mutilated hand. Goodbye.)

At the start of this closing section of the letter, Seneca asks from Lucilius some latitude to be a little unorthodox, as indicated by his request to say *aliquid audacius*. The adjective *audax* makes clear that what follows will be unusual; as we will see, Seneca, having already established a counterintuitive

position – that *patientia* is not an effeminate but a masculine trait – will move to an even more counterintuitive position – that *patientia* and physical suffering are more desirable than their lack. In order to argue for this position, Seneca masculinises *patientia* and suffering, and characterises as effeminate being free from *patientia* and suffering.

As Seneca has done earlier, he associates *patientia* with militaristic fortitude. In §50, he paints a militaristic scene, in which he describes an injured man as *fortis*. This injured man has suffered a leg amputation, with his injury described in highly vivid language (*succisis poplitibus in genua*). By associating *patientia* with the wounded body of the soldier, and by describing this soldier as *fortis*, Seneca masculinises *patientia* in the same ways as he has done throughout this letter. Yet here Seneca goes further in this masculinisation, by contrasting this image of the wounded soldier with that of the unwounded soldier. The unwounded soldier is untroubled (*securus*) and unpursued by enemies (*nullis hostibus castra temptantibus*). Of these two soldiers, Seneca says that the wounded one is more praiseworthy (*magis laudaverim*) because of his demonstrated good qualities (*bona exercitata*). These *bona* are further described as *fortia et cum fortuna rixata*. The adjective *fortis*, as we have seen, is masculinising.[244] The verb *rixor* also works in ways similar to those seen earlier; meaning "to contend", it draws attention to the active and oppositional stance of *patientia*.

The same contrast of injured and non-injured is picked up in the following example of Mucius Scaevola (§51).[245] Again, Seneca describes as

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[244] See above p. 167-8.

[245] Note Mucius' appearance in Valerius Maximus (above pp. 128). For more on Mucius as an exemplary figure, see Langlands 2018, 18–21.

more praiseworthy (*magis laudem*) a person who has been injured. Mucius' hand and its injury are described vividly (*truncam et retorridam*), in contrast with the *salvam manum* of the imagined uninjured man. To further demonstrate his praise of Mucius and his injury, Seneca describes the uninjured man as *fortissimus*, the adjective which has been previously applied to a derivative of *patientia* (66.12 *fortis perpessio*); in other words, despite any personal qualities of bravery of an uninjured man, the endurance of injury is a much more powerful demonstration of good ethical character. By employing these militaristic images of injured and wounded soldiers to explain *patientia*, Seneca masculinises the concept.

The contrast between undergoing and not undergoing *patientia* (as masculine and less masculine) is also highlighted by the images Seneca uses to describe a lack of suffering. Seneca not only ascribes a lack of suffering to the uninjured soldier, but also to the pampered fop (§53). This effeminisation of a lack of suffering is foreshadowed by its earlier description as *mollia illa et delicata* (§49). The adjectives *mollis* and *delicatus* are highly effeminising; they indicate a failure of proper masculinity. This effeminisation is fully actualised in the image which closes the letter, a man having his hands massaged. This image, already luxurious and effeminate, is further emphasised by the language Seneca uses.

He describes the massage being performed by *exoleti*, *muliercula* or *aliquis in mulierculam ex viro versus*. Each of these three figures is oppositional to masculinity. The figure of the *exoletus*, as explained above in relation to *De Providentia* 3.13, is associated with effeminacy and sexual

passivity.[246] The noun *muliercula*, as discussed with respect to Cicero's Verres in the previous chapter, is particularly oppositional to masculinity in its diminutive form; it indicates not only the womanliness of *mulier*, but does so in a dismissive and diminishing way.[247] The final figure in *Ep.* 66 is also like Cicero's Verres, in being a man turned woman. Verres is is an *impura inter viros muliercula*;[248] Seneca, like Cicero, emphasises the contrast between proper masculinity and the failed masculinity of the figure he describes through the contrast of *muliercula* (communicating smallness, insignificance) and *vir* (communicating elite status).[249] By being associated with these anti-masculine figures, the massaged man, free from the kind of suffering endured by Mucius, is also effeminised. Seneca also associates the unconcerned, massaged man with the primary, desirable goods, mentioned at the start of the letter. The verb *malaxo*, used of the man's fingers, is a reminder of the language used of the relaxed quality (66.12 *laxa*; 66.14 *laxitas*) of joy and freedom from suffering. The peaceful state of freedom from suffering, of *laxitas*, which Seneca has said is perceived as desirable and preferable to *patientia*, is shown to actually be undesirable and effeminate.

Replacing freedom from suffering as something desirable is the endurance of suffering, *patientia*. This desirability, which is argued for more fully in *Ep.* 67, is foreshadowed at the end of *Ep.* 66. In §52-3, Seneca uses three times the verb *opto*, which was used earlier in §5-6. This is a move from deeming suffering more praiseworthy through the phrase *magis laudo*, to deeming suffering desirable.

[246] Above pp. 133-34.
[247] Above p. 46.
[248] *In Verrem* 2.2.192.
[249] On the distinctly virilising force of *vir*, see p. 116 n. 188.

11 *Ep.* 67: Establishing *Patientia* as *Virtus*

Ep. 66 explained *patientia* on a human level, which was briefly alluded to in *Ep.* 64 and which was then bolstered as a positive concept through analogy to cosmic *patientia* in *Ep.* 65. Seneca ended *Ep.* 66 with two aspects of *patientia* which are picked up in *Ep.* 67: the masculinity of *patientia* and the desirability of *patientia*. It is the question of desirability which forms the main point of philosophical discussion in *Ep.* 67,[250] and it is the masculinity of *patientia* which bolsters Seneca's view that *patientia* is desirable. Seneca's primary discussion of *patientia* from *Ep.* 64 onwards culminates in this letter, which formally sets *patientia* as part of *fortitudo* – as a *virtus*.

Other treatments of this letter have discussed Seneca's interaction with Epicureanism, especially in the shared paradox that it can be *dulce* to suffer pain.[251] The preoccupation with suffering in this letter has also been addressed from a theological perspective.[252] The letter has also been used to highlight Seneca's use of epistolary features.[253] Another aspect of interest in this letter has been the *exempla* which are scattered throughout the letter (67.7, 67.9, 67.12-13).[254] The philosophical issue at the heart of this letter is not the focus of my discussion. Rather, my focus is on how this letter engages

[250] Roller 2001, 102: 'That right action sometimes involves selecting things that are ordinarily dispreferred is a familiar conundrum in Stoic ethics, and is in fact the topic of this very letter (*Ep*. 67).'
[251] Graver 2016, 206–7.
[252] Tabb 2017, 36–46.
[253] Habinek 1998, 214; Edwards 2015, 51–52.
[254] Roller 2001, 102–5.

with the underlying conceptual connections in Seneca's ethics, between *virtus*, *fortitudo*, *patientia*, and masculinity.

Our keyword, *patientia*, comes up in the anecdotal opening of this letter; in his old age, Seneca finds the unusually cold spring too cold to take a cold bath, to which Lucilius is imagined to respond as follows (*Ep.* 67.1):

> 'Hoc est' inquis 'nec calidum nec frigidum **pati**.' Ita est, mi Lucili: iam aetas mea contenta est suo frigore; vix media regelatur aestate.
>
> (You say, "This is enduring neither warmth nor cold." Very true, my Lucilius. My age now is content with its own cold, it is scarcely thawed in the middle of summer.)

Lucilius' response is rather unusual, and can fruitfully be considered an interaction indicative of Lucilius' and Seneca's pedagogical relationship. Lucilius seems to be talking back to Seneca, mocking his lack of *patientia*, the virtue which he had extolled at length in the previous letter.[255] Lucilius wonders, if, as Seneca wrote at the end of *Ep.* 66, *patientia* is so desirable, why does he not exercise *patientia* by taking a particularly hot or cold bath – is Seneca a hypocrite? Seneca's excuse is his old age, which causes him to be cold even in summer. Lucilius' retort shows his engagement with the previous letter, and, as with his retort at *Ep.* 65.15, reminds us of his intellectual independence through his capacity to question his teacher.

After this anecdotal opening, Seneca turns to the philosophical quandary Lucilius has brought to him (67.3):

[255] Compare with the interaction between Socrates and his interlocutors in Platonic dialogues, discussed by Beversluis 2000, chap. 1.

Quaeris an omne bonum optabile sit. 'Si bonum est' inquis **'fortiter** torqueri et **magno animo** uri et **patienter** aegrotare, sequitur ut ista optabilia sint; nihil autem video ex istis voto dignum.'

(You ask whether everything good is desirable. You say, "If it is good to be tormented bravely and to be burned with greatness of spirit and to be ill enduringly, it follows that these things are desirable. But I see nothing about these which is worthy of prayer.")

This problem goes as follows:

A. Whatever is good is desirable.
B. Being tortured bravely, being burned nobly, and being ill enduringly are good.
C. Therefore being tortured bravely, being burned nobly, and being ill enduringly are desirable.

Statement C is the paradox: how can these painful things possibly be considered desirable?[256] It is clear that this paradox is a direct reference to the

[256] I note here other Roman Stoic sources for similarly paradoxical statements of this kind. Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum* 16 (on the paradox that virue is sufficient for happiness) describes Regulus, tortured by the Carthaginians, as *nec infelix*: *Nec vero ego M. Regulum aerumnosum nec infelicem nec miserum umquam putavi; non enim magnitudo animi eius excruciabatur a Poenis, non gravitas non fides non constantia non ulla virtus, non denique animus ipse, qui tot virtutum praesidio tantoque comitatu, cum corpus eius caperetur, capi certe ipse non potuit*. (Indeed I have not ever thought Marcus Regulus either troubled or unhappy or wretched; for neither his greatness of mind was tortured out by the Carthaginians, nor dignity nor faith nor self-possession, nor even his mind itself, which, with the protection of so many virtues and such a great retinue, was certainly not able to be seized , even though his mind was captured.)
Musonius Rufus 1 (p.34. ll.22-6) (For Musonius, I use Hense's text, as printed by Lutz 1947 and Lutz's translation.): ἢ οὐ τοιοῦτος παῖς ἐκεῖνος ὁ Λάκων, ὃς Κλεάνθην τὸν φιλόσοφον

end of the previous letter. The words *optabilis* and *opto*, which are keywords here, have previously been used in *Ep.* 64 and 66 – foreshadowing this theme of what is desirable. In *Ep.* 64, this idea appeared in a quote from Virgil's *Aeneid*, highlighting Ascanius' desire for animals to hunt – a very masculine activity. In 66, initially primary goods are characterised as *optabilia* (§5, 6, 29), but at the end of the letter, Seneca subverts this by suggesting that he would actually desire suffering over not suffering as this is more masculine (§52, 53).

In comparison to the previous letter, it is also clear that the interlocutor in this letter has learnt how to talk about *patientia* properly. The adverbial form *patienter* is paralleled with the adverbials *fortiter* and *magno animo*, both of which counteract the receptive passivity and potential effeminacy of *patientia*. The passivity of actions involving conceptual (but not verbal) *patientia* is clear from the passive verbs to which *fortiter* and *magno animo* are applied, *torqueri* and *uri*. By contrast, the verb to which *patienter* is applied is *aegrotare*, an active verb, which refers to an action attributable to nature, thereby reducing the possible negative implications of *patienter*. By putting this way of talking about *patientia*, involving qualifications and bolstering, into the mouth of the interlocutor/Lucilius, Seneca shows that he has engaged with the previous letter, that he has learnt from it. Whereas in *Ep.* 66 the interlocutor did not use such qualifications of *patientia* (66.40), at

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ἠρώτησεν, εἰ ἀγαθὸν δ πόνος ἐστίν; οὕτω γ`ρ ἐκεῖνος φαίνεται φύσει πεφυκὼς καλῶς καὶ τεθραμμένος εὖ πρὸς ἀρετήν, ὥστε ἐγγύτερον εἶναι νομίζειν τὸν πόνον τῆς τἀγαθοῦ φύσεως ἢ της τοῦ κακοῦ. (Was not just such a lad that Spartan boy who asked Cleanthes the philosopher if toil was not a good? He made it plain that he was so well-endowed by nature and by training for the practice of virtue as to consider toil closer to the nature of good than of evil, in that he asked whether toil was not perchance a good, as if it were conceded that it was not an evil.)

the start of *Ep.* 67 it is clear that our good student Lucilius has been studying up on how to talk about *patientia*.

Seneca's response to Lucilius introduces the differentiation between the act of suffering and the sufferer's attitude to suffering, which is from where, it seems, *patientia* results (67.4):

> Distingue, mi Lucili, ista, et intelleges esse in iis aliquid optandum. Tormenta abesse a me velim; sed si sustinenda fuerint, ut me in illis **fortiter, honeste, animose** geram optabo. Quidni ego malim non incidere bellum? sed si inciderit, ut vulnera, ut famem et omnia quae bellorum necessitas adfert **generose** feram optabo. Non sum tam demens ut aegrotare cupiam; sed si aegrotandum fuerit, ut nihil **intemperanter,** nihil **effeminate** faciam optabo**. Ita non incommoda optabilia sunt, sed virtus qua perferuntur incommoda.**
>
> (Distinguish, my Lucilius, those things, and you will understand that something in those things is to be desired. I would want tortures to be absent from me; but if they have to be endured, I will desire that I conduct myself bravely, honourably, boldly. Why should I not prefer that war does not happen? But if it does happen, I will desire that I bear nobly wounds, hunger, and everything which the needs of war bring out. I am not so mad that I desire to be ill. But if I have to be ill, I will desire that I do nothing without moderation, nothing womanly. In this way, inconveniences are not desirable, but the *virtus* with which inconveniences are borne [is].)

Seneca states that he does not desire to be subjected to suffering, but if this does happen, he prefers to endure suffering bravely. Although linguistically,

patientia is absent in this section, the aesthetics of *patientia* are still present, through the gerundive *sustinuenda* and verb *perferuntur*, as well as the other *incommoda* to which the philosophical subject is subjected (e.g. war, wounds, hunger, illness).[257] The focus on a brave attitude to suffering is conceived of in gendered terms. Seneca contrasts desirable and undesirable conduct, and masculine and effeminate respectively. The adverbs *fortiter, honeste, animose* and *generose*, referring to desired conduct, are coded masculine, in contrast to *inemperanter* and *effeminate* which refer to undesirable conduct and are coded effeminate. The masculine coding of ethical goodness is confirmed in the final sentence of this section, which clarifies how receptive passivity is desirable; *incommoda* are not desirable in and of themselves, but insofar as they allow the philosophical subject to display *virtus* – *VIRtus* = MASCuline.

Having given his response to Lucilius, Seneca then goes on to argue for this point of view, that receptive passivity which allows the philosophical subject to display *virtus* is desirable. In order to do this, Seneca linguistically sustains the connection between *patientia* and *fortitudo* and formally sets *patientia* as a branch of *fortitudo*. Whenever Seneca mentions *patientia* in the middle part of the letter, it is consistently qualified by *fortitudo* or *fortis* (67.5, 67.6):

> deinde etiam si * * * tormentorum **fortis patientia** optabilis est.

[257] Such switch to an aesthetics of *patientia* in favour of the verbal usage of *patientia* is important to note, as a similar strategy occurs in *Ep.* 68-74, discussed below (pp. 189-93).

> (Then, even if <tortures are not desirable> brave endurance of tortures is desirable.)[258]

> Si **fortitudo** optabilis est, et tormenta **patienter** ferre optabile est; hoc enim **fortitudinis pars** est. Sed separa ista, ut dixi: nihil erit quod tibi faciat errorem. Non enim **pati** tormenta optabile est, sed **pati fortiter**: illud opto **'fortiter'**, quod est **virtus**.
>
> (If bravery is desirable, then it is also desirable to bear tortures enduringly; for this is part of bravery. Distinguish these things, as I have said, and there will be nothing which makes you err. For it is not desirable to suffer torture, but to suffer torture bravely. I desire to act "bravely", that is *virtus*.)

The adjective *fortis* is applied to *patientia*. In §6, *tormenta patienter ferre* is implied to be a part of *fortitudo*, through the conditional. This is made explicit in the following sentence, that endurance of torture is part of bravery, *fortitudinis pars*. Moreover, Seneca stresses that it is not *pati* alone which is desirable, but *pati fortiter*. It is acting *fortiter* which makes an action *virtus*. By making this clarification, Seneca highlights that the action of *pati* cannot be let loose alone, but must be done *fortiter*, as part of *fortitudo*.

After this sustained linguistic association of *patientia* and *fortitudo*, Seneca formally sets out within a kind of taxonomy that *patientia* is a branch of *fortitudo*, a sub-virtue to *fortitudo* (67.10):

[258] Taking Linde's suggested text for the lacuna: *tormenta non optabilia sunt*.

> Cum aliquis tormenta **fortiter patitur**, omnibus virtutibus utitur. Fortasse una in promptu sit et maxime appareat, **patientia**; ceterum illic est **fortitudo**, cuius **patientia** et **perpessio** et **tolerantia rami sunt**.
>
> (When someone endures torture bravely, they use all virtues. Perhaps endurance alone is manifest and appears most of all, but bravery is there, of which endurance and suffering and tolerance are branches.)

Again, *pati* is clarified by *fortiter*. Seneca further develops the idea that *patientia* is a part of *fortitudo*, by making it into a sub-virtue, one of the branches, *rami*, of *fortitudo*, alongside *perpessio* and *tolerantia*. By subordinating *patientia* to *fortitudo*, Seneca protects it, in a formal sense, from the reproach of passivity and effeminacy.

The remainder of *Ep.* 67 continues to reinforce the *virtus* of *patientia* through the use of the *exempla* of Regulus (67.12), Cato (67.13), and his own associates Demetrius (67.14) and Attalus (67.15). All these men are praised for their *patientia*, often in masculine terms. Regulus is described as a *magnus vir* (67.12). Seneca says that Demetrius encourages him to test his *firmitas animi* (67.13), the noun *firmitas* connoting masculinity through its meaning of immovability. Attalus is reported to say *torqueor, sed fortiter… occidor, sed fortiter* (66.15); Attalus' qualifications that his physical suffering is undergone *fortiter* (bravely) echo Seneca's qualifications of *patientia* by this same adverb throughout this letter. Seneca closes the letter by summarising its argument, that whatever *virtus* commands is *optabilis* (67.16); by extension, the reader notes, *patientia*, as part of *virtus*, is also *optabilis*.

By the end of this sequence of letters, then, the reader has reached an understanding of *patientia*. In *Ep.* 64, it was a confusing concept, a receptive inactivity which involved conquering. In *Ep.* 65, we moved to the level of the cosmic – cosmic *patientia* as integral to the universe – to show that *patientia* as receptive passivity is not morally bad precisely because of its centrality to the makeup of the universe. In *Ep.* 66, through explaining the equality of primary and secondary goods qua *virtus*, *patientia* was shown to be an equal display of *virtus* to other, more active pursuits – with Seneca eventually suggesting that *patientia* can even be preferable through characterising the concept as masculine. Finally, in *Ep.* 67, Seneca formally sets *patientia* as a sub-virtue of *fortitudo*, both activating and masculinising the concept.

12 Beyond *Ep.* 67: Applying *Patientia*

Having discussed Seneca's teaching and Lucilius' learning of *patientia* – a topic which takes up the majority of Book 7 of the *Epistulae* (*Ep.* 63-69) – I now show how the concept is applied in Book 8 which runs from *Ep.* 70-74. The concluding letters of Book 7, *Ep.* 68 and 69, see Seneca turn away from the concept of *patientia*, and focus instead on advising Lucilius to withdraw from political life in favour of philosophy. The challenging new philosophical content of Book 7, successfully conveyed by the end of *Ep.* 67, is put aside to remind Lucilius and the reader of the bigger picture of Lucilius' philosophical learning – a breather at the end of the book to allow this new understanding of *patientia* to sink in before its fuller application in Book 8.

Book 8 picks up *patientia* once more, showing how this concept, explained and defined in fairly abstract terms in Book 7, works in more

concrete situations. Knowledge of the concept of *patientia* is is now assumed in Book 8, highlighting the linear development of ideas across Seneca's letters. Although not always linguistically prominent in Book 8 (particularly in *Ep*. 70 and 71), *patientia* features conceptually in all letters in Book 8. The following discussion deals with each letter of Book 8, in order to show how Seneca's teaching in Book 7 is assumed to be successful and is consistent with his presentation of more practical applications of *patientia*.

Ep. 70 discusses appropriate responses to suffering, to answer the questions of when suicide is appropriate, how much is too much suffering. In this letter, there is only one instance of *patientia*, at 70.18, and it does refer to endurance. Throughout the rest of the letter, suffering and endurance are key themes conceptually, but do not feature linguistically. Since the discussion is not focused on *patientia* itself (i.e. what *patientia* is), but rather applies what the reader has learnt about the concept to the endurance of death, the concept itself goes unnamed. We do not get replacement words for *patientia*. but rather the idea that death, like *patientia*, is something to be rehearsed in preparation for.

In *Ep.* 71, we turn to ethical knowledge, and the teaching that this is something practical rather than theoretical. The practical exercise of ethical knowledge involves knowledge of *virtus*, which is evident no matter what the philosophical subject undergoes (e.g. endurance of suffering). Therefore, a large part of the practical exercise of ethical knowledge is endurance, with the facts that all virtue is equal and that endurance of torture is actually good regurgitated throughout the letter – so again we get the application of the teachings from *Ep.* 66 and 67, about what *patientia* is, in a later letter. In this

letter, there are four instances of *patientia*: two which refer to endurance (71.12, 71.14), one which refers to suffering (71.7), and one which refers to allowing (71.16). The two which refer to endurance include supporting adverbs (71.12: *forti et aequo pateretur animo*; 71.14: *fortius ... pateretur*); the first thing being endured is *mutation* – not a physical thing – by Cato (as opposed to his death, mentioned previously), though in the second what is being endured is death – this is put quite euphemistically, as *finis*. The one which refers to suffering and its eradication is in the mouth of Socrates (71.7: *tu tamen nihil patieris, si modo tecum erit virtus*), thus distancing it from Seneca. We also get other words used for the concept of endurance, e.g. *iacueris securior* (71.5), *fero* (71.11, 26, 28), *sustollo* (71.25). It seems that *patientia* here is prevented from referring to physical suffering (as it does in *Ep.* 66 and 67), and therefore softened, protected, and kept positive. The letter concludes with the fact that practising *patientia* allows one to rise above and conquer *Fortuna*.

In *Ep.* 72 and 73, we, again, turn away from the concept of *patientia*. 72 focuses on different kinds of *proficiens*, at different points in the journey to *sapientia*, while 73 discusses ambition and not being attached to indifferents (following *exemplum* of the Stoic god). Therefore, as we approach *Ep.* 74, the concept of *patientia*, which has been set up in *Ep.* 64-67, has been put aside for the end of Book 7, and returns in Book 8 in *Ep.* 70 and 71 where it is applied. In 70, it is applied to the circumstances of suicide, and in 71, it is applied in order to show us where *patientia* gets us, towards rising above and defeating *Fortuna* in full military metaphor.

Ep. 74 concludes Book 8 with a discussion of fear of future *patientia*, as an indifferent which the philosophical subject should scorn, through applying *ratio* to rise above *Fortuna*. Thus, this letter integrates many of the ideas of *Ep.* 64-73 (e.g. equality of virtues, preferability of suffering, retirement, detachment from indifferents).[259] As the culmination of a book, the integration of themes from previous letters makes complete sense. For the most part in this letter, *patientia* refers to a generic kind of suffering or enduring, without the specificity of suffering physical violence, or it refers to future suffering. We are also reminded that *virtus* requires the *patientia* of dispreferred things (74.12). The end of Book 8, and the culmination of a sequence of letters discussing the *virtus* of the philosophical subject in reference to his place in the universe, therefore, returns to *patientia*, but in a more abstracted form. The reader is no longer faced with the physical realities of *patientia*, with which he was confronted in *Ep.* 66 and 67, but the abstract fear of *patientia* that *Ep.* 66 and 67 have left behind. This fear is allayed through a reminder that the reader should live in the present and detach from indifferents, such as fear. Perhaps, in all this discussion of suffering we need a reminder that, although suffering is not within our control (66 and 67), it is not a cause for concern (precisely because it is not within our control).

Seneca's use of *patientia* in Bok 8 highlights that the concept itself has been discussed and defined, and can now be applied and bestowed with nuance. Seneca no longer needs to tell us that *patientia* is positive, but does need to explain the correct ways in which to do *patientia* – when it goes too

[259] For this reason, it seems entirely possible that Books 7 and 8 were circulated together; nevertheless it seems that they were, at the very least, to be read in this order.

far and how to apply it to death (70), how it can lead us to rising above Fortune (71), when (if at all) the philosophical subject is to be anxious of *patientia* (74), especially given the relentless confrontation of *patientia* before the reader in *Ep.* 66 and 67. Seneca, therefore, goes on to explain the concept developed in *Ep.* 64-67, in the middle of Book 7, in Book 8, in *Ep.* 70, 71 and 74. He does this, however, whilst linguistically protecting the concept from negativity. He continues to back it up with supporting adverbs which denote ideas of courage (e.g. *fortiter*), and he avoids associating *patientia* with death and physical violence through using other words (e.g. *fero*) instead.

13 Conclusion

In conclusion, *Ep.* 64 introduces *patientia* as a positive concept associated with *virtus*, whilst also revealing its potential tensions with activity, as a term associated with receptive inactivity. The physical teachings of *Ep.* 65 reassure the reader that *patientia* is a concept central to the make-up of the universe, and so work to mitigate against the negative ethical judgement of *patientia*. *Ep.* 66 argues for the equality of virtues – whether active or passive – and so the virtuousness of *patientia*. *Ep.* 67 makes *patientia* desirable, as the best way of displaying *virtus*, and formally puts *patientia* amongst a taxonomy of *virtutes*.

My discussion of *Ep.* 64-67 has highlighted the significant lengths – figurative and literal –[260] that Seneca goes to in his teaching on *patientia*. Seneca's explanation of *patientia* spans most of book 7 of the *Epistulae*,

[260] *Ep*. 66 stands at a lengthy 53 paragraphs; it is exceeded in length only by *Ep*. 94, another philosophically dense letter.

which runs from 63 to 69. Introduced slowly and requiring some knowledge of Stoic physics in order to be understood correctly, it is clear why *patientia* has not been discussed until the later stages of the *Epistulae*. As well as having the potential to cause confusion (as suggested in *Ep.* 9, as discussed on pp. 138-40, *patientia* is clearly a concept of significant complexity, with a prerequisite for knowledge not only of Stoic physics, but also (as implied in *Ep*. 65, discussed on pp. 154-59) of the correct way of using and relating to Stoic physics. This is, I contend, part of why *patientia* is accorded such careful and concentrated discussion, at this later stage in the *Epistulae*.

Where *patientia* returns conceptually, in *Ep.* 70, 71 and 74, it is less linguistically present, and maintains its positive and protected status. *Ep.* 70 focuses on the endurance of death, applying the earlier teachings about *patientia*. *Ep.* 71 also applies earlier teachings, though this time focusing on how *patientia* aids one in reaching *virtus*; through the practice of *patientia* one rises above *Fortuna*. Finally, in *Ep.* 74, which concludes Book 8, any fears resulting from the *patientia* with which the reader has been confronted in *Ep.* 66 and 67, which the reader has been forced to envisage, are allayed. The teachings about indifferents in *Ep.* 73 mobilise the negation of fears of *patientia*. In Book 8, *patientia* stops being used of physical violence, and is only used of death in the most euphemistic way, otherwise referring to a very generic and non-physical sense of suffering. It is in this way that a positive status for *patientia*, generated by Seneca's teachings in *Ep.* 64-67, is maintained. This positive status, as shown in discussion of *Ep.* 66 and 67, is key for keeping *patientia* and, by extension, *virtus* masculine qua ethically positive.

Whatever happens to the Stoic philosophical subject in the world beyond the text, therefore, if endured bravely (with these teachings of *patientia* applied), does not impact on his masculinity and/or *virtus* – since what matters, ultimately, is the courageous and resistive mindset with which these things are endured, rather than the endurance itself. Moreover, such endurance qua *patientia* is, in fact, a display of masculinity and/or *virtus*. This conceptualisation of positive masculinity – as restraint in the face of external circumstances – is distinct from the negative and excessive masculinity of Atreus, discussed in Chapter Two. Atreus' unconstrained actions, perhaps fit for a king, are certainly not fit for the elite male readership of the *Epistulae*. To Atreus' hypermasculinity, the *Epistulae* provide a response in conceptual terms, a masculinity not dependent on aggressive dominance.

I now close the door on masculinity in Seneca's writing, and look towards the female half of the thesis. The second half of the thesis will see similar interactions between tragic and prose texts. One of the central concerns of Seneca's *Medea*, whether her actions are either unrestrained crimes or societally constrained duties, has conceptual echoes in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, which refigure domestic duty as philosophical *virtus*. In addition, there will be noticeable connections within the different genres discussed. For example, this chapter, on the *Epistulae*, and Chapter Four on the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* employ similar ideas of reconceptualisation and rehabilitation. As we will see in the next chapter, Seneca's *Medea*, like the *Thyestes*, presents the most extreme possibilities of human action. Both Medea and Atreus in avenging themselves, commit the most extreme crime of infanticide; but where Atreus' route to revenge is

direct, we will see that Medea’s is subject to much meditation and contemplation.

Chapter Three. Social Constraints and Crimes in Seneca's *Medea*.

1 Introduction

Having discussed the problems involved in constructing an ethical ideal for men, I now move on to discuss the problems involved in conceptualising ethical behaviour for women. Like men's actions, women's actions can become unrestrained and burst the intricately fashioned moulds that social and ethical norms desire and require of them. This second half of the thesis analyses women-centred texts, dealing with the same themes as the first half - those of unrestrained and constrained power and autonomy. Both the *Medea* and the *consolationes ad Helviam* and *ad Marciam* explore the tension between women's autonomy and women's social roles (as wives and mothers). As in the male-dominated half, the female-dominated half presents first a tragedy which dramatises a most extreme form of women's unrestrained power, followed by a philosophical collection which relaxes the tension by means of Stoic therapy.

At first glance, Seneca's Medea seems to commit extreme crimes in a way similar to that of Atreus in the *Thyestes*. In the broad strokes, Medea's and Atreus' stories have the same landmarks. Both experience disempowerment in the form of a loss of status: Atreus due to his wife's adultery and Medea due to Jason's divorce from her. Their plays show, ultimately, how they respond to disempowerment by taking revenge. For both characters, their vengeance proves their autonomy – their capacity to exceed moral and social boundaries. However, Medea and Atreus differ in how long

they spend at different points, the exact route they take, and the scenery framing their journeys. The different emphases of their journeys illustrate the different and asymmetrical concerns, issues and anxieties when it comes to thinking about the unrestrained action of men versus women.

The key difference between Medea's and Atreus' journeys is that Medea spends more time reflecting on and articulating her disempowerment. It becomes clear that Jason's divorce from Medea causes her powerlessness not only in her loss of status as wife (and so loss of legal and social protections) but also in the transformation the divorce effects upon the meaning and value of her past deeds/crimes. It is only because of the divorce that Medea can articulate that her past deeds/crimes were done for Jason's benefit, that Medea only benefited from them by proxy (as Jason's wife); the divorce causes Medea to no longer benefit from her past deeds/crimes, thus rendering them, in her eyes, valueless to her and only of value to Jason and Creon.

Medea attempts to persuade Creon and Jason that they have benefitted directly and materially from her deeds/crimes, but they refuse to share her perspective. Indeed, from their perspective Medea's deeds have always been her own crimes, committed independently and autonomously, and there has been no change in their meaning due to her divorce. However, from Medea's post-divorce perspective, although her past deeds were morally unconstrained – i.e. crimes – they were also, paradoxically, socially constrained since she did them because she was Jason's wife, they were done for Jason's benefit.

Since Medea is unsuccessful at persuading Jason (and Creon) that her deeds are deserving of recompense, she removes from Jason the benefits he

has received from her deeds, namely the children they share. Financial language pervades the play; instead of the books being balanced by a repayment of favours, Medea collects her debt through revenge. Medea's revenge – her murder of her own children – is the ultimate assertion of her autonomy, as an act both morally unrestrained and no longer constrained (unlike her past actions) by her social role as wife and mother. As in the *Thyestes*, unconstraint is manifested in the most extreme act of infanticide. Such unconstraint is straightforward to communicate, in contrast with the convoluted mental gymnastics required for understanding restraint in the *Epistulae Morales* (and discussed in Chapter Two) and in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* (to be discussed in Chapter Four).

My discussion of the *Medea* is indebted to earlier research in a number of ways. Medea's social status and different perspectives on Medea within the play have been discussed previously.[261] Guastella's and McAuley's explorations of Medea's vengeance, and its interconnectedness with Medea's past identity and motherhood, highlight the significance of Medea's mode of revenge.[262] Medea's identity from a gendered perspective has particularly been discussed by Walsh.[263] In addition, Stoic approaches have been taken to

[261] Abrahamsen 1999 focuses on Roman norms and laws of marriage, which Medea uses (unsuccessfully) to communicate about her status, but resorts to "uncivilised" blood revenge when more "civilised" options fail; see particularly p. 121: 'The monumental act of murdering her own children, the act that defines her mythic identity, can finally force Jason to acknowledge Medea's status as his wife. It is also the only way she can end the marriage. She cannot accept divorce on Roman terms; Medea, mad but triumphant, achieves the barbarian's victory of vengeance.' Benton 2003 highlights the ways in which others in the play perceive Medea's foreign status. McAuley 2016, 207–27 explores the patriarchal implications of motherhood for Medea.
[262] Guastella 2001; McAuley 2016, 201–27.
[263] Walsh 2012 discusses Medea's adoption of masculinity, when her feminine identities (of wife and mother) have left her vulnerable. Where Walsh focuses more on Medea's identity and adoption of masculinity, I focus more on Medea's vulnerability and experience of impinged upon autonomy.

Medea's identity.[264] It will also not do to leave unmentioned intertextual approaches to this very self-aware Medea.[265]

I build on the social aspect of these earlier interpretations, but focus less on Medea's identity and more on Medea's (and others') perceptions of her actions as criminal or socially embedded. In doing so, and particularly in comparing Medea's and Atreus' trajectories,[266] I demonstrate that Seneca's *Medea* is a play concerned with women's social constraint,[267] and that a figure as morally unconstrained as Medea can still experience social constraint.[268] Appearing an autonomous and independent actor to the outside world, Medea nevertheless experiences impingement on her autonomy by her social role as wife and mother. The dissonance between these perspectives on Medea and her actions proves to be dangerous to social and familial bonds. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Seneca's consolatory works addressed to women, the *ad Helviam* and the *ad Marciam*, attempt to confer philosophical autonomy on women by emphasising their capacity for philosophical virtue and making familial duties an integral part of the pursuit of personal,

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[264] Particularly Bartsch 2006, chap. 5; Bexley 2016. Stoic approaches to the *Medea* have also considered Medea's passions, her *furor* and *ira*: Nussbaum 1997; Gill 2009.

[265] Intertextual approaches which look back to Augustan poetry include: Hinds 1993; Trinacty 2007. Seneca's *Medea* also looks back to Euripides', as discussed by Roisman 2005, 80–88.

[266] Similarities between Medea and Atreus (in two particular places) are also noted by Guastella 2001, 203–5, 216; as such, this chapter expands on and analyses at greater lengths the parallels noted previously.

[267] By "social constraints", I refer to the social limitations experienced by women in late Republic and early Imperial Rome. The ideal woman was expected to fulfil familial duties, to her natal and/or marital family. As such, their social role should not extend beyond the realm of the domestic. Exceptions to this ideal, such as the subject of the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*, demonstrate that even in extreme circumstances, the womanly behavioural ideal is supportive of male family members; on this, see Hemelrijk 2004. For more on women's social, political and legal positions in ancient Rome, see Pomeroy 1975, chaps 8, 9, 10; Gardner 1986; Treggiari 1991; Saller 1998; Treggiari 2005.

[268] Medea's power and capacity, and their demonstration through her command of tragic space, are discussed by Segal 2008, 144–45 and Rimell 2012; as complementary to these perspectives, this chapter highlights Medea's clearly articulated experience of constraint and loss of autonomy.

philosophical excellence. And so, as in the first half of this thesis, Senecan tragedy seems to illustrate the same anxieties which are addressed and allayed in his philosophical writings.

2 Chapter Overview

This section walks through the specific terms of the discussion in this chapter. This chapter explains the dynamics of Medea's disenfranchisement, through considering Medea's expressions of (dis)empowerment and (impinged upon) autonomy. My discussion of Act One highlights the similarities between Medea's and Atreus' prologue speeches; both characters are active and vow to take vengeance. Unlike Atreus, Medea does not focus at all on her powerlessness but only on her past crimes and future vengeance, anticipating her characterisation as autonomous and powerful. However, these expectations are subverted in Acts Two and Three, which feature Medea's disenfranchisement due to Jason's remarriage. Act Two opens on Medea moments after Jason's wedding; no longer Jason's wife and exiled from Corinth, Medea is not the powerful figure of the introduction, but disempowered and aimless.

I then show how Medea's interactions with Jason and Creon in Acts Two and Three reveal her own, seemingly paradoxical perspective on her past deeds:[269] as morally unconstrained actions, so demonstrative of her power, but committed for the benefit of another, within the remit of her social role as wife, so demonstrative of her lack of autonomy. Medea attempts to persuade

[269] Medea's backward-looking focus on her past is discussed by Walsh 2012 from the perspective of Medea's identity, that Medea 'constructs a future self who is completely based in her past' (p. 80).

Creon and Jason to see her deeds from her perspective, by conceptualising of her deeds as services rendered and favours bestowed;[270] if she is no longer to be married to Jason, she must, in her view, be deserving of some other form of recompense. However, Creon and Jason refuse to share in Medea's point of view, seeing her deeds only as extreme acts and crimes, and not as services or favours; in their eyes, Medea committed her deeds of her own volition and, as merely coincidental beneficiaries, they owe her nothing. And since she does not receive her dues, Medea in Acts Four and Five turns to debt collection in the form of revenge, taking from Jason and Creon what they took from her: family and homeland.[271]

Medea's backward-facing focus in Acts Two and Three seems, at first glance, a little unusual, especially as her initial characterisation in Act One seems powerful. Unlike Atreus, her route to revenge is not a direct ascent to power, but a route which revisits the past as Medea reflects on her past disempowerment and exploitation.[272] The change in Medea's focus, from powerful to powerless, coincides with the transition between Act One and Act Two, the chorus' wedding song for Jason and Creusa. From this change in focus and from her interactions with Creon and Jason, it becomes clear that her sense of exploitation is contingent on her marital status. More precisely, Jason's divorce from Medea is a key moment which changes the meaning of her past deeds, thus causing her reassessment and re-evaluation of the past in

[270] A similar focus on economic language is taken up by Guastella 2001, 202–3, 206–8.
[271] Where Abrahamsen 1999, 118 sees Medea's revenge as the result of 'a clash of cultures', my discussion considers her vengeance as resulting from a clash of perspectives, of interpretations of Medea's actions.
[272] Benton 2003 offers an alternative interpretation of Medea's exploitation by Jason, as 'an act of imperialist aggression' (p. 273), and focuses on Medea's status as a foreigner and "barbarian".

Acts Two and Three of the play. It is only when separated from Jason and forced out of Corinth that it becomes relevant for Medea to conceptualise her deeds as services rendered. No longer married to Jason, she lacks recognition of her past deeds and sacrifices, and so experiences feelings of injustice and exploitation.

From her past, Medea often recalls the Argonautic journey with Jason, with particular focus on her murder of her own brother in Colchis and her deception of Pelias' daughters in Iolcus which causes them to kill him. Like her eventual infanticide, these acts are extreme and unrestrained by societal morality. However, it becomes clear that, for Medea, these acts do not demonstrate her unrestrained freedom of action or autonomy, but rather the restraint of her autonomy for and by Jason. For Medea, her crimes, as well as her role in the Argonautic journey, were deeds she undertook for Jason's benefit. Medea sacrificed natal familial bonds and good reputation in order to help Jason retrieve the Golden Fleece without tarnishing his reputation. From her perspective, Medea lacked autonomy in the past, even when appearing to act without social or moral restraints, because she acted as a wife, for the benefit of her husband. This claim by Medea – that her crimes were constrained in their social embeddedness – contrasts with Atreus' complete lack of restraint. In addition, Medea's claim highlights the issue of the social meaning of women's actions – an issue which is addressed in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, in which the social value of women's actions is refigured as personal, philosophical value.

Medea's lack of personal benefit from the Argonautic journey and past crimes only becomes clear because of her present, because of Jason's

divorce from her.[273] Without marital connection, Medea's past actions no longer provide her with the societal protections afforded by having a husband; Medea is no longer rewarded for her Argonautic deeds with wifehood. Moreover, without marital connection to Jason, Medea has no home to return to. For Jason's sake she destroyed her bonds with her natal family, and now she cannot return to them. Without her social status as Jason's wife, Medea is exiled from society. Her divorce reveals her lack of social autonomy as a woman, her social vulnerability and precarity.

Even in the second half of the play, during her process of revenge, Medea still reveals the traces of her social embeddedness and constraint. Even as she takes up Atreus-like calls to action, to vengeance, her constant self-encouragement serves as a reminder of her need for motivation, in order to complete her revenge. In Act Five, as she commits infanticide, she wavers and hesitates, and claims a social role from her revenge even as it also, paradoxically, exiles her from society.

And so, although a most extreme situation, the extremes of Medea's situation make legible more general issues and anxieties concerning women, power and autonomy – such as the social vulnerability of women.[274] Medea is also demonstrative of the fact that a powerful woman – in the sense that she has the capacity to do anything – can still experience constraints on her autonomy because of her social role as wife and mother. That Medea

[273] Stated similarly by Guastella 2001, 200: 'But if Medea is now alone, what purpose, what meaning, can be assigned to all her past and the crimes that she committed?'
[274] McAuley 2016, 227 focuses on the power in the motherhood of Medea, as she illustrates anxieties around 'a mother's power not only to give birth but also to dole out death'; I build on this by highlighting, as complementary to Medea's power in motherhood, the constraints presented by her wifehood which Medea clearly articulates when it comes to how her actions are perceived, valued and acknowledged.

committed deeds for the benefit of others causes her to feel unappreciated, exploited and constrained; it is only the fact that the acts which Medea commits for Jason are so extreme which makes clear that she never would have done them for her own benefit. That women's performance of deeds for the benefit of others is a more general concern is also clear from the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*. In these philosophical works, Seneca reframes social and familial duties as part of Stoic philosophical *virtus*, as part of women's pursuit of philosophical excellence. Thus, women are still encouraged to benefit their families, but with the ultimate aim of personal philosophical excellence. Or, from the other side, women are afforded the capacity of *virtus*, i.e. philosophical autonomy, but their philosophical excellence is contingent upon their success in their social and familial duties.[275]

3 Act One: Medea's Prologue, Medea's Empowerment

Before Medea appears disempowered in Acts Two and Three, the prologue of Seneca's *Medea* features a most powerful Medea, setting expectations for her characterisation to come. Unlike Euripides' *Medea*, which opens with a scene-setting speech by the Nurse, Seneca's opening features Medea herself. This centralises Medea's perspective, anticipating her consistent presence in this play. Medea's focus in this speech is vengeance on Jason for his new marriage.[276] The prologue can be divided roughly into three sections. Medea calls upon various divinities to aid her in her revenge (1-17),

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[275] The interaction of constraint and philosophical excellence is also discussed in Chapter Two, on the *Epistulae Morales*.
[276] Euripides' *Medea* is **the** play about revenge. Burnett 1973, 1998. Kerrigan 1996.

opening with address to the marriage gods (1: *di coniugales*), anticipating the centrality of the theme of marriage to this play. She then describes her vengeance: death on Creusa and exile on Jason (17-36). She ends the speech with a self-exhortation to vengeance, in which her past actions provide inspiration for her future (37-55).

Like Atreus in the *Thyestes*, Medea is motivated by vengeance. Both characters have prologue speeches – though in Atreus' case his prologue is delayed by the supernatural scene-setting of Tantalus and the Fury – in which they express their intent on revenge. As discussed in Chapter One, Atreus' opening speech deals with his disempowerment (via emasculation) and retaliatory assertion of power (and masculinity); after expressing his emasculation in programmatic elegiac language, Atreus moves on to a statement of action by which he wills himself to take revenge on his brother. In contrast, Medea's speech is concerned only with her assertion of power, and not the disempowerment to which this assertion responds. In other words, Medea's focus, in the prologue, is not on any constraints on her power, but on her unrestrained exercise of power. Through her prologue speech, Medea is characterised as active, vengeful and boundless in her power, setting the expectation that this will be her characterisation throughout the play.

After calling on the marriage gods, Minerva, Titan, Hecate, Pluto and Proserpina (1-12), Medea invokes the Furies (13-8):

> nunc, nunc **adeste** sceleris ultrices deae,
>
> crinem solutis squalidae serpentibus,
>
> **atram** cruentis manibus amplexae **facem**, 15

adeste, thalamis horridae quondam meis

quales stetistis: coniugi letum novae

letumque socero et regiae stirpi date.

(Now, now be present, goddesses vengeful of crime, with dirty, snakey hair, embracing black torches with bloody hands, be present as savage once you stood at my own bridal chamber. Grant death to the new wife and death to the father-in-law and the royal line.)

In the prologue, Medea focuses on taking action, directing imperative verbs to the Furies (13, 16: *adeste*). Medea also describes the Furies as vengeful goddesses (13), making fully explicit her reasons for invoking these divinities in particular. Her focus on the specific details of the Furies' snake hair and bloodied hands creates a foreboding and morally dark atmosphere. Moreover, the *atra fax* the Furies carry is a distortion of the torch carried at a wedding procession.[277]

As well as understanding her revenge through the Furies, Medea also thinks about her revenge in terms of similarities between past and present. The similarities in circumstance – namely the similar presence of the Furies – between Medea's own marriage to Jason and Creusa's marriage to Jason hint that Medea's past and future actions are equally morally unconstrained. The Furies are an ominous presence, contributing to the ill-fortuned outcomes of both marriages.[278] In addition, the Furies are particularly associated with the vengeance of familial murder. As such, in the case of Medea's marriage,

[277] For further on wedding torches, see Hersch 2010, 164–75, and particularly discussion of the perversion of wedding torch imagery in literature (pp. 165-7).
[278] For further on the motif of Furies at weddings, see Guastella 2001, 199; Boyle 2014, 110–13.

the Furies' presence is most likely due to her murder of her own brother. Their presence at Creusa's wedding is as an avenging force (for Jason's separation from Medea), but also foreshadows Medea's murder of Creusa and her own children. The temporal adverbs *nunc* and *quondam* indicate the contrasting temporal frames, whilst the adjectival *quales* highlights the similarity Medea predicts between her own marriage to Jason and Creusa's.

In her invocation of the Furies at the start of her prologue speech, Medea appears characterised by her unrestrained action, in both past and future. The invocation of the Furies creates a foreboding atmosphere, and also alludes to her past murder of her own brother – a highly morally unconstrained action. The ill-omened presence of the Furies at Creusa's wedding hints at the equally (in comparison to her past actions) savage form Medea's revenge will take. In the final section of the prologue speech, Medea will state more explicitly her intention to copy her past actions. For now, Medea imagines the results of her vengeance on Jason (19-28):

> mihi peius aliquid quod precer sponso malum:
> **vivat. per urbes erret ignotas egens** 20
> **exul pavens invisus incerti laris,**
> **iam notus hospes limen alienum expetat;**
> me coniugem optet, quoque non aliud queam
> peius precari, liberos similes patri
> similesque matri. parta iam, parta ultio est: peperi. 25
> **querelas** verbaque **in cassum** sero?
> non **ibo** in hostes? manibus **excutiam** faces

caeloque lucem.

(I have something worse which I might pray for my spouse: may he live. May he wander through unknown cities, destitute, an exile, afraid, hated and homeless. May he, a notorious guest, seek out foreign shores. May he long for me as wife and – I could not pray something worse – children like their father and like their mother. Now it is born, my vengeance is born. I have given birth. Do I sow complaints and words in vain? Will I not go against my enemies? I will shake the torches from their hands and shake the light from the sky.)

Medea imagines her vengeance making Jason powerless and exiled (21: *exul*). In this imagining, Jason is destitute materially (20: *egens*), but also socially as he has no home (21: *incerti laris*) and nowhere to go, wandering unknown places (20: *urbes ignotae*; 22: *limen alienum*). In contrast to Jason's powerlessness, Medea, in this section, is much more active. Not only does she will Jason's fate in jussive subjunctives (*vivat*, *erret*, *expetat*), but she also envisions herself acting in future tense verbs – first in a question (*ibo*) and then in a statement (*excutiam*). Not speaking in vain (24: *in cassum*), Medea states her intention to attack her enemies, using the verb *excutio* which connotes physical violence.

The rhetorical question through which Medea wills herself to action is also one of the rhetorical devices used by Atreus (*Thy*. 179: *questibus vanis agis ...?*). Both characters berate themselves for speaking in vain, as their actions thus far have not lived up to their words (*in cassum* vs. *vanis*). Both also describe their speech so far as complaint (*questus* vs. *querelas*), that they have been all bark and no bite. In this way, both characters incite themselves

to action. This image of Medea's revenge sets up expectations for the rest of the play. Analogous to the second half of Atreus' opening speech in the *Thyestes* – which states Atreus' intention to assert dominance over Thyestes, the focus of the rest of the play – this speech anticipates as the focus of the remainder of the play the dramatization of Medea's revenge. The reader expects that the *Medea* will, for the most part, show how Jason becomes the powerless and exiled figure of this section and how Medea demonstrates all her potential for action and crime – the focus of the close of the speech (40-55).

per viscera ipsa **quaere** supplicio viam, 40
si vivis, anime, si quid antiqui tibi
remanet vigoris; **pelle** femineos metus
et inhospitalem Caucasum mente **indue**.
quodcumque vidit Phasis aut Pontus nefas,
videbit Isthmos. effera ignota horrida 45
tremenda caelo pariter ac terris mala
mens intus agitat: vulnera et caedem et vagum
funus per artus. levia memoravi nimis;
haec **virgo** feci. **gravior** exurgat dolor;
maiora iam me **scelera post partus** decent. 50
accingere ira teque in exitium **para**
furore toto. paria narrentur tua
repudia thalamis. quo virum linques modo?
hoc quo secuta es. **rumpe** iam segnes moras.

quae scelere parta est, scelere linquenda est domus. 55

(Through the insides themselves seek a path to death, if, my spirit, you live, if anything of your former strength remains. Drive off womanly fears and don the inhospitable Caucasus in your mind. Whatever wrongdoing Phasis or Pontus saw, the Isthmus will see. My mind within stirs wild, unfamiliar, terrible things, evils fearful to sky and earth equally: wounds and slaughter and death wandering through limbs – I have recalled things too trivial, I did these things as a girl. May weightier grief rise up; greater crimes befit me after giving birth. Gird yourself with anger and prepare yourself for destruction with all your rage. May your divorce be told of together with your marriage. How will you leave the man? In the same way you pursued him. Now break off lazy delays. A household which was begotten from crime should be left in crime.)

Medea continues her intention to physical action by spurring herself on, addressing her spirit in the vocative (41: *anime*). Again, Medea is like Atreus in his prologue speech, who also addresses his spirit in the vocative and orders it through imperative forms (*Thy*. 192).[279] It seems, yet again, that this play will focus on Medea's active vengeance against Jason.

Medea particularly exhorts herself through references to her past. She associates her past with strength, harshness and crime – three qualities apparently indicative of the autonomy, the freedom to act of a past, younger Medea. Medea calls on her former strength (41-2: *antiquus vigor*). She then harks back to the Caucasus, the mountain range in the area from which Medea

[279] See also discussion of this passage by McAuley 2016, 220, who explains that Medea's aggression is 'not so much a "masculinity" … but a different paradigm of femininity: the aggressive, uncontainable, terrifying mother.'

hails, which she describes as harsh through the adjective *inhospitalis*.[280] Finally she promises that her past wrongdoing (44: *nefas*) will resurface in the future, highlighted by the repetition of *video* in different (perfect and future) tenses in lines 44-5. Together, these references to Medea's past depict her former actions as unrestrained and criminal, demonstrative of her autonomy.[281]

In order to attain the autonomy and criminality of her past, Medea orders herself to drive off womanly fears (*femineos metus*) and, instead, put on the Caucasus. Since *femineos* is an adjective, qualifying Medea's fears, Medea is not losing her womanhood itself, but the sorts of fears that a woman might experience. The contrast made here is between the timidity of Medea's present – which she must eschew – and the savagery of her past – which she aims to emulate in the future. There has been, it seems, for Medea, a change in courage and freedom to act between her past and her present.

After recalling some of the specificities of her crimes (45-8), Medea brings in a further association of her past: her status as a maiden, unmarried (48: *virgo*).[282] Now, instead of comparing past savagery and present timidity – pursuing one in the place of the other – Medea compares the actions and status of her past with those of her future. In status, Medea has changed from unmarried maiden (*virgo*) to a mother, as indicated by *post partus* (after giving birth).[283] It seems, then, that the *feminei metus* of Medea's present were

[280] Boyle 2014, 125: 'renowned for its wild terrain'.
[281] Guastella 2001, 201 describes crime as 'the guiding thread of her [Medea's] life' and 'the means by which she can attempt to reconstruct her own identity'; I consider crime instead as a conceptualisation of Medea's deeds which is difficult to resolve with their social embeddedness.
[282] Medea's different statuses as *virgo* and *coniunx/mater* and their association with her deeds are also discussed by: Guastella 2001, 200–202.
[283] The term *virgo* implies not only virginity, but also the unmarried but marriageable status of the maiden. *OLD* 2071 s.v. "*virgo*" 1a: 'a girl of marriageable age'. See also P. Watson

not a part of Medea's maidenhood. Medea's maidenhood is associated with autonomy and unrestrained action; and, implicitly, on the other side of this coin, Medea's wifehood is associated with timidity and a lack of strength – and (as we shall see) subordination of self to the interests of others.

For Medea's different statuses in the past and future (as maiden and mother respectively), different magnitudes of action are appropriate. That Medea's focus is actions is clear from the verb *facio* in the statement *haec virgo feci* (49). And that the basis for comparison is size is clear from the adjectives *levis* (48) and *magnus* (50), and the comparative forms *gravior* (49) and *maior* (50). Like Atreus', Medea's description of her escalation is a metaliterary reference to generic ascent. The word *maiora* in particular recalls the word *maius* in the closing line of *Heroides* 12, Ovid's elegiac epistle from Medea to Jason (*Her.* 12.212):

> nescio quid certe mens mea maius agit.
>
> (Certainly, my mind rouses something greater.)

This line itself is a reference to Ovid's generic escalation from elegiac epistles to his lost tragedy *Medea*, mapping the language of magnitude to genre as Ovid did himself.[284] Seneca's reference to *Heroides* 12 alludes to Medea's

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1983, 120–33, 143: 'term which defines the girl's social position', with 'increasing emphasis over the centuries on physical virginity'.

[284] Ovid's previous use of this language in *Am.* 3.1.23-24: *tempus erat thyrso pulsum graviore moveri; / cessatum satis est: incipe maius opus* (It was time that you were moved, struck by a greater *thyrsus*. There has been enough delay: begin a greater work); as discussed by G. Williams 2012, 67 n.2; Trinacty 2014, 99–100. The comparative *maius*, used of epic poetry vis-à-vis elegy, is also evident at Prop. 2.34.66. Hinds 1993, 34–43 discusses the (potential) interactions between Ovid's *Heroides* 12 and lost tragedy *Medea*. On the specifically generic implications of this line and the associations of *maior* with tragedy, see Barchiesi 1993, 343–45; Hinds 1993, 41–43, 2011, 22–23. Hinds 2011, 22 in particular notes: 'the end of Medea's epistle to Jason, *Heroides* 12, operates as a self-conscious metapoetic trailer, not just to the

literary baggage. Seneca, like Ovid, seeks to transcend the elegiac *levia* of the *Heroides*, by presenting her tragic *maiora*, weighty themes more suitable for tragedy.[285]

But where Atreus' deeds grow to expand beyond human boundaries, Medea's deeds develop in accordance with her age and change in status. The words *levia* and *maiora* also refer to specific actions within the life of the character Medea, actions by which she defines her own identity. Medea contrasts her earlier crimes as more minor, by describing them as *levia*, with her plans to commit more serious crimes, *maiora scelera*.[286] By associating her status as a *virgo* with *levia*, and her maternal role *post partus* with *maiora*, Medea highlights how her own personal ageing parallels the escalation of her crimes.[287] On the one hand, Medea's older age requires bigger and badder crimes. On the other hand, something between Medea's maidenhood and motherhood/wifehood seems to have inhibited her abilities to commit crimes at all.

The interconnected increase of Medea's age and crimes is further reinforced by the parallels she makes between her marriage and divorce, events which have effected significant changes to her identity. The equivalence of *repudia* and *thalamis*, the coordination of *quo modo* ... *hoc*

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bloody Corinthian revenge immediately beyond the end of that epistle, but to the specific tragic text immediately beyond the end of that epistle; in other words, *Heroides* 12 is cast by Ovid as a "prequel" to his own Medea-tragedy.'

[285] For further discussion of Medea's literary recollection in Seneca, see Trinacty 2007, 2014, 95–126. Trinacty 2014, 99–100: 'Medea strives throughout the work to perform "greater" crimes and transcend her previous Ovidian representations.' This kind of palimpsestic claim to surpass a predecessor is also discussed by Burke-Tomlinson 2021. On generic interplay, see also Ntanou 2021.

[286] In addition, Medea's more extreme crimes can be interpreted, as by Benton 2003, 278, as a manifestation of her barbarity and otherness.

[287] Cf. Hine 2000, 120: 'M.'s obsession with making sure her behaviour in the current situation will match her behaviour in the past.' Medea's identity as a maiden is also explored in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, opposed to her identity as a witch, on which see Mawford 2021.

quo, and the repetitive structure of Medea's final line highlight the parallels between Medea's divorce and her marriage, which occur under the same criminal conditions, because of the same repeated *scelera*. Unrestrained action (in the sense of being morally extreme) is characteristic of Medea in past and future. However, it will be her past crimes, currently conceived of as unrestrained, which will be reconceptualised in the next two acts; although in her actions she was morally unrestrained, Medea will describe herself to have been restrained in motivation – acting for Jason rather than herself.

The closing lines of the prologue foreshadow the importance of reputation to Medea; unlike Atreus, who is neither concerned with nor motivated by what others think of him, Medea is deeply concerned with others' evaluation of her and her deeds. This concern is anticipated at the end of the prologue speech by the verb *narro*, which, through its epic connotations, highlights the ideas of reputation and honour. This verb evokes the Homeric concept of κλέος, the glory conferred on a hero through his deeds recorded by the epic poet.[288]

Whilst the verb *narro* does not have the immediate epic recognisability of *cano*, it does have epic connotations, as highlighted by its use in Virgil's *Aeneid*, where it refers not to the epic song of the bard, but the recounting of heroic and anti-heroic acts in a less formal sense. This verb is used of Aeneas' narration of his own deeds (*Aen.* 3.716-7; 4.78-9):

sic pater Aeneas intentis omnibus unus

[288] On κλέος in Homeric epic as the glory conferred on a hero through his deeds recorded by the epic poet, see Nagy 1999, 17.

fata renarrabat divum cursusque docebat.

(Thus, father Aeneas alone, with everyone attentive, told of the fates of the gods and explained his course.)

Iliacosque iterum demens audire labores
exposcit pendetque iterum narrantis ab ore.

(Again, maddened, she [Dido] demands to hear the Trojan hardships and again hangs onto the lips of the one narrating.)

In both these cases, the verb *narro* (and the etymologically related *renarro*) refers to Aeneas' narration of his journey from Troy to Carthage, an act of narration mirroring Odysseus' narration of his journey from Troy to Phaecia.[289] This verb, therefore, has epic range, used of the narration of the deeds of an epic hero within an epic poem.

The verb *narro* can also be linked more explicitly to reputation, as in Pyrrhus' and Turnus' respective addresses to their victims before they die (*Aen.* 2.547-50; 9.741-2):

"referes ergo haec et nuntius ibis
Pelidae genitori; illi mea tristia facta
degeneremque Neoptolemum narrare memento.
nunc morere."

("And so you will report these things and go as a messenger to my father, son of Peleus. Remember to tell him of my wretched deeds and his ignoble Neoptolemus. Now die!)

[289] Clausen 2002, 58; Heyworth and Morwood 2017, 21.

> "incipe, si qua animo virtus, et consere dextram,
>
> hic etiam inventum Priamo narrabis Achillem."
>
> ("Come then, if there is any courage in your heart, and face my right hand.
>
> You will tell Priam that an Achilles has also been found here!)

In both instances, the speakers use the verb *narro* to instruct their victims-to-be to tell of their deeds in the Underworld. Just as in Homeric epic, *kleos* allows the hero's reputation to transcend their absence in death, the act of narration, indicated by *narro*, transcends the anti-hero's absence from the Underworld.[290] This verb, therefore, refers to the reporting of heroic and anti-heroic deeds in an epic context, which results in the transmission of a hero's, or anti-hero's, reputation.[291] Following these mechanics, Medea exhorts that her marriage and divorce are reported so that her reputation is preserved, particularly, as will be shown, with the view that the appropriate honours are then conferred upon her.

The verb *narro*, as noted by Trinacty, also has a metaliterary function; by using this verb, Medea assumes an authorial role, taking control of her own destiny and writing her eponymous tragedy with the knowledge of her literary past.[292] The passive and jussive subjunctive form highlights how Medea wants her deeds to be talked about in a specific way; this anticipates how Medea will continue to seek a certain conceptualisation of her deeds and

[290] On the immortalising function of κλέος, see Nagy 1999, 174–209.
[291] Compare also with Juno's use of this verb of Hercules' reputation at *Hercules Furens* 37-40: *qua Sol reducens quaque deponens diem / binos propinqua tinguit Aethiopas face, / indomita virtus colitur et toto deus / narratur orbe.* (Wherever the sun, leading back and taking away the day, touches the twin Ethiopian tribes with its close torch, his unassailable courage is revered and he is told of as a god throughout the whole world.)
[292] Trinacty 2014, 94.

assert agency over how she is perceived. The evaluation of his own deeds does not matter to Atreus – he never expresses any concern about what others might think of him. However, for Medea evaluation by others is highly important, indicating a social contingency or dependency on other people. This social contingency is most clearly reflected in Medea's use of the ideas of honour, reciprocity and beneficence. As the play continues, it will become clear that one of Medea's aims is to convince others to see her and her deeds the way that she wants them to. The verb *narro* anticipates this aim – and an epic framework helps us to understand how Medea will go on to connect the ideas of deeds, reputation and honour.

4 Act Two: Jason's Re-Marriage, Medea's Disempowerment

Between Acts One and Two, the chorus sing their wedding song for Jason and Creusa. Act Two opens on Medea's response to Jason's new marriage. Medea is made powerless, in contrast to her characterisation as powerful and autonomous in Act One (116-21):

> **occidimus**. aures pepulit hymenaeus meas.
> vix ipsa tantum, vix adhuc credo malum.
> hoc facere Iason potuit, **erepto patre**
> **patria atque regno sedibus solam exteris** 120
> deserere durus?
>
> (I am ruined. The wedding song has struck my ears. I myself still scarcely believe so much evil. Could Jason do this, with my father, fatherland and kingdom torn away, could the harsh man leave me alone in a foreign land?)

Medea's vulnerability is clear from her opening exclamation of despair (*occidimus*). In a reversal of the situation imagined in Act One, it is not Jason who is left exiled, but Medea. Medea is separated from her father, homeland and kingdom (*patre patria atque regno*). Her description of herself as *sedibus solam exteris* emphasises her vulnerability in its word order, with Medea (*solam*) surrounded by a foreign land, Corinth (*sedibus exteris*). Exiled like the imagined Jason of Act One, Medea expresses her sense of powerlessness in a list and in a self-directed rhetorical question – just as Atreus does in the opening of his prologue speech (*Thy.* 176-81).

As Medea's response continues, it becomes clear that she conceives of her disempowerment as occurring through unappreciation or devaluation (121-3):

> **merita contempsit mea**
> qui **scelere** flammas viderat vinci et mare?
> adeone credit omne **consumptum nefas**?
> (Has he disregarded my services, he who had seen fire and sea overcome by crime? Does he think now all my wrongdoing has been used up?)

In abandoning her, in remarrying, Jason, from Medea's perspective, lacks appreciation of her past deeds. The statement *merita contempsit mea* is most illustrative of Medea's conceptualisation of her situation: in taking marriage away from Medea, Jason no longer repays her for her favours, her *merita*, but instead devalues them (*contemno*).[293] Here, Medea uses the language of

[293] Medea's use of financial language here is also noted by Guastella 2001, 202–3.

reciprocity and favours (*beneficia*) by using the term *merita*.[294] However, Medea glosses these favours or services to Jason as *scelus* and *nefas* (crime and wrongdoing). Medea's paradoxical conceptualisation of her deeds as both *crimina* and *beneficia* is key to understanding Medea's perspective in this play.[295] Jason and Creon see her deeds as only the former and not the latter, and so Medea will go on to convince them of her point of view, that her deeds are both.

Medea particularly focuses on the quantification and equity involved in giving and receiving *beneficia*. This is clear from her use of *contemno* (121), *consumo* (123) and, later, *satis* (127), words with which she quantifies her favours, her wrongdoing and her vengeance. This language of quantification expresses how Medea, at this point in the play, experiences a change in how her past deeds – her abilities to conquer the elements – are thought about by Jason, that they are scorned, devalued or disregarded due to his act of divorcing Medea. Following similar themes, Medea then questions whether Jason's betrayal of her is indicative of his belief that she has depleted her capacity for wrongdoing, with the implication that she will be unable to pursue revenge. It seems that Jason, by divorcing Medea, has become indebted to her, tipped the scales to his detriment, and assumed that she will be unable to recoup her loan in the form of revenge.

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[294] As used by Seneca in the *De Beneficiis*, *merita* refers to services committed for another in beneficent exchange (e.g. *Ben.* 1.1.8, 1.5.2, etc.).

[295] Medea's incongruous use of beneficence is striking, as this discourse is at odds with the situation to which she applies it (i.e. marriage); in particular, it is not the language of beneficence (i.e. *beneficium*) which is relevant to marital relations, but the language of duty (i.e. *officium*) – on which, see Treggiari 1991, 162, 206, 239, 489. Both her attempt to conceptualise crimes as favours and her use of beneficent exchange to describe the union of marriage highlight the unusualness of her situation. The incongruity or irresolvability of beneficence with marriage contribute to showing the uphill battle Medea faces, in getting Creon and Jason to see her point of view. I have previously discussed Medea's unusual use of the typically masculine discourse of beneficence; see Ngan 2021.

This leads Medea to discuss her revenge, again in terms of quantification (124-30):

incerta vecors mente vesana feror
partes in omnes. **unde** me ulcisci queam? 125
utinam esset illi **frater**! est **coniunx**. in hanc
ferrum exigatur. hoc meis **satis** est malis?
si quod Pelasgae, si quod urbes barbarae
novere facinus quod tuae ignorent manus,
nunc est parandum. 130

(Uncertain and maddened, I am driven by an insane mind in all directions. From where can I avenge myself? If only he had a brother! But there is his wife. In her may the sword be driven. Is this enough for my wrongs? If Pelasgian cities, if barbarian cities know any crime which your hands are ignorant of, now it must be prepared.)

An enraged Medea calculates how to balance the books, what kind of revenge will be sufficient repayment. In order to do so, she must look to the past, the wrong committed against her, which is not only Jason's divorce from her but also the circumstances of their marriage. Initially, it seems that the source material for her vengeance against Jason, the act which she seeks to emulate, is her murder of her own brother – paradoxically a wrong committed both by and against her. It seems that this crime will be mirrored in the murder of Jason's new wife. However, Medea swiftly moves on to consider what – if anything – could be sufficient. Medea wants to find an unthought-of crime, suggesting that she is like Atreus. However, where Atreus wants to be

extreme, bigger and badder than human, akin in status to the Giants, Medea's focus is sufficiency and adequacy. For Medea, extreme wrongs against her – the murder of her brother, betrayal of her family, and exile due to divorce – require an extreme form of retaliation.

Medea continues looking to the past for inspiration, elaborating on the past crimes she has only alluded to so far (130-7):

> scelera te hortentur tua 130
> et cuncta redeant: inclitum regni decus
> raptum et **nefandae** virginis parvus comes
> **divisus** ense, funus **ingestum** patri
> **sparsum**que ponto corpus et Peliae senis
> decocta aeno membra: funestum impie 135
> quam saepe fudi sanguinem – **et nullum scelus**
> **irata feci. saevit infelix amor.**
>
> (May your crimes encourage you and may everything return: the seizure of the renowned glory of the kingdom, the dissection of the little companion of the wicked maiden – his death thrust into his father's face and his body scattered in the sea – and the stewed limbs of the old man Pelias in a pot. How often I spilled fatal blood against family! Yet I committed no crime in anger; unfortunate love raged.)

Medea practically confesses, listing her crimes against her kingdom, her family and Pelias' family. That her betrayal and murders have the added familial layer is emphasised by the adverb *impie* (135). The familial aspect of Medea's crimes explains the familial focus of her vengeance: wishing that

Jason had a brother, she settles on his wife as an appropriate substitute. Medea does not deny the criminality of her deeds, describing them in gory detail. She draws attention to physical mutilation, with the words *divisus* and *sparsus* (133-4). The verb *ingero* (133) particularly emphasises her presentation of her brother's death to her father, characterising it as an intrusion or encroachment – the crossing of a boundary.[296] As well as her deeds as criminal, she describes herself as criminal with the adjective *nefandus*. Medea is aware of the criminal status of her deeds and herself.

However, Medea qualifies that her crimes were not driven by anger, but by love for Jason (136-7); by putting this qualification on her actions, Medea highlights that her past actions were done for the benefit of another, rather than for her own benefit. The adjective *iratus* is also used by Atreus; this emotion, which applies to Atreus at the start of the *Thyestes* (180), did not apply to Medea when she did her past deeds but, by implication, does apply now. Instead of being motivated by anger in the past, Medea was motivated by love. In this play, Medea will follow a similar path to that of Atreus who, when angered by the injustices done to him, vindicated himself through vengeance. Through vengeance, both Medea and Atreus assert their own power and validate themselves. Medea's past deeds, by contrast, were not self-motivated, but incited by love – specifically love for another person, Jason.[297] The impersonal phrasing of *saevit amor* suggests that love came from without as an external stimulus. The fact that Medea's past deeds were motivated by love for another person and committed for the benefit of another

[296] See earlier discussion of the verb *ingero* at pp. 62-5. The connection of this verb with infanticide in the *Thyestes* and the *Medea* is observed by Guastella 2001, 203–4.
[297] The contrasting emotions of *amor* and *ira* are also discussed by Guastella 2001, 205–6, as means of Medea's restoration of her lost social identity.

will be revealed to be a key part of to her reconceptualisation of her crimes as favours, or, rather, her conceptualisation of her deeds as both crimes and favours.

Finally, Medea's soliloquy concludes with her contemplation of whether Jason is to blame. She concludes that he could not have done anything other than marrying Creusa (137-40), since he could not have contravened Creon (143-6). Since Jason is (for now) not to blame for his new marriage, the only thing Medea longs for from Jason is that he remembers her and her deeds (140-2):

> si potest, vivat meus,
> ut fuit, Iason; si minus, vivat tamen
> **memor**que **nostri muneri** parcat meo.
> (If he can, let Jason live as mine, as he once was; if not, let him still live and spare my gift by remembering me.)

If Jason cannot be hers, she wants him to at least remember her *munus*. Memory is key to social reciprocity and *amicitia*; the word *munus* is a common way of referring to such favours. Not blaming Jason, Medea puts blame instead on Creon and is determined to destroy Creon's home and family (143-9).

Medea then discusses the wisdom of this vengeance with her Nurse (150-76). The Nurse discourages Medea from taking vengeance by imploring her to think of her motherhood (171):

NU. mater es –

ME. cui sim vides.

(NU. You are a mother –

ME. You see for whose benefit I am.)

Medea's response to her Nurse highlights that her motherhood is not straightforwardly her own, but that her motherhood is socially beneficial, of benefit of another person.[298] The relative pronoun *cui* is a dative of advantage, presaging Medea's use of this case in the same way later in the play.[299] This is another instance of Medea's deeds being in benefit of another person – and specifically socially defined through role as mother.

5 Act Two: Medea and Creon

Medea's primary interaction in Act Two is with Creon. Upon entering the stage, Creon describes Medea and her actions as criminal and monstrous. Medea aims to change Creon's conception of her, and persuade him that her actions were not criminal, but of social benefit. She does this by casting herself as an epic hero, embodying Achilles and his situation – through his martial prowess Achilles benefitted all the Greeks, but received no recompense when his prize (Briseis) was taken from him by Agamemnon. Medea finds parallels in their situations, which are highlighted through verbal parallels with Achilles' speech in *Iliad* 9. By casting herself as an epic hero, as an Achilles, Medea attempts to persuade Creon that she, like Achilles, has remained unrecognised for her deeds.

[298] The socially beneficial aspect of motherhood is noted by McAuley 2016, 217.
[299] *Med.* 276, 457, 487-8.

When Creon enters in Act Two, he addresses Medea as an abomination, because of her past crimes. The first time Creon describes her to his attendants, he draws attention to her transgressive lineage and deeds (*Med.* 179-91):

Medea, **Colchi noxium Aeetae genus**,
nondum meis **exportat e regnis** pedem? 180
molitur aliquid: **nota fraus, nota est manus**.
cui parcet illa quemve securum sinet?
abolere propere **pessimam** ferro **luem**
equidem parabam; **precibus evicit gener.**
concessa vita est. liberet fines metu 185
abeatque tuta. fert gradum contra **ferox**
minaxque nostros propius affatus petit.
arcete, famuli, tactu et accessu procul,
iubete sileat. **regium imperium pati**
aliquando discat. **vade** veloci via 190
monstrumque saevum horribile iamdudum **avehe**.

(Medea, harmful offspring of Colchian Aeëtes, does she not yet take her feet from my kingdom? She plans something. Her crime is known, her hand is known. Whom will she spare, or whom will she leave untroubled? I, personally, was preparing to swiftly purify the foul pestilence by sword; but my son-in-law conquered me with prayers, her life is granted. May she free my lands from fear and leave safely. She fiercely takes a step in opposition and, threatening, she seeks closer conversation with me. Keep her away, attendants, far from touch and approach. Order her to be silent. May she

sometime learn to endure the power of kings. Go by a swift path, take away, at last, the savage, terrible monster.)

His first reference to her by a patronym highlights his "othering" of her, through reference to her non-Greek heritage from Colchis and allusion to her divine lineage from Helios via her father Aeëtes.[300] He explicitly describes her as a *monstrum*, also applying the adjectives *saevus* and *horribilis* to her, as a result of her past deeds, which he refers to negatively as *fraus* (treachery), and orders her to leave his kingdom. By "othering" Medea, dehumanising her and alluding to her deeds in negative terms, Creon highlights his view of Medea as a criminal and her deeds as crimes. Moreover, Creon's dehumanisation of Medea sets her beyond society. Likewise, his appeal that she will learn *regium imperium pati* (189) also excludes her from society, by implying that she does not submit to kings and so does not know her proper place. To Creon, Medea is not grounded in society and her past actions were not socially embedded or committed with rational motivations.

Creon's perception of Medea here also bears similarity to Atreus' characterisation in the *Thyestes*, highlighting (from Creon's perspective) Medea's criminality, lack of restraint, and excess. Creon notes that Medea is well-known for her trickery (181: *fraus*). Medea's deceptiveness is central to Creon's perception of her. He returns to this later in the act when describing her involvement in the death of Pelias at the hands of his own daughters (260-261: *cum **dolo** captae tuo / piae sorores impium auderent nefas*), and when voicing his suspicions about her present intent (290: ***fraudibus** tempus*

[300] Medea's foreignness is also discussed by Abrahamsen 1999; Benton 2003.

petis).[301] Like Medea, Atreus is also associated with deception and trickery through the same nouns, *fraus* and *dolus*.[302] Moreover, Creon's dehumanisation and bestialisation of Medea also make her similar to Atreus, whose bestial features are central to his characterisation.[303] The noun *monstrum* and adjective *saevus*, used of Medea by Creon at 191, are also used of Atreus and his deeds.[304] In short, Creon sees Medea as an Atreus-like figure, acting criminally and immorally to such an extent that places her beyond the pale.

However, Medea's conception of her own deeds contrasts that of Creon, as she considers them worthy of reward. At first she skips over the criminal aspects of her deeds to focus on her safekeeping of the Argonauts, her insurance of their safe passage from Colchis. She describes the safe return of the Argonauts as a benefit she has conferred upon Creon and Greece, for which she herself is worthy of reward. In order to express her perspective, Medea employs concepts of epic honour, fashioning herself as an underappreciated Achilles. As McAuley notes, 'she speaks as if she were Achilles, bringing back spoils from war, keeping only Jason for herself'.[305] In addition to the parallels noted by McAuley, I highlight that Medea's Achillean self-characterisation is particularly evident in her claim to have single-handedly saved all the Argonauts. Moreover, by echoing Achilles' speech on the depreciation of his role in the Trojan expedition, Medea

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[301] Trickery (*fraus* and *dolus*) will also later be attributed to Medea by the chorus 881, etc.
[302] *fraus*: *Thyestes* 316, 320, 482. *dolus*: 286, 318, 473.
[303] See above pp. 66-8, 73-7.
[304] *Monstrum*: *Thy.* 254, 632, 703; *saevus*: 196, 715, 726, 743.
[305] McAuley 2016, 215.

attempts to conceive of her own treatment by others as unfair depreciation (*Med.* 225-35 cf. *Il.* 9.321-37):

… solum hoc Colchico regno **extuli**, 225
decus illud ingens Graeciae et florem inclitum,
praesidia Achivae gentis et prolem deum
servasse **memet**. **munus** est Orpheus **meum**,
qui saxa cantu mulcet et silvas trahit,
geminumque **munus** Castor et Pollux **meum** est. 230
satique Borea quique trans Pontum quoque
summota Lynceus lumine inmisso videt,
omnesque Minyae. nam ducum taceo ducem,
pro quo nihil debetur. hunc nulli imputo;
vobis revexi ceteros, unum mihi. 235

(I brought back only this from the Colchian kingdom: the great glory of Greece, the famous bloom, the shields of the Achaean race, the offspring of the gods – I myself saved them. My gift is Orpheus, who softens rocks and moves woods with song, and Castor and Pollux my twin gift, and the offspring of Boreas, and Lynceus who sees far off things across the Pontus with his sent off sight, and all the Minyans. But I am silent on the leader of leaders, for whom nothing is owed. I account this man to no one; for you I brought back the rest of them, just one for me.)

οὐδέ τί μοι περίκειται, ἐπεὶ πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῷ
αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολεμίζειν.
…

ὣς καὶ ἐγὼ πολλὰς μὲν ἀΰπνους νύκτας ἴαυον, 325

ἤματα δ᾽ αἱματόεντα διέπρησσον πολεμίζων

ἀνδράσι μαρνάμενος **ὀάρων ἕνεκα σφετεράων**.

δώδεκα δὴ σὺν νηυσὶ πόλεις **ἀλάπαξ**᾽ ἀνθρώπων,

πεζὸς δ᾽ **ἕνδεκά** φημι κατὰ Τροίην **ἐρίβωλον**·

τάων ἐκ πασέων κειμήλια πολλὰ καὶ ἐσθλὰ 330

ἐξελόμην, καὶ πάντα φέρων Ἀγαμέμνονι **δόσκον**

Ἀτρεΐδῃ·

…

ἄλλα δ᾽ ἀριστήεσσι δίδου γέρα καὶ βασιλεῦσι,

τοῖσι μὲν ἔμπεδα κεῖται, **ἐμεῦ** δ᾽ **ἀπὸ μούνου** Ἀχαιῶν 335

εἵλετ᾽, ἔχει δ᾽ ἄλοχον θυμαρέα. τῇ παριαύων

τερπέσθω.

(There is no gain for me, when I suffer pains in my heart, always risking my life in war… Thus, I spent many nights without sleep, and made the days blood-red in battle, fighting men for the sake of their wives. I plundered twelve cities of men with ships, I claimed eleven by foot in fertile Troy; from all these cities I took many good treasures, and, bringing them back, I gave them to Agamemnon, son of Atreus… He gave some of the treasures as prizes to the chiefs and kings, and for those men the gifts are set, but from me alone of the Achaeans he has taken; he has my pleasing concubine. Let him delight in lying beside her.)

Each speech illustrates how their speaker's deeds have gone underappreciated. The situational parallels between Achilles and Medea are reinforced by linguistic parallels.

Each has been responsible for committing deeds for the benefit of others. Achilles fights on behalf of the Greeks for the return of Helen to Menelaus (ὀάρων ἕνεκα σφετεράων), the third person possessive pronoun emphasising that his effort is not for himself but for another. Achilles even states that he has done nothing for his own benefit (οὐδέ τί μοι περίκειται). Likewise, Medea does not benefit (for the most part) herself, but helps the Argonauts for the benefit of Jason, Creon and the Greek populous in general (*vobis revexi ceteros, unum mihi*), which is emphasised through the use of pronouns of different persons.

Both figures also emphasise that they have singlehandedly been responsible for the success of their respective expeditions. Achilles uses first person verbs (ἀλάπαξ', ἐρίβωλον, ἐξελόμην, δόσκον), juxtaposed with the plural numbers to count his achievements (δώδεκα, ἕνδεκά). Similarly, Medea uses first person singular verbs and pronouns (*extuli*, *memet*, *meum*, *mihi*) juxtaposed with the lengthy list of Argonauts she has saved, described with multiple terms of status which emphasise their value.[306] Like Achilles alone plundered many cities, Medea alone saved many heroes.

However, despite the fact that they are singlehandedly responsible for the success of an expedition which benefits someone else (and not themselves), they are not appropriately recompensed, even having their prizes confiscated. Just as Achilles provided Agamemnon with κειμήλια, Medea offers *munera*, in the form of the objectified Argonauts, to Creon and the Corinthians. Achilles states that Agamemnon has taken booty away from him

[306] For discussion of Medea's use of these terms, see: Hine 2000, 141. For the Roman terminology of status in general, see: Lendon 1997, 272–74.

alone (ἐμεῦ δ᾽ ἀπὸ μούνου). Similarly, by asking for a prize when everyone else has received one, Medea highlights her lack of recompense for her deeds (*vobis revexi ceteros, unum mihi*).

In short, both characters have been slighted. After fighting on the behalf of the Greeks in order that Helen is returned to Menelaus, Achilles' contribution has gone unappreciated, as illustrated by the seizure of Briseis from him. Likewise, although she was responsible for the safe return of the Argonauts to Greece, Creon cannot be satisfied with the benefit the other Argonauts bring to Corinth but demands that Jason is taken from Medea too. Medea explicitly puts before Creon their respective benefits from her actions: *vobis revexi ceteros, unum mihi*. Medea (so she claims) brought benefit to herself by saving Jason, but to Creon and Greece by saving all the other Argonauts. In her view, she has done Creon a favour by bringing so many heroes to his kingdom – and her recompense for such a favour is Jason. She contrasts the many other men (*ceteri*) she saved to the one (*unus*) she considers her rightful share.

By conceptualising her situation as analogous to Achilles', Medea expresses her sense that she is unappreciated. Medea did not do her past deeds for her own benefit, but for that of others – and mostly for Jason. Although demonstrating physical power and capacity by saving the Argonauts, Medea nevertheless experiences constraint because of her circumstances. According to Medea, she aimed to benefit Jason because she was his wife – thereby constrained by her social role as wife. Medea is also socially constrained because she requires recognition by others, indicating the importance of honour and reputation to her. By embodying the role of Achilles, she

conceptualises of her deeds as heroic and worthy of reward – something which Atreus never claims.

Having conceived of her deeds as heroic acts which have benefitted others but been left unappreciated, Medea describes the detriment of her past deeds to her in a slightly different way. She argues that only she and her deeds are considered criminal, and that the beneficiaries of her deeds do not share this burden (244-5):

> quodcumque culpa praemium ex omni tuli,
>
> hoc est penes te.
>
> (Whatever prize I conveyed out of all my guilt, this prize is in your possession.)

This idea of shared guilt is one Medea will develop in her discussion with Jason in Act Three. And so, Medea presents two ways in which her past deeds have disbenefited her: firstly, she has not been appropriately recompensed for them, despite benefitting other people; and secondly, the beneficiaries do not share in the burden of the guilt but it is hers alone. However, Creon's view of Medea and her deeds remains unchanged from his very negative description of her (266-71):

> tu, tu malorum **machinatrix** facinorum,
>
> cui **feminae nequitia ad audenda omnia**,
>
> **robur virile** est, **nulla famae memoria**,
>
> **egredere**, purga regna, letales simul

tecum aufer herbas, libera cives metu, 270

alia sedens tellure **sollicita deos**.

(You, you deviser of evil deeds, who has the wickedness of a woman to dare everything, manly strength, and no care for your reputation, leave, purify my kingdom, take away with you your deadly herbs, free my citizens from fear, residing elsewhere harass the gods.)

He still orders her to leave Corinth (*avehe*, *egredere*), and he still recalls her deeds as crimes. Creon's clarification that Medea's deeds are *malorum facinorum* highlights the fact that what she considers to be heroic deeds, he remembers not as heroic, or even neutral actions, but as crimes.[307] Moreover, Creon goes further than considering Medea as criminal, but, like earlier, beyond the norms of society itself. Creon describes Medea as a gendered monstrosity and as uncaring of her reputation.

To further emphasise Creon's negative perception of Medea, a feminine form of *machinator*, a noun typically used of male inventors or craftsmen, is used. This is the only place in extant Latin literature where this noun is found, highlighting that Medea is so shocking that novel vocabulary which transforms masculine words must be used to describe her.[308] The gendered aspect of Medea's transgression is further emphasised by the textual/interpretative ambiguities of *Med.* 267-8; it is possible to punctuate after *omnia* (as Boyle's text printed above) or after *nequitia* to give: *cui*

[307] The word *facinus* can refer to either a deed or a crime: *OLD* 667 s.v. "*facinus*" 1 'a deed, act', 2 'a misdeed, crime, outrage'.
[308] *TLL* 8 s.v. "*machinatrix*" 16.80-81: as the feminine form of *machinator;* it only occurs here in Seneca's *Medea*.

feminae nequitia, ad audendum omnia / robur virile est.[309] Medea presents, in any case, a monstrous combination of gendered traits, both *feminae nequitia* and *robur virile*. The attribution to Medea of *robur virile* is particularly striking, due to the masculine and military connotations of *robur* – a noun literally referring to oak trees, but transferred through metaphor to describe physical strength, vigour or military might.[310] Medea, then, presents a paradox, an antithesis: a female figure both femininely wild and behaving like a man. As such a gendered monstrosity, Medea does not fit into society. This is further demonstrated by Creon's statement that she pays no mind to her *fama*, her "reputation" with particularly epic connotations.[311]

Creon's version of Medea is unaltruistic and heedless of society's opinion of her. Creon's perspective on Medea is similar to Atreus' characterisation in the *Thyestes*: selfish and socially unconstrained. The verb *audeo*, which Creon uses here of Medea, is characteristic of Atreus in the *Thyestes*.[312] Atreus likewise pays little mind to others' opinions of him; when asked by his attendant if he is concerned that his people will think ill of him, Atreus considers himself above their judgement (204-7). Creon thinks that Medea in the past, like Atreus in the *Thyestes*, acted according to her own desires, with no consideration for others. That Creon's perspective on Medea

[309] E.g. Zwierlein punctuates after *nequitia*. (You, you deviser of evil deeds, who has the wickedness of a woman, the manly strength to dare everything, and no care for your reputation, leave…)

[310] For the literal and figurative definitions of *robur*, see *OLD* 1658 s.v. "*robur*". The phrase *robur virorum* is commonplace in military contexts in Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* (e.g. 21.54.3, 37.43.7), as observed and discussed by Santoro L'Hoir 1992, 68. In addition, I note the attribution of *robur* to male warriors in epic poetry. For example, Cat. 64.4 describes the Argonauts are *Argivae robora pubis* (the strength of Argive youth). In Virgil's *Aeneid*, epic warriors are described as *robur* when being motivated to steadfastness or courage. A poignant simile at *Aen* 4.441-9 employs the image of the oak as analogous to Aeneas' constancy in the face of Dido's pleas for him to stay in Carthage.

[311] See Hardie 2012, esp. 78-125.

[312] *Thyestes* 20, 193, 284.

is similar to Atreus' characterisation in the *Thyestes* is also clear from the final line of this section, his closing line of his lengthy speech to Medea. Ordering Medea to leave his kingdom, Creon bids her to trouble the gods from elsewhere in the world. As such, Creon characterises Medea as contesting with the gods, somewhat suprahuman, just as Seneca characterises Atreus in the *Thyestes*. And so, it is clear that Medea does not succeed in having Creon reconceptualise her *crimina* as *merita*, and so fails to have him recognise the social benefits she has endowed him with. In talking about her past deeds in epic terms, Medea attempts to persuade Creon that she is not morally bad, that her past deeds were not crimes but deeds worthy of reward. Medea feels wronged because she has not been properly recompensed for her deeds – like Achilles in the *Iliad*. Creon, however, does not recognise her deeds as praiseworthy, but reminds Medea of her material role in those crimes, and sets Medea herself apart from society and humanity.

Creon orders Medea to leave, still refusing to see her deeds in her way: not as the crimes of an evil woman, but as the deeds, which happen to be criminal, of a loyal wife. Even as she leaves, she insists on explaining to Creon that her past actions were socially contingent (276-80):

> **illi** Pelia, **non nobis** iacet.
> fugam, rapinas adice, desertum **patrem**
> lacerumque **fratrem**, quidquid etiamnunc novas
> docet maritus coniuges: **non est meum**.
> totiens nocens sum facta, sed numquam **mihi**.

> (It is for Jason's benefit, not mine, that Pelias lies dead. Add escape, robbery, the abandonment of a father and the mutilation of a brother, whatever this husband even now teaches his new wives – it is not mine. So often I was made guilty, but never for myself.)

This section anticipates what Medea will go on to say to Jason. Medea will later pick up on the idea of shared guilt. This is Medea's clearest statement so far that she did not act for her own benefit. She presents the paradox of doing things which actively disbenefit her – ruining her reputation and leaving her with no natal family – but all for the benefit of her husband.[313] The contrast of dative pronouns – *illi* vs. *non nobis* – highlights for whose benefit (or not) Medea committed her crimes. Her crimes and guilt were never for the benefit of herself (*numquam mihi*).[314] The absence of specific pronouns when referring to family members (*pater* and *frater*) glosses over whose family were harmed – of course it was Medea's own.

6 Act Three: Medea's Rage

Act Three opens on Medea's Nurse describing her raging. From her description it is clear that, like Creon did previously in Act Two and like Jason will later in Act Three, the Nurse is also guilty of misunderstanding Medea's past behaviour (393-5):

> **non** facile secum versat aut **medium scelus;**

[313] Idea alluded to at *Med.* 126 (*utinam esset illi frater*).
[314] Medea's focus in this passage on social aspects is also noted by Abrahamsen 1999, 111–12, who discusses the marital, legal language Medea uses.

se **vincet**. **irae novimus veteris notas**.

magnum aliquid instat, efferum immane impium.

(She does not consider an easy or middling crime; but she will conquer herself. I recognise the marks of her old anger. Something great, wild, huge and unholy threatens.)

The Nurse sees in Medea's present raging similarities to her past anger, not seeming to realise that, from Medea's perspective, her past behaviour was not driven by anger but by love (137). The Nurse, like Creon and Jason, does not consider Medea's past actions to have altruistic motives.

Instead, the Nurse focuses on the quality shared by Medea's past and present actions, their moral extremity – the quality that Medea's actions share with Atreus'. The Nurse's description of Medea's plotting here has linguistic parallels with Atreus' self-description of his own plotting at *Thy*. 266-75. As discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter One (pp. 54-66), in the *Medea* and *Thyestes* the idea of magnitude is identified with moral extremity, the capacity for immorality and the power to do anything. Similarly, here, Medea's Nurse describes the crime Medea is plotting (like her past crimes) as *non medium*. The verb *vinco*, used of Medea's transcendence of her own past crimes, is used similarly of Atreus: his surpassing of the crimes of his ancestors (*Thy*. 19), and his overpowering of Thyestes (196). The adjectives (*ef)ferus*, *immanis* and *impius* are each used of Atreus and/or his deeds within the *Thyestes*.[315] The Nurse's description focuses on the moral extremity of

[315] *ferus*…, *immanis* (273), *impius* (315, 712).

Medea's planned crimes – which is the way they are similar to her past crimes and to Atreus' crimes.

Medea herself also notes the similar extremity of her past and future deeds, but also the different emotions motivating those deeds (397-8):

> Si quaeris odio, misera, quem statuas modum,
> imitare amorem.
> (If you seek, wretched woman, what boundary you should set for your hatred, imitate your love.)

The implication here is that, just as Medea's love knew no bounds, so too her hatred will know no bounds. In both past and present, extreme emotions go hand in hand with extreme actions. Where Medea's past crimes were governed by boundless love, her criminal vengeance will be driven by boundless hatred. Despite her description of how her vengeance and past crimes are similar, it is important to note the contrasting emotions: hatred (*odium*) and love (*amor*). Like Medea's earlier statement – *et nullum scelus / irata feci: saevit infelix amor* (136-7) – these lines highlight Medea's differing motivations. As Act Three will continue to show, Medea's past actions, driven by love, were done altruistically, socially confined in the sense that she acted for Jason's benefit; in contrast, her vengeance of Acts Four and Five, driven by extreme anger, will not be socially confined but representative of social and moral autonomy.[316]

[316] The emotional motivations of love and anger, which I view here as contrasting, can also be considered as similar, when understood as passions through the lens of Stoicism. Such Stoic interrogation of Medea has been undertaken by e.g. Nussbaum 1997; Gill 1997; Bartsch 2006, 255–81; Gill 2009. My focus in this chapter is less on a Stoic interpretation of Medea's

7 Act Three: Medea and Jason

Medea's interaction with Jason repeats her interaction with Creon. Medea's interlocutor enters, again focusing on the extremity of her actions and their lack of moral restraint, characterising Medea as inhuman, bestial and monstrous. Again, Medea traces back over her past actions, adopting existing conceptual models in order to explain how her actions were socially embedded and so constrained by her social relations. Again, Medea's interlocutor resists her conceptualising, leaving the stage without addressing her arguments, unable to see Medea as constrained in any way. This repetition of pattern – conflicting perspectives on Medea's actions which are not resolved – emphasises how Medea's perspective is not legible by others, despite her explaining it. The other characters in the play do not understand – wilfully or otherwise – how Medea's actions could benefit others whilst actively being of detriment to herself, nor how her actions could be socially constrained at the same time as they are morally unconstrained. This paradoxical state of affairs, only possible because of the extremities of Medea's character and actions, exposes how women might experience a sense of social constriction in their actions, and so a lack of autonomy. Atreus, by comparison, suffers no such social constrictions: his monstrous acts are in no sense socially embedded.

On entering the stage, Jason's description of Medea emphasises her power and extremity. He describes her as *ferox corde* (fierce in her heart) and

two emotions as passions, and more on Medea's emotions as representative of her union with and separation from Jason – the social embeddedness of Medea which other characters refuse to acknowledge.

nec patiens iugi (not enduring of the yoke) (442). This description by Jason echoes that of Creon, earlier; the adjective *ferox* was used by Creon (186), and Creon also stated Medea's inability to endure or submit through the verb *patior* (189). Jason's view of Medea is similar to Creon's. The imagery of the yoke highlights what Jason perceives as Medea's uncontrollability. This description is also bestial, a quality (shared with Atreus) which highlights her extreme immorality. Like Creon and the Nurse, Jason focuses on the moral extremity of Medea's actions, which he identifies with her unconstrained power.

Jason's entrance is followed by Medea's lengthy address of him, which I split up into three thematic parts. Medea begins by describing her current situation of disempowerment – her lack of safe refuge in the Greek world (447-65). She then goes on to explain why she is disempowered: Jason's ingratitude (465-77). In this second section, Medea employs the institution of beneficence in order to conceive of her deeds as favours bestowed on Jason, for which he should express his gratitude in the form of reciprocation. Finally, Medea exhorts that Jason return his favour, encouraging his good will through referencing their shared life (478-89). In this section, Medea also expresses Jason's reciprocation of her deeds in deliberately challenging terms, as the return of the dowry Medea paid, the losses she has suffered in order to marry Jason. As will be seen, Medea's losses are impossible for Jason to reverse or return in their original form; as such, according to Medea's logic, he can only repay the favour and prevent her disempowerment by remaining married to her and leaving the wife he has just married. However, Jason refuses Medea's proposals, perpetuating the

disempowerment which results from his lack of acknowledgement of the socially constrained aspect of Medea's monstrous, morally unconstrained deeds.

Medea's expresses her disempowerment at the start of this speech (447-59):

> Fugimus, Iason, fugimus. hoc non est novum,
> mutare sedes; causa fugiendi nova est:
> **pro te** solebam fugere. discedo, exeo,
> penatibus profugere quam cogis tuis. 450
> ad quos remittis? Phasin et Colchos petam
> patriumque regnum quaeque **fraternus cruor**
> perfudit arva? quas peti terras iubes?
> quae maria monstras? Pontici fauces freti,
> per quas **revexi** nobilem regum manum 455
> adulterum secuta per Symplegadas?
> parvamne Iolcon, Thessala an Tempe petam?
> **quascumque aperui tibi vias, clausi mihi.**
> quo me remittis? exuli exilium imperas nec das.

(I have fled, Jason, I am fleeing – this is not a new thing, moving home. But the cause for fleeing is new. I used to flee on your behalf. Now I depart, now I leave, whom you force to flee your home. But to whom do you send me back? Shall I seek Phasis and the Colchians, the kingdom of my father and the fields which brotherly blood soaked through? What lands do you order me to seek? What seas do you point out? The mouth of the Pontic strait, through which I brought back the famous band of kings, following an

> adulterer through the Symplegades? Shall I seek little Iolcus, Thessaly or Tempe? What paths I opened for you, I closed to myself. To where do you send me back? You order exile for the exile but you do not provide it.)

Medea is forced to leave Corinth; for her this is not, however, the easy task Jason, thinking Medea capable of anything, believes it to be. Unlike previous instances of leaving a place, Medea has neither anywhere to go nor anyone to accompany her.

From Medea's perspective, in her previous flight from locations for Jason's benefit (*pro te*), she destroyed her own ability to return to those places. She lists the places from which she is alienated because of Jason – namely Colchis and Thessaly. Medea specifically points out that she cannot return to her natal family in Colchis because she betrayed her family and killed her own brother. Her use of the adjective *fraternus* highlights both the social relations she has sacrificed for Jason and the horrific nature of her crime. As she herself explains succinctly at line 458, Medea created safe passage for Jason, but in doing so she has prevented her own ability to return to these places, by damaging her own reputation. The mirroring of the dative pronouns *tibi* and *mihi* as dative of advantage and disadvantage respectively highlights Medea's self-sacrifice for Jason's benefit. Medea draws attention to how her actions, which have benefitted Jason, have left her no place of refuge; Medea is vulnerable and – as she paints it – powerless.

However, Medea's argument for self-sacrifice and powerlessness also professes to her capabilities. Repeating her sentiments to Creon (225-35), Medea, here, again claims to have singlehandedly saved the Argonauts, with the first-person singular verb *revexi* (used also at 235). As Medea's speech

continues, in order to communicate her sense of injustice, the lack of appreciation she receives for her past actions, she employs the idea of reciprocal exchange or beneficence (465-89):

> **ingratum caput**, 465
> **revolvat animus** igneos tauri halitus
> interque **saevos** gentis **indomitae** metus
> **armifero** in arvo **flammeum** Aeetae pecus,
> hostisque subiti tela, cum **iussu meo**
> terrigena miles mutua caede occidit. 470
> adice expetita spolia Phrixei arietis
> somnoque **iussum** lumina ignoto dare
> insomne monstrum, traditum fratrem neci
> et scelere in uno non semel factum scelus,
> **iussa**que natas fraude deceptas mea 475
> secare membra non revicturi senis.
> aliena quaerens regna, deserui mea.

(Ungrateful creature! Let your mind turn over again the fiery breath of the bull and, amongst the savage fears of the uncontrollable race, in the weapon-bearing field of Aeëtes, the flaming beast, and the spears of sudden enemies, when at my order earthborn soldiers fell in mutual slaughter. Add the retrieval of the spoils of the Phrixean ram and the unsleeping monster ordered to give over its eyes to unknown sleep, the brother handed over to death and – a crime committed in not only one crime – the daughters, deceived by my trickery, ordered to cut the limbs of an old man who would not return. Seeking the kingdoms of others, I deserted my own.)

Medea transitions from focusing on her deeds as self-sacrifice resulting in powerlessness to focusing on her deeds as services unpaid for. Medea's employment of the concept of beneficence is signalled by the ideas of ingratitude and memory/forgetfulness. After accusing Jason of ingratitude (*ingratum caput*), Medea proceeds to remind him of her deeds, the favours for which he is ungrateful. Whilst not strictly a verb of remembering, *revolvo* does have this semantic potential,[317] especially in Medea's exhortation that Jason recall in his mind past events. In Act Three, as she did in Act Two, her interaction with Creon, Medea adopts an existing model – this time beneficence instead of epic heroism – in order to communicate her conception of her own deeds. Significantly, these are never arguments used by Atreus. Where, earlier, Medea characterised herself as Achilles slighted by Agamemnon, here she characterises herself as an underappreciated benefactor – in both cases, ultimately, the victim of ingratitude.

Like her use of epic heroism, Medea's employment of beneficence to express her disenfranchisement requires her, somewhat counterintuitively, to detail the powerful deeds for which she now experiences disempowerment. This change in perspective, from current powerlessness to past capability, demonstrates the apparent paradox of Medea's situation; despite the fact that she is capable of seemingly impossible deeds, she also experiences disempowerment brought on by the lack of reciprocity encoded in "ingratitude". What may seem to go against Medea's initial self-presentation

[317] *OLD* 1649 s.v. "*revolvo*" 2c: 'to go back over (past events, etc.) in thought or speech'. Hinds 2011, 27–28 also takes *revolvat animus* to refer to remembering.

to Jason – as a vulnerable and disempowered woman – is, in fact, part of her conceptualisation of her actions as part of the social institution of beneficence or gift exchange. Where, in the previous section, Medea explained her current situation of disenfranchisement resulting from Jason's ingratitude, here, Medea explains to Jason his ingratitude directly – the deeds she did for him for which he ought to be grateful. In other words, the progression of Medea's argument – from describing her present situation to explaining the causes of her situation (and Jason's responsibility for it) – follows the train of thought of the victim of ingratitude. Medea suffers a loss because she has bestowed something of benefit on Jason – namely her deeds – but Jason has not reneged on his reciprocation.

In order to argue for her current disenfranchisement – Jason's lack of reciprocity for her deeds – Medea must demonstrate that she committed deeds worthy of recompense. However, Medea's capacity to perform impossible deeds is a double-edged sword: her impossible deeds encompass both the miraculous and the criminal. In her description of her past, Medea emphasises the almost miraculous nature of her deeds. The adjectives she uses (*igneus*, *saevus*, *indomitus*, *flammeus*, *armiferus*) draw attention to the dangers involved in her deeds (e.g. overcoming the fire-breathing bull, the earth-born soldiers and never-sleeping dragon). Medea's subjugation of other beings (often dangerous) is highlighted by her repetition of forms of *iubeo* (469, 472, 475). By emphasising the heroism of her deeds, Medea attempts to persuade Jason that these are deeds worthy of recompense within a system of reciprocated benefits.

However, Medea cannot mention deeds committed in aid of Jason without including the murder of her brother and Pelias – the deeds for which she and her reputation suffer the most. It is significant that Medea includes the damage her deeds did to her reputation – indicated by *scelus* and *fraus* – as this is an important part of the loss she suffers due to Jason's ingratitude. Her inclusion of these murders alongside her heroic feats as acts for which Jason ought to be grateful is indicative of her combining of the concepts of crime and benefit – systems which should not be consolidated. The problem arises for Medea that her potency both allows her to commit the extreme deeds which generate the social capital to participate in reciprocity and allows others to see her deeds as crimes and her as a criminal. The value of Medea's deeds is generated by their extreme nature, but this same extreme nature is what makes others wary of seeing her deeds as socially valuable.

In short, Medea can, in the same breath, talk about being disempowered by ingratitude, then being powerful enough to aid Jason, and then being extreme enough to kill her own brother: these things should not be connected but Medea connects them, highlighting the social embeddedness of her criminal and monstrous acts. Medea makes the unusual connection between reciprocity and criminality, using both ideas simultaneously to talk about her deeds. The incongruity of this combination draws attention to the unusual nature of Medea's deeds, as both monstrous and socially constrained.

Medea closes this speech to Jason with a plea that he return to her what she is due (478-4=89):

per spes tuorum liberum et certum larem,

per victa monstra, **per manus, pro te quibus**

numquam peperci, perque praeteritos metus, 480

per caelum et undas, coniugi testes mei,

miserere, **redde** supplici felix **vicem**.

ex opibus illis, quas procul raptas Scythae

usque a perustis Indiae populis agunt,

quas quia referta vix domus gazas capit, 485

ornamus auro nemora, nil exul tuli

nisi fratris artus: hos quoque impendi tibi.

tibi patria cessit, tibi pater frater pudor.

hac dote nupsi. redde fugienti sua.

By the hopes of your children and your certain house, by the conquered monsters, by my hands which I never spared on your behalf, and by the previous fears, by the sky and waves, the witnesses to my marriage, have pity, fortunate man, repay a suppliant. From those riches which the Scythians carry, seized from far off, from as far as the burned people of India – since our crammed house scarcely holds such gems, we decorate the trees with gold – I brought nothing into exile except the limbs of my brother; and even these I spent on you. For you I lost my fatherland, for you I lost my father, my brother, my modesty. I married you with this dowry; return to someone fleeing their possessions.)

If Medea's persuasion is successful, Jason should express his gratitude through reciprocation. Medea's plea for reciprocation is expressed through the repeated *redde* (482, 489), the first time with the adverb *vicem* also indicating reciprocation. Medea makes her plea against things of shared

importance – e.g. their children (478). One of these things is Medea's hands (479), which she describes in more detail: *pro te quibus / numquam peperci*. The idea that Medea never spared her hands expresses her sense of self-sacrifice. Medea's *manus* are symbolic of her deeds and their violent nature,[318] but also of herself – her guilty reputation is an idea which will be picked up. The prepositional phrase *pro te* highlights how Medea's deeds were for Jason's benefit and is emphasised by its promotion due to the postponement of *quibus*.[319]

In the second half of this section, Medea expresses the idea of returned value in the financial terms of a dowry.[320] This is most clear from the explicit description *hac dote nupsi*. Instead of a financial dowry, *opes*, Medea's dowry is more abstract. She claims as her dowry, the price she paid to marry Jason, her homeland, father, brother and modesty. Through her repeated use of the dative *tibi*, Medea reiterates her previous idea, that Jason benefited from her dowry (487-8). However, the dative case in these lines can simultaneously be interpreted in a slightly different way; rather than the dative as the recipient of Medea's favours, the dative as the asset for which Medea made a quasi-financial payment. The verb *impendo* establishes a financial semantic field, within which *cedo* can also be included. On the one hand, Jason was the beneficiary of Medea's deeds, profiting from Medea's losses; on the other hand, Jason was the purchase for which Medea incurred losses. This

[318] Comparable uses earlier at 128 and 181.
[319] Word order noted by Boyle 2014, 254.
[320] On the legal and financial aspects of a Roman dowry, see Treggiari 1991, 323–64. Like Medea's earlier use of the discourse of beneficence (p. 220), her labelling of her crimes as a dowry shows her attempts to make her actions understood as beneficial to Jason, despite their criminality. Her use of multiple (often incongruous) systems of quantifying deeds – epic heroism, beneficent exchange, and marital dowry – demonstrates Medea's multiple attempts and failures to have her deeds recognised by others.

ambiguity in Medea's meaning highlights how the concept of the marital dowry allows Medea's deeds to be seen from a different angle. Where the institution of reciprocal exchange (*beneficia*) showed Medea's deeds in terms of the benefit they brought to Jason (i.e. the success of his voyage/mission), the concept of the marital dowry presents Medea's deeds from the other side of the coin, in terms of the losses she incurred, the price she paid in order to save and marry Jason.

However, Medea's conceptualisation of her losses as a dowry falls apart when she demands their return (489), since her losses are abstract and/or non-fungible, thus highlighting the absurdity of applying the concept of the marital dowry to her situation.[321] This absurdity is also emphasised by the juxtaposition of the elaborate and lengthy description of riches (483-6) with the abrupt description of her murdered brother's dismembered limbs (487: *nisi fratris artus*). This absurdity highlights that the marital dowry is yet another system which does not work for Medea's situation, because, as she has repeatedly said, she cannot return to her natal family. Her request for the return of her dowry – her fatherland, father, brother and *pudor* – actually highlights the ridiculousness of applying this system to her situation. By extension, according to Medea's logic, Jason cannot straightforwardly divorce her and return her dowry, but is obligated to remain married to her as repayment for her losses. In other words, Jason cannot divorce Medea, because he cannot return her dowry to her; Medea and Jason are not so much joined by legal matrimony as by guilt and blood.

[321] A failure of logic likewise noted by Abrahamsen 1999, 113, who states succinctly that Medea 'has given much, but gotten nothing in return', by Guastella 2001, 207, who says that the dowry 'imposes a kind of formal metaphorical order on an irregular and criminal union', and by McAuley 2016, 216, who describes Medea's dowry as an 'anti-dowry'.

In summary, in this lengthy speech of 42 lines, Medea has explained to Jason her disempowerment and his role in it, through employing the institution of beneficence, and highlighted that her losses are impossible for Jason to repay, through impossibly applying the idea of the marital dowry to her and Jason's marriage and divorce. Medea's application of social institutions – beneficence and marital dowry – indicates her embeddedness within society and her participation within systems of social obligation. Her claims that her criminal deeds were part of a system of social obligation highlights the social embeddedness of these criminal deeds. This is the kind of claim which Atreus never makes; Atreus never figures his deeds as a social obligation to another person. Medea's employment of social institutions highlights her, from her perspective, social embeddedness. Moreover, her use of different institutions allows her to draw attention to, on the one hand, the benefits Jason has received and, on the other hand, the losses Medea has incurred. Jason's response to Medea's speech reveals that he has not understood the second of these ideas – that through helping him she has incurred losses. Instead, he understands Medea's deeds only in terms of his gain from them (490-6):

I. perimere cum te vellet **infestus** Creo, 490
lacrimis meis **evictus** exilium dedit.
M. poenam putabam. **munus**, ut video, est fuga.
I. dum licet abire, **profuge teque hinc eripe**.
gravis **ira** regum est semper. *M.* hoc suades mihi,
praestas Creusae. paelicem invisam amoves. 495

I. Medea amores obicit? *M.* et caedem et dolos.

(*J.* When hostile Creon wanted to destroy you, he granted you exile because he was conquered by my tears.

M. I thought it a punishment. As I see now, flight is a gift.

J. Whilst you are allowed to leave, flee and take yourself away from here. The anger of kings is always serious.

M. You persuade me, you represent Creusa. You remove the hated mistress.

J. Medea accuses me of love?

M. And slaughter and trickery.)

It is clear from Jason's initial response that, from his perspective, he has, in fact, repaid Medea's favour to him. Just as she saved his life on the Argonautic voyage, he has now saved her life from Creon, having persuaded him to exile her instead of killing her. As Creon stated earlier, Jason's pleas stopped him from killing Medea (183-5); in describing Creon as *evictus* (491), Jason parrots Creon's use of the verb *evinco* (184) for his persuasion by Jason to let Medea live. Jason's claim to have repaid Medea by saving her life is noted by her when she describes it as a *munus*. This is the language of social benefits and reciprocal gift exchange. Medea earlier uses this word to describe the benefits she brought to Creon and Jason (142, 228, 230). Jason's use of this word highlights his engagement with the concepts Medea uses to talk about her deeds and crimes; unlike Creon, Jason engages with Medea on the same conceptual level as her. However, a shared conceptual foundation is not sufficient for their agreement, as Jason, using these terms, can claim that he has repaid her benefits without acknowledging her losses.

Seeming again to parrot Creon's earlier words to Medea, Jason then bids her to leave Corinth (493 cf. 190-1, 269). Jason's focus is clearly less on Medea's feelings, but on Creon's. He describes Creon as *infestus* and attributes anger (*ira*) to him. Jason's emphasis of Creon's negative, angry reaction to Medea and his potential to harm her highlights how, from Jason's perspective, Medea is lucky to leave Corinth with her life; Jason claims to have softened Creon's anger and so saved Medea's life. Jason's description of Creon also highlights something of a persuasive strategy by Jason; despite having expressed his negative opinion of Medea as wild and untameable in an earlier aside (443), Jason here instead applies such characteristics to Creon instead. As we will see, Jason focuses on the power Creon has over himself and Medea, rather than on the power Medea demonstrated in the past through her deeds; this will turn out to be a costly mistake as Jason will apply these qualities (specifically the adjective *infestus*) to Medea at the end of the play as he is forced to confront her monstrous deeds and nature.

Since Jason does not understand that, from Medea's perspective, he does not only need to repay his debt, but he also owes her for her losses, Medea explains her losses yet again (497-503):

I. obicere crimen quod potes tandem mihi?

M. quodcumque feci. *I.* restat hoc unum insuper,

tuis ut etiam **sceleribus** fiam nocens.

M. tua illa, tua sunt illa. cui **prodest scelus**, 500

is fecit. omnes coniugem infamem arguant,

solus tuere, solus insontem voca.

tibi innocens sit quisquis est **pro te nocens**.

(*J*. What crime are you able to accuse me of?

M. Whatever I did.

J. This one thing remains, that I am made guilty of your crimes.

M. Yours, they are yours! He whom the crime benefits committed it. Everyone else might condemn your wife as scandalous, but you at least should defend her, you at least should call her innocent. Let them be innocent in your eyes, whoever is guilty on your behalf.)

In this section, Medea describes her loss of good reputation and guiltlessness for Jason's benefit, by claiming that Jason, as a beneficiary of crimes, should also bear the burden of her guilt. In 497-8, Medea paradoxically accuses Jason of the things she did (*quodcumque feci*). However, Jason emphatically attributes Medea's crimes to her, with the second person possessive pronoun (*tuis*) promoted to the start of the line and subordinate clause; and Medea responds with the same second person possessive pronoun (*tua*) at the start of the following line, repeating it for further emphasis. The pair's repeated use of this pronoun of the other highlights their respective transferral of responsibility to each other.

Medea then combines the language of criminality with that of reciprocal exchange – two systems which should not be combined – in order to claim that Jason should take a share of the responsibility for the crimes committed by her hands, just as he shares in the benefits of her crimes. Her combination of these systems is clear from the phrase *cui prodest scelus*, the verb *prosum* being part of the language of reciprocal exchange and *scelus* being criminal and legalistic. Medea again combines criminality and

reciprocal exchange with the adjective *nocens* used together with *pro te*; as earlier in this act, Medea uses the prepositional phrase *pro te* to highlight her committing of deeds in benefit of Jason (449, 479). By incorporating her crimes within the institution of reciprocal benefits, Medea articulates the social embeddedness of her crimes.

In the discussion which follows, Medea and Jason fail to come to any agreement or compromise. Medea, from Jason's perspective, should leave in the face of the danger Creon presents, whilst Jason, from Medea's perspective, does not acknowledge the things she has done for him, the power which she has shown and could show. Their exchange demonstrates their clash of perspectives on Medea's deeds and her power – perspectives which will turn out to be irreconcilable. With her combination of criminality and reciprocal exchange, Medea exhorts that, even when all others consider her guilty, Jason, as the beneficiary of her crimes, should proclaim her innocence. However, instead of acknowledging Medea's deeds and their benefit to him, Jason completely disavows Medea's deeds (504-5):

> *I.* **ingrata** vita est cuius acceptae pudet.
>
> *M.* retinenda non est cuius acceptae pudet.
>
> (*J.* It is a thankless life which one is ashamed to have received.
>
> *M.* A life which one is ashamed to have received should not be held onto.)

Jason's impersonal, general statement – that one cannot be grateful for something one is ashamed to have received – implies his own shame and ingratitude. Again, Jason engages with Medea's conceptual terms – of

reciprocal exchange – but disagrees with her conclusion – that he should be grateful and appreciative for her deeds. Jason's words here prove Medea's earlier accusation of ingratitude (465: *ingratum caput*). To Jason's shame and ingratitude, Medea says he should not keep possession of something he is ashamed to have received; this statement by Medea foreshadows how she will end up taking everything from Jason in an act of both repossession and revenge.

Jason's and Medea's conversation comes to a head as Medea realises that Jason will not compromise his perspective. He will neither leave Corinth with her, although she promises her protection (521-29), nor will he allow their children to accompany her (540-49). Realising that Jason cares greatly about his children, Medea feigns her agreement to leave Corinth (549-59). On Jason's exit, Medea expresses her incredulity that he could be satisfied (560-2):

> discessit. itane est? vadis **oblitus** mei
> et tot **meorum facinorum**? excidimus tibi?
> numquam excidemus.
> (He has left. Is that it? Do you go, forgetful of me and my many deeds? Are we lost to you? We will never be lost.)

Medea's amalgamation of the concepts of crime and reciprocal exchange culminates here. Jason's exit without repayment or acknowledgment of Medea's services demonstrates, to Medea, his forgetfulness of her deeds.

Memory is necessary for gratitude, and so is an integral part of beneficent exchange; as Seneca notes in his *de Beneficiis* (*Ben.* 3.1.3):[322]

> ingratissimus omnium, qui oblitus est.
>
> (The most ungrateful of all is he who forgets.)

Ingratitude ultimately results from forgetfulness. Medea emphasises Jason's forgetfulness by using not one, but two verbs (*obliviscor* and *excido*).[323] By leaving, Jason has proven himself ungrateful for her services to him, despite the fact that she reminded him at length of her deeds (465-76). In this way, Jason contradicts Medea's earlier wishes for him to remember her and, consequently, be grateful for her deeds.[324]

Medea's interpolation of crimes within this scheme of reciprocal exchange comes about with mention of what Jason forgets: Medea's *facinora*. The noun *facinus* can refer to both neutral deeds and negative crimes.[325] It is used earlier in its negative sense, by Creon and by Medea herself.[326] It is used negatively in the *de Beneficiis*, specifically as the result of ingratitude, the

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[322] See Griffin 2013, 25. At *Ben.* 1.1.1, Seneca states that there is no vice *frequentius* (more common) than ingratitude. On ingratitude as the root of all other vices, see *Ben.* 1.10.4: *erunt homicidae, tyranni, fures, adulteri, raptores, sacrilegi, proditores; infra omnia ista ingratus est, nisi quod omnia ista ab ingrato sunt, sine quo vix ullum magnum facinus adcrevit.* (There will be murderers, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, rapists, sacrilegious men, traitors; below all these is the ungrateful man, except all these vices are from the ungrateful man, without which scarcely any great crime grows.)

[323] On *excido* as a verb of forgetting ("to fall from memory"): *OLD* 634 s.v. "*excido*[1]" 9b; *TLL* 5.2 s.v. "*excido*" 1239.6-1240.2. See the use of *excido* to refer to forgetfulness causing ingratitude at *Ben.* 1.2.5: *ingratus est adversus unum beneficium? adversus alterum non erit; duorum oblitus est? tertium etiam in eorum, quae exciderunt, memoriam reducet.* (Is he ungrateful towards a single benefit? He will not be towards another. Has he forgotten two? A third will lead his memory back to those which fell from him.)

[324] At 142 and 466, Medea bade Jason to remember her.

[325] The word *facinus* can refer to either a deed or a crime: *OLD* 667 s.v. "*facinus*" 1 'a deed, act', 2 'a misdeed, crime, outrage'.

[326] *Med.* 128, 266.

opposite of reciprocation.[327] Medea's forcing together of these two ideas – crime and beneficent exchange – which are usually at odds with each other, indicates her paradoxical conception of her crimes as socially embedded. Although morally unconstrained acts, Medea considers her crimes to have been socially restrained, committed for the benefit of another person and to the active detriment of herself. Actions which seem, from an external perspective, indicative of Medea's autonomy are, from her perspective, representative of a way in which her autonomy was impinged upon. Medea's experience of disempowerment – previously through lacking autonomy – has been exacerbated further in Acts Two and Three, by her interactions with Creon and Jason. Neither Creon nor Jason has acknowledged the ways in which they have benefitted from Medea's crimes. As such, this point in the play is where Medea is most disempowered, having had her autonomy impinged upon, having acted to her own loss, and having not had her losses or reduced autonomy acknowledged.

8 Acts Three and Four: Mede-A-treus

Medea's response to this disempowerment is self-exhortation to action. Medea is resolved to be remembered and does so in ways reminiscent of Atreus in the prologue of the *Thyestes* (*Med.* 562-7):

hoc **age**, omnes **advoca**

[327] *Ben.* 1.10.4. *Erunt homicidae, tyranni, fures, adulteri, raptores, sacrilegi, proditores; infra omnia ista ingratus est, nisi quod omnia ista ab ingrato sunt, sine quo uix ullum magnum facinus adcrevit*. (There will be murderers, tyrants, thieves, adulterers, rapists, sacrilegious men, traitors; below all these is the ungrateful man, except all these vices are from the ungrateful man, without which scarcely any great crime grows.)

vires et artes. fructus est scelerum tibi
nullum scelus putare. vix **fraudi** est locus:
timemur. hac **aggredere**, qua nemo potest 565
quicquam timere. **perge**, nunc **aude**, **incipe**
quidquid potest **Medea**, quidquid non potest.

(Do it, summon all your strength and skill. The enjoyment of your crimes is that you think nothing a crime. There is scarcely room for trickery: I am feared. Attack in this place, where no one is able to fear anything. Keep going, now be daring, start whatever Medea can, and whatever she cannot.)

These lines have features reminiscent of Medea's earlier prologue speech, which itself shared features with Atreus' prologue speech. All three sections are self-exhortations towards action – specifically criminal and vengeful action. As she did in her own prologue speech and as Atreus did in his prologue speech in the *Thyestes*, Medea here wills herself towards aggressive action and vengeance. The expectations set up by Medea's prologue speech, which were subverted, are here renewed. Medea (again) becomes Atreus-like by asserting her autonomy.

The end of Act Three, then, is something of a repetition of Medea's statement of action at the start of Act One. It seems significant that this pivotal moment of resolve (re)occurs almost at the very centre of the play, the dividing point of two halves. That Medea repeats her statement of action seems to suggest a lack of progression of Medea's aim to assert her autonomy. Although the intent of her speech is similar to that of Atreus' prologue, that she repeats and renews her aim of revenge draws attention to her inactivity in Acts Two and Three. Unlike Atreus, whose self-exhortation successfully and

immediately incites his vengeance out of disempowerment, Medea's actions of vengeance are delayed. The delay of her actions draws attention to her inactivity in Acts Two and Three, as she was occupied with failed attempts to persuade Creon and Jason to acknowledge her actions. Both the content of her persuasion – that her deeds were socially embedded and are now worthy of reward/recompense – and the failure of her persuasion highlight the manifold ways in which Medea lacks autonomy in the first half of the play. It is this lack which necessitates her most extreme act at the end of the play.

Medea's speech as a statement of action is clear from her repeated use of imperatives (e.g. *age*, *advoca*, etc.). Her similarity in this regard to Atreus of the *Thyestes*' prologue is clear from Atreus' *age, anime, fac* … (*Thy.* 192). Both characters use the same verb, *ago*, in the same imperative form, in order to exhort themselves to action. Medea here uses a range of verbs of action (*aggredior*, *ago*, *incipio*, *pergo*), which find either direct parallel or semantic correlation in Atreus' vocabulary for his own actions (*ago*, *facio*, *incipio*, *sumo*). That Medea's actions will be criminal is clear from her references to *scelera* (563-4) and her use of the verb *audeo* (566). As discussed above (pp. 234-5), this verb is characteristic of Medea in this play and of Atreus in the *Thyestes*. Atreus in his prologue speech uses this verb of his excessive crimes: *aliquod audendum est nefas* (*Thy.* 193). As well as as *nefas*, Atreus also refers to his crimes as *scelera* (e.g. 195-6).

Atreus' and Medea's acts of vengeance are both characterised as similarly deceptive. Medea references *fraus* as a part of her plan (564), a quality which has been characteristically applied to her by other characters (181). As discussed earlier (pp. 227-8), this is also a quality used of Atreus'

trickery of his brother. A final point of similarity between Atreus and Medea is their use of their own names as archetypes of criminal action. Scholars have noted the importance of Medea's self-naming.[328] Medea's self-naming indicates a particular self-awareness by the character of her own literary history, of the baggage she carries from her past versions. Likewise, in 567, Medea wills herself towards the crimes that come with her name. In a similar way, Atreus in the *Thyestes* uses his own name (271: *dignum est Thyeste facinus et dignum Atreo*), demonstrating his self-awareness of his own character. And so Medea, like Atreus in the *Thyestes*' prologue, is determined to commit characteristic crimes through means of deception.

Medea's self-exhortation to action and crime at the end of Act Three is, like her opening speech of the play, reminiscent of Atreus' prologue speech in the *Thyestes*. This reminiscence is, on the one hand, indicative of how Medea, like Atreus, will assert her autonomy through revenge. On the other hand, this reminiscence, in its repetition, draws attention to the delay of Medea's action. Like Atreus in the *Thyestes*, and like her earlier self in her prologue, Medea here is determined on extreme action and vengeance. However, unlike Atreus in the *Thyestes*, Medea has taken a two-act-long detour to navigate her disempowerment, a journey which has highlighted the socially constrained nature of her morally unconstrained deeds and which has demonstrated Medea's lack of acknowledgement by others. We will see, in Chapter Four, how women can forego the need for acknowledgement by others, through attaining philosophical virtue.

[328] For further discussion of Medea's self-naming, see Segal 1982, 241–43; Boyle 2014, cix–cxii.

Medea continues to be characterised in the same ways as Atreus in the Nurse's description of her at the start of Act Four (670-93):

Pavet animus, horret; **magna pernicies** adest. 670
immane quantum **augescit** et semet dolor
accendit ipse vimque praeteritam integrat.
vidi furentem saepe et **aggressam deos**,
caelum trahentem. **maius** his, **maius** parat
Medea **monstrum**. namque ut attonito gradu 675
evasit et penetrale funestum attigit,
totas opes effudit et quidquid diu
etiam ipsa timuit promit atque omnem explicat
turbam malorum, arcana secreta abdita,
et triste laeua comprecans sacrum manu 680
pestes vocat quascumque ferventis creat
harena Libyae quasque perpetua nive
Taurus coercet frigore Arctoo rigens,
et omne monstrum. tracta **magicis cantibus**
squamifera latebris turba desertis adest. 685
hic saeva serpens corpus immensum trahit
trifidamque linguam exertat et quaerit quibus
mortifera veniat. **carmine** audito stupet
tumidumque nodis corpus aggestis plicat
cogitque in orbes. **'Parva sunt'** inquit **'mala** 690
et vile telum est, ima quod tellus creat.

caelo petam venena. iam iam tempus est

aliquid movere **fraude vulgari altius**.

…

(My mind is afraid. Great danger is present. How much, how dreadfully her grief grows and burns itself and restores its old force. I have often seen her raging and attacking the gods, dragging down the sky. Greater than these, Medea prepares a monstrosity greater than these. As she goes out with stunned steps and reaches the deathly shrine, she pours out all her resources and brings forth whatever even she herself used to fear and she unfolds a whole host of evils: secret, hidden, concealed things. And, praying at the harsh shrine with her left hand, she calls on whatever plagues the sand of boiling Libya created and which Taurus began with endless snow, hardening in Arctic cold, and all monstrosity. Drawn down by magic incantations, a scaly crowd is present out of hidden deserts. Here a savage snake drags its huge body and stretches out its three-forked tongue and seeks for those to whom it might come, deadly. It is stunned when it hears the incantation and folds its swollen body with piled up knots and forces it into coils. Then she says: "These evils are small and this weapon is ordinary, which the earth below creates. I shall seek poisons from the sky. Now, now it is time to incite something loftier than common trickery…)

In preparing her revenge, Medea continues to share characteristics with Atreus. The magnitude of deeds is symbolic of their monstrosity. Like Medea earlier in this play (48-50) and like Atreus in the *Thyestes* (particularly at 267-75), Medea here, through the eyes of the Nurse, prepares bigger and badder deeds. She describes the danger as great (*magna pernicies*). As Medea's grief (*dolor*) grows (*augesco*), so too she prepares larger monstrosities (*maius*

monstrum). Magnitude is highlighted through the verb *augesco* and the repeated comparative adjective *maius*. Atreus too describes his own revenge as something greater (267: *nescioquid maius*; 274: *aliquid maius*). Both Medea's and Atreus' vengeance is horrifying in its immeasurability, demonstrated by their shared description as *immanis* (*Med.* 671, *Thy.* 273).

In aspiring to bigger and badder deeds, Medea, like Atreus, seeks a method of vengeance which is novel and extraordinary. Medea rejects the small and the ordinary (*parva mala* and *vile telum*), aspiring for something beyond the usual (*fraude vulgari altius*). The adjectives *parvus* and *vilis* denote quantities and measurement, highlighting how Medea is comparatively evaluating different means of revenge. Similarly, Atreus rejects ordinary modes of vengeance as insufficient (255-6: *nil quod doloris capiat assueti modum; / nullum relinquam facinus et nullum est satis* (Nothing which might seize upon the method of usual grief; I will leave behind no crime and no crime is enough)). He also rejects Procne's and Philomela's vengeance upon Tereus, as a crime which has been done before (273-4: *immane est scelus, / sed occupatum* (The crime is huge but it has been taken)).

The Nurse's description of Medea's vengeance as unusual (neither *vilis* nor *vulgaris*) and comparatively large (*maius*), recalls Medea's earlier proclamation that greater crimes are more appropriate for older age (48-50); as such, Medea's vengeance will be a more extreme version of her earlier crimes.

Medea's extremity, like Atreus', is also understood as inhuman: both a threat to divine order and monstrously bestial. Medea's Nurse recalls her

earlier deeds as attacks on the gods (673); and Medea herself looks not for earthly punishments but heavenly (692). Like Atreus, it seems that Medea, in the extent of her monstrosity, approaches suprahumanity (Cf. *Thy.* 885-889, discussed on pp. 64-6, 81). Atreus' inhumanity is also understood as bestiality, which is clear from his identification (by himself and by others) with predatory, hunting animals (see pp. 68-70, 72-8). Where Atreus himself takes on bestial qualities, Medea's bestiality is encoded, instead, in her summoning of snakes.

However, there is also something different about their respective preparations. Atreus is like a priest, performing proper sacrificial rites; by contrast, Medea is specified to be non-normative in using magic spells. The characterisation of Atreus as a priest and his murder of his nephews as a ritual sacrifice positions him within society, in a civic and institutional role, albeit a perversion of proper conduct. By contrast, Medea's characterisation as a witch, performing magic, positions her outside of society, in a non-institutional, extra-civic role.[329] The respective positioning of Atreus and Medea in relation to society is ironic, given their own regard for society. Medea has, as discussed, attempted at length to persuade others of her embeddedness in society, of the social embeddedness of her past crimes. Yet now Medea is characterised as excluded from proper society, in being described as a witch. This "othering" of Medea, her exclusion from

[329] On the "othering" in discourses on witches in Greco-Roman antiquity, see Stratton 2007, chaps 2 and 3; Stratton argues that, in Classical Greece, 'magic emerged as a powerful Othering discourse, which connoted effeminate treachery, subversion, and oriental barbarism' (p. 44), and that, in late Republic and early Imperial Rome, the representation of witches 'reinforces a parallel discourse of women's dangerous independence. For more specific discussion of Medea's characterisation as a witch in Greek and Roman literature, see Stratton 2007, 49–54, 87–90; G. Williams 2012.

"civilised" society, is further emphasised by the references to Libya and Taurus (Asia Minor) as the source of her magical powers.

Beyond the quoted passage, the Nurse continues reporting Medea's speech, with which she summons snakes, and concludes with description of Medea concocting poison (694-739). Act Four then features Medea's spell, which invokes Pluto and punished figures of the underworld (740-786). Medea's preparations culminate in her children's delivery of the poisoned shroud to Creusa (787-848). The act closes with a short choral ode, pondering what monstrosity Medea has planned (849-878).

9 Act Five: Mede-Ain't-treus

Medea's words at the end of Act Three represent a turning point for Medea's actions. In Acts Two and Three, Medea was directing her actions and words towards gaining compensation from Creon and Jason, revealing the social embeddedness of her monstrous deeds and the social constraints on her past autonomy. However, Medea was unsuccessful, resulting in her further disempowerment by Creon and Jason. The end of Act Three sees Medea respond to this multi-layered disempowerment with self-exhortation towards action. Medea returns to the active characterisation of her prologue speech (see above pp. 208-14), encouraging herself to take revenge on Jason, like Atreus encourages himself in his prologue speech in the *Thyestes* (see pp. 53-7).

Medea's Atrean characterisation, in her active pursuit of criminal vengeance, continues in Act Four, in which the Nurse reports her preparations for revenge. Medea also differs subtly from Atreus in the Nurse's description,

which focuses on the alienating aspects of Medea's monstrosity. Nevertheless, it seems that Medea has undergone a transformation, an alteration in her approach to this situation. Where previously Medea attempted to persuade others of her unjust treatment using words, Medea is now determined on vengeful action. As the Nurse has described, Medea has prepared her revenge upon Creusa. At the start of Act Five, a messenger reports Creon's and Creusa's deaths by the fire caused by Medea's poisoned robe. The audience might anticipate, then, that Act Five will see Medea, in full Atrean style, commit infanticide with enthusiasm and revel in taking revenge on Jason. However, this will not be the case, as Medea's continued self-exhortation actually reveals her uncertainty concerning her actions, an uncertainty which will manifest more clearly in her hesitation to commit infanticide.

The first speech of Medea in Act Five seems to confirm her similarities to Atreus, her determination on revenge. The first part of this lengthy speech by Medea features her self-willing towards vengeance against Jason (893-915).

> Egone ut recedam? si profugissem prius,
>
> ad hoc redirem. **nuptias** specto **novas**.
>
> **Quid, anime, cessas? sequere** felicem impetum. 895
>
> pars ultionis ista, qua **gaudes**, quota est?
>
> amas adhuc, furiose, si **satis** est tibi
>
> caelebs Iason. **quaere poenarum genus**
>
> **haut usitatum** iamque sic temet **para**:

fas omne cedat, abeat expulsus pudor. 900
vindicta levis est quam ferunt purae manus.
incumbe in iras teque languentem **excita**
penitusque veteres pectore ex imo impetus
violentus hauri. quidquid admissum est adhuc
pietas vocetur. hoc **age** et **faxo** sciant 905
quam **levia** fuerint quamque **vulgaris** notae
quae **commodavi** scelera. **prolusit dolor**
per ista noster. quid **manus** poterant **rudes**
audere magnum, quid **puellaris** furor?
Medea nunc sum. **crevit** ingenium malis. 910
iuvat, iuvat rapuisse fraternum caput,
artus **iuvat** secuisse et arcano patrem
spoliasse sacro, **iuvat** in exitium senis
armasse natas. quaere materiam, dolor.
ad omne facinus **non rudem dextram** afferes. 915

(Am I to leave? If I had fled before, I would return for this. I see novel marriages. Why, spirit, do you delay? Follow your successful attack. Is this part of your revenge, by which you rejoice, so small? Still, you love, raging spirit, if widowed Jason is enough for you. Seek a kind of punishment not customary and now prepare yourself in this way. Let everything right fall away, let driven away modesty be absent. Vengeance is trivial which clean hands bring. Press upon anger and incite your lazy self and violently draw your past force from deep in your heart. Whatever has been committed already, let that be called *pietas*. Do this and make sure they know how trivial and of what common sort were the crimes which I lent out. Through

> these my grief rehearsed. What great thing could untrained hands dare, what could girlish rage dare? Now I am Medea. My character has grown through evils. It is pleasing, it is pleasing to have seized the head of a brother. It is pleasing to have cut off his limbs and robbed my father of his hidden, holy thing. It is pleasing to have armed daughters for the death of their father. Seek the material, grief. To all misdeed you bear a not amateur right hand.)

As earlier, Medea focuses on the novelty of her crime, its unusual and extraordinary nature. She describes her vengeance on Creon and Creusa as a new kind of marriage rite (*novae nuptiae*), the adjective *novus* emphasising its novelty. For Jason himself, she searches for an unusual kind of punishment (*haut usitatum*). Since she describes her past crimes as trivial and commonplace (*levis* and *vulgaris notae*), it is clear that Medea aims to exceed in magnitude and extremity the deeds of her past.[330] Again, Medea parallels her increase in age with her increase in crime (as earlier at 48-50), attributing smaller deeds (those not *magnus*) to untrained hands and girlish rage (*manus rudes* and *puellaris furor*). The language of magnitude, novelty and growth, used also by Atreus, contributes to highlighting the extreme excess of the crimes, the vengeance which Medea plans.

However, Atreus' use of the language of magnitude positioned him beyond the gods, as suprahuman. Medea uses the language of magnitude and growth to different effect, in order to highlight the relative insignificance of her past crimes in light of what is to come. Where Atreus' crimes exceed those of others (such as Procne and Philomela (*Thy*. 272-6)), Medea's crimes

[330] For different perspectives on this passage, see: Abrahamsen 1999, 119 (Medea's recourse to barbarianism); Guastella 2001, 210 (Medea's fulfilment of her identity).

exceed her own past crimes. Medea's vengeance against Jason will transcend her past crimes not only in their extremity – from killing her brother to killing her own children – but also in their motivation. Her past crimes, which she describes as *levia* and *vulgaris notae*, she claims to have lent out (*commodavi*). The verb *commodo* refers to the lending or providing of something to another,[331] particularly something useful or beneficial to another, as underlined by this verb's related adjective *commodus*. By implication, Medea's vengeance will not be committed for the benefit of others, unlike her past crimes. This indicates, on the one hand, Medea's transition from her past, socially-embedded monstrosity to the self-motivated monstrosity of an Atreus-like figure. On the other hand, the verb *commodo* reminds the audience that Medea has had social constraints on her actions, unlike Atreus who never experiences such constraint in the *Thyestes*.

Medea's similarities with Atreus continue, as she describes the pleasure she took in her present vengeance on Creon and Creusa and her past crimes against her brother, father and Pelias (*gaudeo* and *iuvat*).[332] Likewise, Atreus in the *Thyestes* takes pleasure in watching Thyestes as he eats his own children (903: *libet videre*). Medea's shift in the vocabulary she uses of her crimes, from her earlier language of benefits (e.g. *prodest* (500), *pro te* (449, 479, 503), *munus* (142, 228, 230, 492)) to the language of pleasure (*iuvat*), indicates a highly significant shift in how she sees her past crimes. Medea previously claimed she committed her past crimes for the benefit of others and to the detriment of herself, sacrifices she made, and so not for her own

[331] *OLD* 366-7 s.v. "*commodo*" 1a 'to lend, hire (to another)', 3 'to provide, bestow, accord, give'.
[332] Medea's pleasure in her crimes is also observed by Benton 2003, 278–79, who discusses this as part of Medea's barbaric identity.

pleasure. However, these are the very same crimes from which Medea claims – but only now claims – to derive pleasure.

This change in Medea's view of her past crimes highlights her transition into an Atreus-like figure. Medea's earlier self-conception saw her committing crimes for the benefit of others, and so lacking autonomy, especially when others did not acknowledge their benefit from her crimes. By now taking pleasure in her past crimes, seeming to have committed her crimes for the sake of self-pleasure, Medea becomes like Atreus, unrestrained and self-motivated. But it has taken Medea prolonged humiliation and mistreatment to reach this point, whereas Atreus reached it almost instantly. The distinct shift in language is a reminder of the delay Medea has taken before reaching Atreus-like unrestrained action. So, although Medea uses the same language and rhetoric as Atreus, the slightly different ways in which they are used draw attention to Medea's delay in action, the fact that unrestrained vengeance is a last resort for her.

Medea's pursuit of empowerment through vengeance is, again, clear from her self-exhortation. She berates herself for inaction (895) and gives orders to herself throughout this section with imperative forms (*sequere*, *quaere*, *para*, *incumbe*, *excita*, *age*, *faxo*). This kind of self-exhortation to action also features, as has been discussed, in Atreus' delayed prologue speech, and so characterises Medea, like Atreus, as a figure who exercises unrestrained power. However, self-exhortation is characteristic of Atreus only in his prologue speech, and not during the course of his vengeance. Atreus' self-encouragement in Act Two of the *Thyestes* translates into his actions in the rest of the play, and so he does not require additional self-

exhortation. Whilst Atreus' self-exhortation ceases after his prologue, Medea's carries on here, suggesting her hesitancy to commit her vengeance. Atreus does not need to goad himself, whereas Medea needs to keep herself on task.

This suggestion of Medea's uncertainty concerning her revenge foreshadows her hesitation when it comes to killing her children. Medea has expressed her resolve on the mode of her revenge, infanticide (916-25), but even after this she hesitates (926-8).

> **cor** pepulit horror, **membra** torpescunt gelu
>
> **pectus**que tremuit. ira discessit loco
>
> **mater**que tota **coniuge expulsa redit**.
>
> (Trembling has struck my heart, my limbs stiffen with cold and my breast quivers. Anger has left from here and, with the wife completely driven away, the mother returns.)

Medea is struck by what seems to be an attack of conscience as she considers the planned murder of her children.[333] The nouns *cor*, *membra* and *pectus* highlight the physical symptoms of paralysis which Medea experiences. She then links her hesitation to kill her children to her social role as a mother (*mater redit*); even as she rejects one social role, that of wifehood (*coniuge expulsa*), Medea recognises a different social duty, to her children. Her hesitation at the point of committing this most extreme crime indicates that

[333] For a different perspective on Medea's involuntary, bodily hesitation, see Walsh 2012, 89–90, who interprets Medea's hesitance as the breaking of mortality through Medea's adopted divine persona.

Medea, unlike Atreus, seems to be unable to escape societal bonds. She goes on to disown (929-30) her statement of intent from just five lines earlier, willing the crime of infanticide away from herself (931-2).

Medea experiences further involuntary physical reactions as she hesitates to commit infanticide (937-9):

> quid, anime, **titubas**? **ora quid lacrimae rigant**
>
> variamque nunc huc ira, nunc illuc amor
>
> diducit?
>
> (Why, spirit, do you falter? Why do tears wet my face and why now does anger, and now love split me apart here and there?)

Medea's wavering to kill her children is indicated by her questioning with the verb *titubo*. She then, again through self-questioning, describes her crying as involuntary; she asks herself why she is crying: *ora quid lacrimae rigant*. In hesitating to commit murder, Medea is like Atreus, as described by the messenger in a simile (*Thy.* 707-13). Compared to a tigress, Atreus also wavers (708: *erravit*). However, whereas Atreus hesitates between which of Thyestes' two children to murder first, Medea hesitates over whether to commit murder at all. Although both characters do the same action – hesitating – they do so for very different reasons. Atreus' hesitation over which child to murder first is demonstrative of the extremity of his crime, of the careful consideration he takes when committing this murder. Contrastingly, Medea's hesitation over whether to commit infanticide at all is indicative of her lack of complete freedom to act, her experience of some kind

of constraint on her actions.[334] It seems that, despite her attempts to distance herself from social constraint, Medea nevertheless has a sense of social responsibility to her own children.

In fact, Medea's involuntary physical reactions, which result from an attack of conscience, make her less like Atreus and more like Thyestes. At the revenge banquet, whilst unknowingly dining on his children Thyestes also experiences involuntary physical reactions (*Thy.* 942-56). Like Medea, Thyestes questions his own weeping (943-4: *quid flere iubes, / nulla surgens dolor ex causa?*). Although Medea's questions are more rhetorical than Thyestes', as she is, at some level, aware that her conflicting emotions arise from her simultaneous desires to take vengeance on Jason and to protect her children, nevertheless her experience of involuntary crying due to filial piety makes her similar to Thyestes. Medea's similarity to Thyestes hints at a lack of autonomy, or at least her uncertainty about what she is about to do. Importantly, Atreus never experiences such an attack of conscience about murdering his nephews. Although she previously seemed resolved to take vengeance on Jason by infanticide, Medea is now not so sure. In other words, Medea's transformation into an Atreus-like figure, a self-driven committer of monstrosities, is not so straightforward.

After this hesitation, Medea bids her children to join their father, but soon changes her mind (945-54):

huc, cara proles, unicum afflictae domus 945

[334] On Medea's hesitation, Guastella 2001, 211–13 notes the incompatibility of Medea's identities as wife and as mother.

solamen, huc vos ferte et infusos mihi
coniungite artus. **habeat incolumes pater**—
dum et mater habeat. urguet exilium ac fuga—
iam iam meo rapientur avulsi e sinu,
flentes, gementes. osculis pereant patris, 950
periere matris. rursus increscit **dolor**
et fervet **odium**, repetit invitam manum
antiqua **Erinys**. **ira**, **qua ducis, sequor**.

(Here, dear children, sole comfort of a shattered house, bring yourselves here and join your spread limbs to me. Let your father have you unharmed, as long as your mother has you too. Exile and flight urges. Now, now they will be snatched, torn from my breast, crying, groaning. Let them be dead to the kisses of their father; they are lost to those of their mother. Again grief grows and hatred seethes. The old Erinys seeks again an unwilling hand. Anger, where you lead, I follow.)

For a moment, it seems that Medea's children will live, as she sends them to be with their father (947), unharmed (*incolumes*). However, Medea suddenly has a change of heart mid-sentence, between 947 and 948, when she realises that Jason's gain of their children will be her loss. The thought of her separation from them quickly rouses her emotions (948-51). Medea's personified emotions – *dolor*, *odium* and *ira* – and the external force of the Furies drive her to infanticide and vengeance. The intensity of Medea's emotions grows (*increscit*, *fervet*) and they exert active force over her (*qua ducis, sequor*). Medea's infanticide seems to be, at least partially, driven by

forces from without, rather than within or by Medea herself – an apparent contradiction to the autonomous motivation for her revenge.

Medea is finally driven to commit infanticide by the imagined visions of the Furies pursuing her and of the ghost of her brother (958-71). Medea commits the first of her murders in address to her dead brother: *victima manes tuos / placamus ista* (970-971: With this victim, I pacify your shade.). Medea, previously purportedly committing revenge on her own behalf, seems now to be committing revenge on behalf of someone else, her brother. Although she claimed to be exercising her own autonomy by taking revenge on Jason, proving her independence from him, instead she seems to be, as with her past crimes, acting for the benefit of another, instead of for her own benefit. By contrast, Atreus needs no such external encouragement or motivation to murder his nephews; he acts entirely for himself. Even as she commits infanticide, in the extremity of monstrous autonomy, Medea inflects the situation with the social embeddedness of her role as sister and her vengeance on behalf of another.

As Jason approaches, Medea takes her children, one alive, one murdered, onto the roof of the palace. Again, Medea expresses contrasting emotions in quick succession (982-92):

> iam iam **recepi sceptra germanum patrem**,
> **spoliumque Colchi pecudis auratae tenent**.
> **rediere regna, rapta virginitas redit**.
> o placida tandem numina, o festum diem, 985
> o nuptialem! vade, **perfectum est scelus**—

vindicta nondum. **perage**, dum faciunt manus.

quid nunc moraris, anime? quid dubitas? potens

iam cecidit ira? paenitet facti, pudet.

quid, misera, feci? misera? paeniteat licet, 990

feci. **voluptas** magna me **invitam** subit,

et ecce crescit.

(Now, now, I have retaken my sceptre, brother and father, and the Colchians hold the prize of the golden ram. My realm returns, my stolen maidenhood returns. O at last peaceful deities, o celebrated day, o wedding day! Leave, the crime is done, but not yet my revenge. Finish it, while your hands are doing things. Why now do you delay, spirit? Why do you doubt? Has your powerful anger yielded? I regret to have done it, I am ashamed. Why, wretched woman, did I do it? Wretched woman? Although I regret it, I have done it. Great pleasure steals upon me, unwilling, and it grows.)

Medea is initially jubilant at having achieved her vengeance, clear from her address of the wedding gods (985-6) and her statement *perfectum est scelus* (986); it seems Medea might be satisfied. In 982-4, she claims to have reclaimed her family, her kingdom and her virginity. This reclamation is necessarily symbolic, rather than literal, and connects back to Medea's earlier, quasi-financial conceptualisation of her marriage to Jason and its associated deeds. The losses which she previously incurred for Jason's benefit, she now claims to have recouped through this act of revenge. As discussed previously, Medea's losses are impossible to return in literal form, and her claim here to have regained these losses (even if only symbolically)

serves to highlight this impossibility.[335] Moreover, following on from her visions of the Furies and her brother's ghost, this claim characterises Medea as somewhat delusional and unstable. This claim is also, although consistent with her earlier rhetoric, of benefits and debts, not consistent with her most recent expression of motivation for her infanticide – namely, to pacify her brother (970-1).

Medea's jubilation is very quickly cut short. After her claim that she has now gotten her own back on Jason, Medea immediately regrets her actions. Medea's regret is first hinted at by the continuation of her goading of herself. Although she has now committed her first act of infanticide, she still requires the same self-encouragement of earlier in the play. Medea again gives herself orders in imperative forms (*perage*) and berates herself for inaction in self-addressed questions (998-99). Medea addresses herself with the vocative form *anime* five times in this play – this instance is the final time – and each time in self-exhortation to action (41, 895, 937, 976). From the line references, it is clear that, as Medea approaches her act of revenge, and even in the process of her revenge, she requires self-encouragement. In contrast, this same kind of self-address and self-encouragement by Atreus occurs only in Act Two of the *Thyestes*, where Atreus sets himself up for his revenge (192, 270, 283, 324) and never when Atreus is in the process of committing revenge.

[335] As Guastella 2001, 216 notes, Seneca's Atreus makes a similar claim at *Thy.* 1096-9, that through his revenge he has recouped his losses. Despite its similarly delusional nature, Atreus' claim is not later qualified by any sense of regret. Atreus exercises his will over the world through taking his revenge, whereas Medea's revenge seems to result in her playing herself.

Medea's continued uncertainty then becomes an explicit expression of regret (*paenitet facti*) and shame (*pudet*). Again, the Atreus of the *Thyestes* would never feel regret or shame for his vengeance. In fact, Atreus revels in his crimes, taking pleasure in them (*Thy*. 903-906); this is particularly clear from the fact his description of his crimes follows the phrase *libet videre*… (903: it is pleasing to see…). The verb *libet* indicates Atreus' pleasure in his crimes, and contrasts with Medea's *paenitet* and *pudet* (989). In addition, Atreus describes the outcome of his crimes as *fructus* (906), the profit which makes the effort worthwhile. And so, Atreus' emotional response to his own crimes is positive. In contrast, Medea's emotional response to her crimes is negative; she feels regret and shame.

After regret and shame, Medea does, admittedly, feel pleasure. This initially seems like Medea's earlier pleasure in crimes, her past crimes at 911-3. However, she describes her pleasure in infanticide as unwilling (*invitam*), indicating that it is an involuntary reaction. Like Medea's earlier physical reactions which arose when she planned her unthinkable act of infanticide, this pleasure is involuntary. Medea is in conflict about her crimes: both ashamed of herself and unwillingly joyful. This conflicted response to her crimes puts her in stark contrast to Atreus, who wholeheartedly enjoys his revenge upon Thyestes.

Medea is pulled away from her feelings of shame, regret and involuntary pleasure by confrontation with Jason. As Medea threatens the murder of their other child, Jason claims that he is guilty in a desperate attempt to save their child's life (1004-5):

si quod est crimen, meum est.

me dedo morti. noxium macta caput.

(If there is any crime, it is mine. I give myself to death. Sacrifice my guilty life.)

Jason's claim to guilt is, on the one hand, in stark contrast to his earlier denial of Medea's crimes, for which she attributes some responsibility to him (497-8). On the other hand, Jason here in Act Five does not claim responsibility for Medea's crimes, but the crimes and the guilt for which she is about to murder their child: their child is not guilty, but he is. He offers himself up as a scapegoat.

However, Medea's words on the matter make clear that she is not concerned anymore with soliciting admissions of guilt, but instead with causing pain (1006-20):

MEDEA. Hac qua recusas, qua **doles**, ferrum exigam. 1006

…

IASON. Vnus est poenae satis.

MEDEA. Si posset una caede satiari manus,

nullam petisset. ut duos perimam, tamen 1010

nimium est **dolori** numerus **angustus meo**.

…

IASON. Iam perage coeptum facinus, haut ultra precor,

moramque saltem supplicis dona meis. 1015

MEDEA. Perfruere lento scelere, ne propera, **dolor**.

meus dies est: tempore accepto utimur.

IASON. Infesta, memet perime.

MEDEA. Misereri iubes.

Bene est, peractum est. plura non habui, **dolor**,

quae tibi litarem. 1020

(*M.* I will drive the sword in this place, where you refuse me to, where you feel pain…

J. One is punishment enough.

M. If my hand could be satisfied by one slaughter, it would not have sought another. Were I to destroy two, nevertheless the number is too narrow for my pain…

J. Now finish the crime you've begun, I pray nothing further, and at least spare my supplications any delay.

M. Enjoy a slow crime, do not hurry, my pain. It is my day; I use the time I have received.

J. Hostile woman, destroy me.

M. You order me to have pity. Very well, it is done. I do not have more, my pain, which I might offer to you.)

Medea desires to cause Jason pain in exchange for her own pain. She kills his children not as retribution for guilt, but because their deaths will cause him pain (*qua doles*). Likewise, the aim of Atreus' vengeance is also to cause Thyestes pain (*Thy*. 1096-8):

nunc meas laudo manus,

nunc parta vera est palma. perdideram scelus,

nisi sic doleres.

(Now I praise my hands, now my true palm has been born. I had wasted my crime, unless you were pained in this way.)

Atreus' crime would have been a waste, had Thyestes not been caused pain. Both Medea and Atreus use the same verb, *doleo*, of the victim of their revenge.

Despite this similarity, Atreus' emotional response to his revenge is in stark contrast to Medea's. Atreus is jubilant in the face of Thyestes' pain. Atreus references the victory palm (*palma*) he has received, symbolic of his triumph over Thyestes, his successful revenge. In contrast, Medea is not jubilant and celebratory, but relieved of pain. She is motivated by her own pain, for which she says even the deaths of two children are not sufficient (1010-1: *nimium angustus*). After this, twice Medea addresses her *dolor*, her pain (1016, 1019). In the first of these addresses, Medea orders her pain to take enjoyment in her drawing out of the crime. In the second, Medea refers to her crime as an offering to her pain. Medea's revenge by infanticide seems to make her feel relief, no longer plagued by a feeling of injustice. Medea's pain is allayed, pacified by her infanticide. Medea does not rejoice in Jason's pain, but inflicts pain on Jason in order to relieve her own. Medea's perfunctory *bene est, peractum est* is not a statement of victory or celebration, but completion. Medea does not commit revenge for her own pleasure, but to relieve her pain, which, as her addresses to it reveal, she conceives of as somewhat separate from herself. As such, it seems Medea does not commit

revenge for herself at all, that Medea does not commit revenge to exercise autonomy and assert dominance, but for relief.

After killing her second child to appease her *dolor*, Medea turns to address Jason. In these closing lines of the play, Medea confronts Jason with her crime and then leaves on a serpent-led chariot, whilst Jason condemns Medea's anti-social behaviour (1020-7):

> MEDEA. lumina huc tumida alleva, 1020
> **ingrate Iason**. coniugem agnoscis tuam?
> sic fugere soleo.
> …
> ego inter auras aliti curru vehar. 1025
> IASON. per alta vade spatia sublimi aetheris.
> testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos.
>
> (M. Lift up your swollen eyes, ungrateful Jason. Do you recognise your wife? I am accustomed to flee in this way… I will be carried amongst the winds on a winged chariot.
> J. Go through the high expanse of the lofty sky. Bear witness that there are no gods where you go.)

These closing lines of the *Medea* highlight the paradox of Medea's social embeddedness and exclusion from society.

On the one hand, Medea addresses Jason with the epithet *ingratus*, the same epithet she used of Jason earlier in the play (465). Medea's use of this epithet is a reminder of Medea's social embeddedness, which she argued for in Acts Two and Three. In asking Jason to recognise her (*agnoscis*), Medea

is demanding that he acknowledge that her previous actions (and crimes) were committed for the benefit of him, her husband, and that she was a self-sacrificing wife, doing things which were actively to her own detriment.[336]

On the other hand, in contrast to past social-embeddedness, Medea separates herself from society by leaving. Medea's self-exile from society is simultaneous with society's exile of her, as Jason's words indicate. By leaving on her serpent-led chariot through the sky 1022-4), Medea is "othered". The snakes are symbolic of her earlier characterisation as a witch, which served to highlight her positioning as extra-civic, a positioning Medea seems now to embrace. Medea's statement, *ego ... vehar* (1025), pre-empts Jason's bid that she leave (1026: *vade*). It is clear that, at the end of the play, Medea shuns society as much as it shuns her.

It is also clear that Medea is also socially excluded by Jason's correlation of Medea's presence with an absence of gods. These lines are open to interpretation: does Medea's presence drive away gods, or does Medea go to places where there are no gods? In either case, an absence of gods from Medea's presence is a similarity with the end of the *Thyestes*. In the *Thyestes*, the gods have turned away from Atreus' monstrous crimes, and it seems as though Atreus has achieved his goal of suprahumanity, of replacing the gods; perhaps Medea achieves the same. More useful, though, is a different comparison: although both plays end similarly with the gods' absence, the vengeful protagonists suffer contrasting fates. Medea is exiled from or exiles herself from society, whereas Atreus remains a part of his society, indeed,

[336] The verb *agnosco* and idea of recognition at the end of the *Medea* have also been interpreted from other angles: intertextual (Trinacty 2014, 125–26); philosophical (Bartsch 2006, 255–62; Bexley 2016, 43–45).

remains king of his society. Such asymmetry is striking and serves as a reminder of the intersecting "otherings" of Medea which, alongside her extreme crimes, place her beyond the reaches of society.

10 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how Seneca's *Medea* presents Medea, a figure most emblematic of extreme action and autonomy, as also able to be subject to social constraints and impingements upon her autonomy. Comparison with the Atreus of Seneca's *Thyestes* has shown that, although on the surface both Medea and Atreus transition from positions of disempowerment to dominance, the focus of Seneca's Medea is not assertion, but disenfranchisement.

Act One seemed to set Medea on the same trajectory as Atreus, seeking revenge through infanticide. However, in Acts Two and Three, Medea, completely unlike Atreus, focuses on her disenfranchisement due to Jason's divorce and remarriage. As her crimes are not acknowledged by others as beneficial, Medea is burdened with the guilt. She desperately argues for her social embeddedness of her crimes – as actions deserving recompense and indicative of her marital commitment to her husband. However, Medea's arguments for the social benefit of her crimes are in vain. Because of this lack of recognition, Medea is forced to do the unthinkable, to murder her own children.

It might be expected that Medea takes up this mode of revenge wholeheartedly; in Acts Three and Four, Medea seems to have transformed into an Atreus-like figure who revels in crime and revenge. However, in Act

Five, Medea's conflict reveals itself, in her hesitation and involuntary reactions. Moreover, at various points in committing her revenge, Medea is motivated not by her own desire or pleasure, but by apparently external forces. Her brother, the Furies and her *dolor* are the recipients, the beneficiaries of her revenge. She kills her own children to pacify these forces which she identifies as distinct from herself. From this it is clear that Medea, unlike Atreus, does not pursue revenge straightforwardly for herself. Even when she commits the most extreme crime of infanticide, she seems to lack the unequivocal autonomy of Atreus.

Medea is also unlike Atreus in the consequences for her societal position. After committing her crime, she is exiled and exiles herself from society, whereas Atreus remains king and secures his power through his revenge on Thyestes. Despite her exclusion from society, Medea's relationship with society and social ties is paradoxical: Medea has sacrificed everything for her social ties, for which society relegates her beyond its bounds. For Seneca's Medea, a most socially-othered figure in her foreignness, femaleness and witchcraft, society and its view of her is highly important, in a way that they are not for Atreus. The connections Medea continually draws – between her actions, their social value and her consequent place in society – and the extremities of Medea's situation make legible a potential problem for women's autonomy and freedom of action: what happens when women's actions, for the benefit of their husbands, are directly unbeneficial to the women themselves?

This problem finds a response, at least in conceptual terms, in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*. These philosophical works, unusual in being

addressed to women, offer up a conceptual tightrope walk which refigures women's familially beneficial actions as part of personal, philosophical excellence. As in the first half of this thesis, a tragedy presents the most extreme ethical range of action, and philosophical writings provide a conceptual response which advocates for constraint in ways which accord with traditional and conservative ideals of behaviour.

Chapter Four. Social Duty and Philosophical Autonomy in Seneca's *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*.

1 Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis discusses Seneca's *consolationes* addressed to women, the *ad Marciam* and the *ad Helviam*. Like Chapter Three, this chapter deals with texts which centralise women's experiences; it will become clear that the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, like the *Medea*, deal with women's familial duty. This chapter also has connections with Chapter Two on the *Epistulae Morales*; the *consolationes* and the *Epistulae* are pedagogical texts, which encourage the employment of Stoicism by their addressees. Like Chapter Two, this chapter will discuss how Seneca's use of Stoic ideas motivates reconceptualisation of more traditional Roman ideas of *virtus*, thereby blurring and/or moving traditional gender boundaries; whereas men in the *Epistulae Morales* need to be talked into the potentially effeminising concept of *patientia*, women in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* are allowed access to the masculine concept of *virtus*. This chapter discusses how philosophical autonomy, offered to women through access to *virtus*, mollifies the constraints imposed upon them by social duty, which were articulated by Seneca's Medea. Philosophical constraint on men operates somewhat differently in the *Epistulae Morales*, at least in so far as practice of the virtue of *patientia* is not conceived as an opportunity to act primarily for the benefit of others.

Like Seneca's *ad Polybium*, these works are consolatory, intended to relieve the grief of their bereaved addressee.[337] The *ad Marciam*, with an approximate composition date of 40 CE,[338] is addressed to Marcia three years after the death of her son.[339] Consolatory works were composed not only in situations of death, but also of exile, as in the *ad Helviam*.[340] Seneca addresses the *ad Helviam* to his own mother to console her on his own exile,[341] the only extant Roman example of an author's address to his own mother. The work can be securely dated to the period of Seneca's exile (41-49 CE), with an approximate composition date of 42/43 CE.[342] Although different in focus, the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* share the aim of addressing women philosophically; it is this aim which is the focus of this chapter. This chapter explores the means by which and ways in which Seneca addresses women philosophically. The pedagogical focus of Seneca's *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* provides a fruitful point of comparison with Chapter Two on the *Epistulae Morales*, a text directed towards the instruction of Lucilius. Thus, this chapter considers the similarities and differences between how Seneca pedagogically addresses women and men.

In this chapter, I discuss the traces left by the female addressees – traces which, themselves, demonstrate the marked status of the female ethical subject. For example, Seneca explicitly points out the need to justify addressing women philosophically; in this way, Seneca argues for the

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[337] See Baltussen 2013 for an overview on consolatory writings. See also Scourfield 2013, on the complications of defining a strict consolatory genre.
[338] For discussion of how the *ad Marciam* is dated, see Manning 1981, 1–4. See also: Sauer 2014b, 135.
[339] *Ad Marciam* 1.7: *tertius iam praeterit annus* (a third year has passed).
[340] For the tradition of *consolatio* for exile, see Nesselrath 2007; Fantham 2007, 176 n. 15.
[341] For further on the *ad Helviam* as exilic literature, see G. D. Williams 2006; Fantham 2007.
[342] See Duff 1915, xxxii; Costa 1994, 4; Sauer 2014a, 171.

philosophical equality of women, whilst also highlighting that the task of considering women is so unusual as to require justification. In philosophical terms, women are equals, but their equality is qualified and marked. Although women are equally philosophically capable, their address by a philosophical work requires justification and specific strategies which are more appropriate to them. As we shall see, the ultimate invocation of the domestic sphere as the appropriate sphere of action has some parallels with the dramatic world experienced by Medea and explored by Seneca.

After explaining the marked philosophical equality of women in Seneca's *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, I then discuss what this philosophical theory entails in practice for these women. Marcia and Helvia have been told that they too can acquire philosophical virtue/*virtus*; how does Seneca advise they go about this? These women are encouraged to engage intellectually with philosophy, by reading philosophical writings and pursuing the formal study of philosophy. The study of philosophy counters grief through allowing the philosopher to understand the terms of life, the inevitability of death, and the priority of the mind and soul over the physical body. As for all philosophical students, formal philosophical education is not sufficient for philosophical and ethical development; they must also put their learning into practice. Seneca's advice to women to help them put theory into practice is to support their family members – either through household management to support their male relatives' public lives, or through bringing up their young female relatives to become good Roman women. Such advice is distinct from that

given to a man (Polybius) in a similar situation. Polybius is encouraged to behave with dignity in his public, political position.[343]

[343] Note particularly Seneca's focus on the judgement of many others, which prevents Polybius from publicly displaying his grief. *Ad Polybium* 6: §1 *Potest et illa res a luctu te prohibere nimio, si tibi ipse renuntiaveris nihil horum, quae facis, posse subduci. Magnam tibi personam* ***hominum consensus*** *imposuit: haec tibi tuenda est. Circumstat te* ***omnis ista consolantium frequentia*** *et in animum tuum inquirit ac perspicit quantum roboris ille adversus dolorem habeat et utrumne tu tantum rebus secundis uti dextere scias, an et adversas possis viriliter ferre: observantur oculi tui.* §2 *Liberiora sunt omnia iis, quorum adfectus tegi possunt; tibi nullum secretum liberum est. In multa luce fortuna te posuit;* ***omnes*** *scient, quomodo te in isto tuo gesseris vulnere, utrumne statim percussus arma summiseris an in gradu steteris. Olim te in altiorem ordinem et amor Caesaris extulit et tua studia eduxerunt. Nihil te plebeium decet, nihil humile. Quid autem tam humile ac muliebre est quam consumendum se dolori committere?* §3 *Non idem tibi in luctu pari quod tuis fratribus licet; multa tibi non permittit* ***opinio*** *de studiis ac moribus tuis recepta, multum a te homines exigunt, multum expectant. Si volebas tibi omnia licere, non convertisses in te* ***ora omnium****: nunc tantum tibi praestandum est, quantum promisisti.* ***Omnes illi****, qui opera ingenii tui laudant, qui describunt, quibus, cum fortuna tua opus non sit, ingenio opus est, custodes animi tui sunt. Nihil umquam ita potes indignum facere perfecti et eruditi viri professione, ut non multos admirationis de te suae paeniteat.* §4 *Non licet tibi flere immodice, nec hoc tantummodo non licet; ne somnum quidem extendere in partem diei licet aut a tumultu rerum in otium ruris quieti confugere aut* ***adsidua laboriosi officii statione*** *fatigatum corpus voluptaria peregrinatione recreare aut spectaculorum varietate animum detinere aut ex tuo arbitrio diem disponere. Multa tibi non licent, quae humillimis et in angulo iacentibus licent:* §5 *magna servitus est magna fortuna. Non licet tibi quicquam arbitrio tuo facere: audienda sunt tot hominum milia, tot disponendi libelli;* ***tantus rerum*** *ex orbe toto coeuntium* ***congestus****, ut possit per ordinem suum principis maximi animo subici, exigendus est. Non licet tibi, inquam, flere: ut multos flentes audire possis, ut periclitantium et ad misericordiam mitissimi Caesaris pervenire cupientium [lacrimas siccare], lacrimae tibi tuae adsiccandae sunt.* (§1 The following is able to prevent you from excessive grief, if you report to yourself that nothing of these things, which you do, are able to be hidden. The common agreement of people has imposed on you a great standing; this standing must be guarded by you. A whole crowd of consolers stands around you and searches in your mind and looks at how much strength it has against grief and whether you know how to employ favourable circumstances skilfully, or whether you are able to bear adversity courageously. Your eyes are observed. §2 All things are more free to those men, whose feelings are able to be covered; no secret is free for you. Fortune has placed you in great light. Everyone knows how you conduct yourself in the face of that wound, whether you submit your arms immediately after being struck, or whether you stand in position. Once Caesar's love brought you out to a higher position and led out your studies. Nothing common befits you, nothing lowly. Yet, what is as lowly and womanly as to send yourself out to be consumed by grief? §3 The same thing which is allowed to your brothers is not allowed to you, though equal in grief. Received opinion about your studies and your character does not allow many things to you. Men demand much of you, they expect much of you. If you wanted all things to be allowed to you, you would not have turned the faces of all towards yourself. Now there must be presented by you as much as you promised. They are all guards of your mind, those men who praise the works of your mind, who copy you, who, although in no need of your fortune, are in need of your talent. You are never able to do anything unworthy of your profession as a perfect and learned man, lest there be regret to many men of their admiration of you. §4 It is not allowed for you to weep immoderately, nor is this the only thing not allowed to you. You are not even allowed to stretch out sleep into part of the day, nor to flee from the racket towards the leisure of the quiet country, nor to restore your body, tired from the frequent post of tiresome duty, with a pleasurable trip, nor to distract your mind with a variety of shows, nor to arrange your day according to your own judgement. Many things are not allowed to you, which are allowed to those men most lowly and lying in a narrow corner. §5 Great fortune is great servitude. You are not allowed to do anything by your own judgement. There are so many thousands of men

In short, Seneca's radical position on women's (philosophical) equality is accompanied by a conservative position on women's contribution to society. This incongruity can be interpreted less generously: philosophical equality is the sugar to help the bitter medicine of familial duty and women's inferior social position go down. In this way, philosophical equality can be considered merely rhetorical window dressing. According to this interpretation, the rhetoric of philosophical equality, which allows women to achieve philosophical *virtus*, sweetens the bitter experience of Seneca's Medea, for whom familial duty incurs personal losses; the disguise of philosophical *virtus* allows familial duty to seem personally beneficial for women, even if their labour remains unrecognised by those they support.

It is also possible to interpret this incongruity more generously to Seneca, and to consider the substantial role familial duty plays in philosophical and ethical development. Elsewhere in his philosophical writings, Seneca emphasises the importance of ethical practice alongside philosophical study. Familial and societal roles are central to Stoic ethical development, for individuals and communities; Seneca's addressees are encouraged to partake in not only personal, philosophical development, but also community development, through aiding social replication. As discussed in Chapter Two, Seneca argues for the joint contribution of philosophical leaning and ethical practice to the development of philosophical *virtus*. For these reasons, it is also possible to consider Seneca's advice to women less

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to be heard by you, there are so many petitions to be disposed. Such a great pile of matters from all over the world, so that it is able to be treated in proper order by the mind of a great leader, must be examined. As I have said, you are not allowed to cry; so that you are able to listen to many others weeping, so that you are able to dry the tears of those in danger and desiring to arrive at the mercy of the gentlest Caesar, you must dry your own tears.)

cynically, as a sincere statement of their path to philosophical *virtus* within the constraints of imperial Roman society – just as Seneca's rehabilitation of *patientia* allowed Roman men to reach philosophical *virtus* despite limitations on their control of their physical circumstances.

By interpreting the texts in this way, I take into account both the apparent sincerity of Seneca's philosophical doctrine and the rhetorical markedness of female philosophical subjects, in an attempt to bridge the gap between two potentially dichotomous positions on these texts.

One approach prioritises Seneca's philosophical statement that women are equal to men, to such an extent that gendered ethical language and actual social roles of women do not problematise, at all, the Stoic conception of equal virtue for both men and women. For example, Arnold states: 'We need attach no great importance to those more distinctively masculine views which Seneca occasionally expresses, to the effect that woman is hot-tempered, thoughtless, and lacking in self-control, or to the Peripatetic doctrine that man is born to rule, women to obey; for these sentiments, however welcome to his individual correspondents, were not rooted in Stoic theory nor exemplified in the Roman society of his own days.'[344] Mauch argues that, despite Seneca's use of misogynistic language, his consolatory works to women promote the ethical equality of women.[345] Motto goes as far as considering Seneca an early proponent of women's liberation.[346]

[344] Arnold 1911, 271.
[345] Mauch 1997.
[346] Motto 1972, 157: 'Seneca, well in advance of his time, is willing to grant women equal opportunity at the banquet table, equal place at the feast of human endeavor. She is, he would argue, everyone's equal in capacity, and, if she exercise virtue, everyone's superior. That kind of liberation is a real achievement.'

More recent research has found a more nuanced approach to the philosophical aspects of these texts, taking seriously Seneca's philosophical address of women. For example, Reydam-Schils uses the consolations to show that social bonds are an important site for moral development within Roman Stoicism.[347] Gloyn, along similar lines, discusses the serious and sincere approach to women's philosophical development by Seneca, with particular reference to the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis* by which interhuman relationships are formed.[348]

A different approach prioritises gendered language and Seneca's reproduction of a gendered hierarchy over his statement of the philosophical equality of women. For example, Manning states that: 'to talk of a Stoic concept of the equality of the sexes requires so many reservations in period and so lengthy a definition of its meaning that it is best to dispense with the term altogether.'[349] Moreover, Manning clarifies that the equal capacity for virtue and the encouragement to equal education for women 'did not however entail the rejection in practice of the male domination practised in Roman society.'[350] Literary approaches to the *consolationes* generally follow views of this kind, highlighting how Seneca's text reproduces gendered hierarchies. Vidén focuses on identifying an overall conception of women in Seneca's thought, through literary and rhetorical methods, concluding that the negative comments on women in the majority of Seneca's work outweigh the more generous statements he makes in the *consolationes*, which are explained away

[347] Reydams-Schils 2005, particularly chapters 4 and 5.
[348] Gloyn 2017, 14–47.
[349] Manning 1973, 176.
[350] Manning 1981, 87.

as rhetorical strategy.[351] Both Langlands and Wilcox focus on how Seneca constructs *exempla* for women which avoid threatening the dominant position of men.[352] McAuley discusses how Seneca uses the virtue of his mother, Helvia, as an indicator of his own virtue, reinforcing the fact that the behaviour of female relatives was of male concern.[353] These literary approaches emphasise that Seneca's texts reproduce gendered hierarchies, through the presentation of female virtue as supportive of and indicative of male virtue.

By considering Seneca's philosophical position as sincere, but also subject to qualifications, I aim to bridge the gap between these two positions, showing that it is possible to prioritise neither view, but take a more multivalent perspective. In other words, it is possible to find no contradiction between Seneca's statement of the philosophical equality of women and his use of gendered language and marked philosophical status of women. Gendered ethical language is part of the conceptual fabric of Roman ethics; ethical weakness as womanly is effective for Seneca's comprehension by his audience. Gendered ethical language can be explained not only on rhetorical grounds, but also on philosophical and pedagogical grounds.

In his philosophical-pedagogical writings addressed to men, exceptionalism – rising above the ethical weakness exhibited by the majority – is a key part of Seneca's pedagogical strategy and conception of philosophy: all people are equally capable of attaining *virtus*, but few actually undergo the difficulties involved in doing so. Likewise, the philosophical equality of

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[351] Vidén 1993, 108–39.
[352] Langlands 2004; Wilcox 2006. Seneca's persuasion through *exempla* is discussed by Shelton 1995.
[353] McAuley 2016, 169–200.

women which Seneca proposes is not straightforward, but subject to many qualifications; the marked philosophical status of women is a part of, not a contradiction to, this qualified philosophical equality of women. In other words, all women are, theoretically, equally capable of attaining *virtus*, but few exhibit, in practice, the tenacity and strength required to overcome the ethical weaknesses of humans. Although all people and all women are naturally capable of acquiring *virtus*, the circumstances of some facilitate this acquisition; for example, elite men have greater access to formal philosophical education. What this means in practice is that women, despite being just as naturally capable, will be less likely to have the philosophical tools to pursue *virtus*. The exceptionalism of the female ethical subject (ascribed to Marcia and Helvia) is not specific to women, but to all who pursue philosophy and, in doing so, rise above the weakness of the masses.

By considering Seneca's position as one of philosophical substance, I demonstrate that through directing them towards the stable and meaningful goal of philosophical *virtus*, Seneca rehabilitates women's familial duties, seen by Medea as constrained, as beneficial not only to others, but also to women themselves. The mechanics of reconceptualisation and rehabilitation (as in the *Epistulae Morales* of Chapter Two) are applied to the problem of women's familial service (as constraining upon autonomy, as in the *Medea* of Chapter Three), in order to present a socially conservative familial role as philosophically worthwhile to women.

2 Stoic Context for Women's Philosophical Equality

There is clear evidence that Stoics, both before and contemporary with Seneca, considered women to be ethically equal to men, and advocated the equal philosophical education of women. Whilst earlier evidence for Stoic beliefs on women is scant, that others expounded views similar to Seneca's claim in the *ad Marciam* is clear.[354] For example, the founder of the Stoic school, Zeno, is reported to have claimed in his work on political theory, the *Republic*, that women were citizens, and that men and women had equality in how they dressed (Diogenes Laertius 7.32-3):[355]

> 'κοινάς τε τὰς γυναῖκας δογματίζειν ὁμοίως ἐν τῇ Πολιτείᾳ… καὶ ἐσθῆτι δὲ τῇ αὐτῇ κελεύει χρῆσθαι ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας καὶ μηδὲν μόριον ἀποκεκρύφθαι.'
>
> ([Some criticise Zeno] for his doctrine set out there concerning community of wives… and for his instruction that men and women should wear the same clothes and keep no part of the body completely covered).

Zeno's successor, Cleanthes, is reported to have written a work titled *On the same virtue of men and women* (Περὶ τοῦ ὅτι ἡ αὐτὴ ἀρετὴ [καὶ] ἀνδρὸς καὶ

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[354] Also see discussion by Asmis 1996.

[355] On this passage, Long and Sedley 1987, 1:435 note: 'His wholesale rejection of the educational curriculum, public buildings including temples, and currency, and his **recommendations concerning community of wives and unisex clothing** (B, C), embarrassed later Stoics (cf. E) when the school had acquired bourgeois respectability; and he probably included the still more shocking justifications of incest and cannibalism attributed to Chrysippus' Republic (F, G). In assessing the overall purpose of Zeno's work (probably a single papyrus roll, cf. the reference to line 200 at B 4), the following points, in addition to those mentioned, should be noted: 'one way of life and order' as the system of economy and law, in contrast with local and civic demarcations (A); virtue, not kinship or any other bond, as the criterion of friendship, and also as the criterion of freedom (B 3-4; cf. M, P); **restriction of citizenship to the virtuous, who appear to have included women, contrary to normal Greek practice** (B 4-5); sublimation of the sex drive into a source of friendship, freedom and social solidarity (D).'

γυναικός).[356] Moreover, Musonius Rufus, a near contemporary of Seneca, seems to have, likewise, considered men and women as ethical equals.[357] Two of his teachings, recorded by one of his students, affirm this: ὅτι καὶ γυναιξὶ φιλοσοφητέον (that women too should be taught philosophy) and εἰ παραπλησίως παιδευτέον τὰς θυγατέρας τοῖς υἱοῖς (if daughters should be educated equal to sons).[358] In these, Musonius argues that women have equal reason to men, and an equal inclination to virtue.[359] Moreover, the same virtues which are useful to men are also useful to women, highlighting the need for women to receive the same philosophical education as men.[360] Where men and women differ, in Musonius' account, is in their roles and functions; men need a philosophical education to fulfil their civic duties, and women to fulfil their household duties.[361] However, notably for Musonius,

[356] Diogenes Laertius 7.175.
[357] Further discussion of Musonius' writings on women can be found in Nussbaum 2002
[358] For Musonius, I use Hense's text, as printed by Lutz 1947 and Lutz's translation. For the accenting of the titles of Musonius' discourses, I am indebted to Martina Astrid Rodda.
[359] Musonius Rufus 3 (p. 40 ll. 1-5): ἔτι δὲ ὄρεξις καὶ οἰκείωσις φύσει πρὸς ἀρετὴν οὐ μόνον γίνεται τοῖς ἀνδράσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γυναιξίν· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἧττον αὗταί γε τῶν ἀνδρῶν τοῖς μὲν καλοῖς καὶ δικαίοις ἔργοις ἀρέσκεσθαι πεφύκασι, τὰ δ' ἐναντία τούτων προβάλλεσθαι. (Moreover, not men alone, but women too, have a natural inclination toward virtue and the capacity for acquiring it, and it is the nature of women no less than men to be pleased by good and just acts and to reject the opposite of these.
[360] Musonius Rufus 4 (p. 44 l. 10): ὅτι δὲ οὐκ ἄλλαι ἀρεταὶ ἀνδρός, ἄλλαι δὲ γυναικός, ῥᾴδιον μαθεῖν. (And yet that there is not one set of virtues for a man and another for a woman is easy to perceive.) Lutz trans. Musonius Rufus 4 (p.46 ll.1-2): <εἰ μὲν οὖν τὰς αὐτὰς εἶναι πέφυκεν> ἀρετὰς ἀνδρὸς καὶ γυναικός ἀνάγκη πᾶσα καὶ τροφὴν καὶ παιδείαν τὴν αὐτὴν προσήκειν ἀμφοῖν. (If then men and women are born with the same virtues, the same type of training and education must, of necessity, befit both men and women.)
[361] This is clear from Musonius Rufus 3, which focuses on how virtues are necessary for women to be good wives and manage their households well. Likewise, Musonius Rufus 4 (p. 44 ll. 10-14): αὐτίκα, φρονεῖν δεῖ μὲν τὸν ἄνδρα, δεῖ δὲ καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα· ἢ τί ὄφελος εἴη ἂν ἄφρονος ἀνδρὸς ἢ γυναικός; εἶτα <δεῖ> δικαίως βιοῦν οὐδέτερον ἧττον θατέρου· ἀλλ' ὅ τε ἀνὴρ οὐκ ἂν εἴη πολίτης ἀγαθὸς ἄδικος ὤν, ἥ τε γυνὴ οὐκ ἂν οἰκονομοίη χρηστῶς, εἰ μὴ δικαίως. (In the first place, a man must have understanding and so must a woman, or what pray would be the use of a foolish man or woman? Then it is essential for one no less than the other to live justly, since the man who is not just would not be a good citizen, and the woman would not manage her household well if she did not do it justly.)

the different roles of men and women both require the same virtues and philosophical education.[362]

Therefore, although the sources are scarce, it is evident that, prior and contemporary to Seneca, there were arguments being made for the ethical equality and equal education of women. The Stoics believed that women and men were both equally capable of the same virtues, and, for them, different ways of displaying virtue were no contradiction to this part of their doctrine. As different studies have highlighted, despite the different societal roles of men and women, the Stoics still took seriously the ethical education of women, and women's ethical role within the family. For example, as Reydams-Schils discusses extensively, for the Roman Stoics, social roles play an integral part in philosophical development, thus providing women with the means to achieve philosophical virtue themselves.[363] Therefore, it is clear that the idea of women's philosophical virtue was taken seriously within Stoic theory.

Seneca himself reflects this Stoic belief in the ethical equality of women, noting explicitly that women are just as capable as men in their ethical capacity (*ad Marciam* 16.1):[364]

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[362] Musonius Rufus 4 (p. 48 ll. 17-20): μόνον περὶ μηδενὸς τῶν μεγίστων ἕτερος ἕτερα μεμαθηκέτω, ἀλλὰ ταὐτά. ἂν δέ τις ἐρωτᾷ με, τίς ἐπιστήμη τῆς παιδείας ταύτης ἐπιστατεῖ, λέξω πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι φιλοσοπηίας ἄνευ ὥσπερ ἀνὴρ οὐκ ἂν οὐδείς, οὕτως οὐδ' ἂν γυνὴ παιδευθείη ὀρθῶς. (But about the all-important things let not one know and the other not, but let them know the same things. If you ask me what doctrine produces such an education, I shall reply that as without philosophy no man would be properly educated, so no woman would be.)

[363] Reydams-Schils 2005, chaps 4 and 5.

[364] This passage is also discussed, with regard to similar ideas, by Wilcox 2006, 79; McAuley 2016, 190; Gloyn 2017, 18–19.

> Quis autem dixit **naturam** maligne cum mulierum ingeniis egisse et virtutes illarum in artum retraxisse? **Par** illis, mihi crede, **vigor**, **par** ad honesta, **libeat**, **facultas** est; dolorem laboremque ex aequo, **si consuevere**, patiuntur.
>
> (But who has said that nature has dealt with the qualities of women unfairly and withdrawn their virtues into confinement? Believe me, there is equal strength for them, equal ability for honourable things, if they want. They suffer grief and toil in the same way, if they are accustomed to do so.)

In this quote from the *ad Marciam*, Seneca specifies his position against the commonplace assumption that women are not predisposed to *virtus*. The rhetorical question at the start of this section gives the popularly held belief, that women lack a predisposition towards *virtus*. That this lack is believed to be inherent to women is clear from the attribution of women's supposed condition to *natura* (nature). Seneca, however, asserts that the strength and ability (*vigor* and *facultas*) of women are equal to (we must assume) men; this is emphasised by the repetition of *par*. Seneca also states, as relevant to the subject of the *ad Marciam*, that women experience grief in the same way as (again we must assume) men; this time equality is expressed by the phrase *ex aequo*. Both these statements of women's ethical capacity – their propensity for *virtus* and their endurance of grief – are made with qualifications: *libeat* and *si consuevere*. From these qualifications and a familiarity with other parts of Seneca's philosophical writings, it seems that a certain amount of experience and intention is required in order for women to reach *virtus*. This idea is returned to in the course of this chapter.

This statement of women's ethical equality to men – whatever this means exactly – is extremely unusual, especially within a Roman context of gendered conceptualisation of ethics. As has been discussed in Chapter Two, the term *virtus*, which comes to be used of ethical excellence or virtue (the Greek ἀρετή), comes with the baggage of elite masculinity; to have *virtus* is to be a Roman *vir*, an upstanding elite citizen man. From one angle, this gendered model of ethics looks to be a problem for women's philosophical equality. If to act in a "womanly" manner is to act ethically improperly, Seneca's statement that women's potential for *virtus* is equal to men's seems to be difficult, if not impossible.[365] From the other angle, women's philosophical equality looks to be a problem for a Roman gendered model of ethics. Women's equal potential for *virtus* seems to threaten the masculinity of *virtus*. The attribution of this kind of philosophical autonomy to women, through allowing them access to *virtus*, creates substantial problems for gendered models of ethics. In order to overcome these problems, Seneca must do some significant rhetorical and philosophical gymnastics. As explained previously, my approach and interpretation aims to be generous to Seneca. As such, this chapter demonstrates a route around Seneca's many obstacles. Due to the complexity of the ideas and the precision of the logical leaps which must be made to achieve this, my route through the texts will be somewhat circuitous. For this reason, I map out now the path we will take.

I start from the markedness of women in philosophy. The very important, above-quoted statement in the *ad Marciam* reveals the markedness

[365] The problem of gendered ethical language and addressing women, with reference to the *ad Marciam*, is discussed by Langlands 2004, 118–19.

of women in philosophy. The framing of Seneca's statement is defensive, against the idea that women, on the grounds of their gender, are ethically less capable than men. The fact that women's philosophical equality – whatever this means – is explicitly said to go against the status quo shows that women's involvement in philosophy is marked. The fact that women's status as equal philosophical subjects (people who do philosophy) is unusual cannot go unremarked. Seneca cannot get away with stating the position which goes against the status quo, but must also state the fact that it goes against the status quo. Like the terms 'woman doctor' or 'male nurse' highlight that, from the perspective of the speaker, it is unusual that doctors are women or that nurses are men, Seneca's defensive stance draws attention to the fact that his position is unusual. When I refer to women's status in philosophy as "marked", this is what I mean. Women's philosophical equality, although equality – if we do, indeed, take Seneca at his word – is a marked kind of equality.

Women's philosophical markedness, in its various forms, has the potential to be counteractive to the creation of an ethics for women; however, Seneca uses markedness to his advantage as a rhetorical strategy for addressing women. In his other philosophical writings, Seneca often singles out the philosophical subject, the *proficiens*, for pursuing philosophy, in contrast to the masses who, despite the accessibility of philosophy to all, do not. Seneca applies this same strategy to women: by nature, all women have the potential for philosophical excellence, but few pursue and achieve it. Seneca's particular addressees – Marcia and Helvia – are exceptional to the majority of women, because they have demonstrated their ethical capacity. Section 5 of this chapter demonstrates Seneca's parallel use of this rhetoric

elsewhere in his philosophy, in which all people, by nature, have the potential to pursue philosophy, only a few individuals actually do so.

One key reason why so few pursue philosophy is because they lack the access to philosophical education. Thus, it is possible to interpret Seneca's comments on women's weakness in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* as part of the reality, that women were less likely to demonstrate ethical excellence because they did not have access to philosophy.[366] This interpretation is supported by the fact that Marcia and Helvia have had greater access than most women to formal philosophical education. In the context of this reality for Roman women, women's marked philosophical status is indicative of the layers of difficulties for women pursuing philosophy. It is difficult even for an elite man to pursue philosophy; it is even more difficult for a woman. Seneca encourages Marcia and Helvia towards formal philosophical education, to which few women would have access.

Formal education for women gives recourse to the radical potential of women's equal philosophical capacity to men. The radical idea of theoretical equality of access to *virtus* for women has the potential to threaten and feminise the masculinity of *virtus*. However, Marcia's and Helvia's ethical strength – in opposition to other women's ethical weakness – is shown through their chastity and service to their families. As such, Seneca implements another stereotype of women – the ideal woman – in the face of the stereotype of luxurious and indulgent women. This ideal woman is also the end goal of Helvia's and Marcia's philosophical study, and so this

[366] For further on the realities of women's education in Rome, see Harris 1989, 233–48, 252–53; Hemelrijk 1999, 2015.

conservative and domestic ideal negates and counters the potential threat to masculinity and *virtus*. In short, the theoretical potential of *virtus* is only realised in a handful of exceptional circumstances, and towards a conservative gendered role. These circumscriptions constrain the radical potential of women's *virtus*, through limiting *virtus* to a select group of women and directing their actions towards the sphere of the domestic.

Seneca is not an idealist, but works within the limitations of Roman reality. Reality necessitates that he acknowledges how unusual his position on women's philosophical capabilities is. Gendered conceptualisations of ethics make their way into Seneca's text as those which exist in Roman reality. By employing the rhetoric of exceptionalism, Seneca overcomes these limitations, refiguring them to his advantage; this is one of Seneca's tricks of argumentation. Exceptionalism is not only a rhetoric highly suited to the enlightening slant of Hellenistic philosophy (and Stoicism in particular), but is also appropriate for the reality of Roman women. Although no person is naturally privileged towards philosophical success, there are more significant social and political boundaries for some, as philosophy and *virtus* are facilitated by (formal) philosophical education, to which few men and even fewer women have access – at least according to Seneca's Stoicism. By drawing these connections, Seneca can state that women are equally philosophically capable to men, whilst also maintaining gendered ethical models, in which women are ethically weaker than men; in this way, Seneca adapts to and exploits the stereotype of the luxurious and indulgent woman. Seneca also uses the stereotype of the chaste and modest ideal woman to his advantage, describing this ideal as the end goal of philosophy and *virtus* for

women. This domestic-minded woman is a highly conservative figure, and so negates the radical potential of female *virtus*, by supporting, rather than threatening, men and masculinity. Seneca thereby conceptualises of and creates a form of *virtus* for women which integrates with the constraints of society, just as a masculine *patientia* is conceptualised in the *Epistulae Morales*. In other (more negative) words, women's philosophical autonomy is employed in order to constrain women to the conservative ideals of social duty which troubled Seneca's Medea.

3 Justifying Women's Philosophy in the *ad Marciam*

That women's engagement with philosophy, their acquisition and possession of *virtus*, is unusual is clear from the programmatic opening of the *ad Marciam*. At the very start of his address to Marcia, Seneca justifies his address to a woman (*ad Marciam* 1.1):[367]

> Nisi te, Marcia, scirem tam longe ab **infirmitate muliebris animi** quam a ceteris vitiis recessisse et mores tuos velut aliquod antiquum exemplar aspici, non auderem obviam ire dolori tuo, **cui viri quoque libenter haerent et incubant**, nec spem concepissem tam iniquo tempore, tam inimico iudice, tam invidioso crimine posse me efficere, ut fortunam tuam absolveres. Fiduciam mihi dedit **exploratum iam robur animi et magno experimento approbata virtus tua**.
>
> (If I did not know, Marcia, that you had withdrawn so far from the weakness of a womanly mind as from all other vices, and that your character is looked

[367] This passage is also discussed by Langlands 2004, 119–20; Langlands highlights the problems of addressing women which Seneca's opening words raise.

> upon just as some ancient exemplar, I would not have dared to oppose your grief, which even men cling to and rest upon freely, and I would not have seized upon hope that I would be able to make that you dismiss your fortune, at so unfavourable a time, with a judge so hostile, with a charge so hateful. Your strength of mind, already established, and your virtue, proved by a great trial, has given me faith.)

As Seneca has it here, it might be supposed that Marcia, as a woman, would be prone to womanly weakness (*infirmitas muliebris animi*), rendering consolatory address to her superfluous. However, Marcia's character is such that Seneca has confidence (*fiducia*) that Marcia can be a successful addressee of consolation. The gendering of ethical character, of responses to grief, is particularly clear from the phrases *infirmitas muliebris* and *cui viri quoque libenter haerent et incubant*. The first of these phrases highlights the association of women with ethical weakness – an association which necessitates justification that Marcia will be a suitable subject for therapeutic consolation. The second of these phrases describes grief (*dolor*). The implication of this description, that even men (*viri* ***quoque***) are affected by grief, is that it is comparatively more difficult to allay the grief of women than of men. The adverb *quoque* is doing the heavy lifting in this phrase; if even men are affected by grief, what chance do women have? Seneca's programmatic opening states that: since even men are affected by grief, one might assume that there is even less possibility and even more difficulty involved in preventing a woman's grief.

In the face of the obstacle apparently presented by womanly weakness, Seneca's address to a woman is nevertheless possible, due to

Marcia's good character. Seneca states that he has confidence in Marcia's ability because of her *exploratum iam robur animi et magno experimento approbata virtus tua*. By helping to preserve the writings of her father, Aulus Cremutius Cordus (*ad Marciam* 1.2-1.4, discussed further below pp. 326-9), Marcia has already demonstrated her ethical strength. Marcia's past demonstration of her *robur animi* and *virtus* is the prerequisite with which Seneca justifies his address of her, a woman. Stated even more explicitly, Marcia has transcended her sex (*ad Marciam* 1.5):

> Haec magnitudo animi tui vetuit me ad sexum tuum respicere, vetuit ad vultum, quem tot annorum continua tristitia, ut semel obduxit, tenet.
>
> (This greatness of your mind prevented me from regarding your sex, prevented me from regarding your expression, which the continual sadness of so many years holds, as it once covered.)

Again, Marcia's good character – this time *magnitudo animi* – allows Seneca to put aside the potential limitations presented by the fact that Marcia is a woman. Seneca explicitly points out that Marcia's gender (*sexum tuum*) could be considered an obstacle to his consolatory aim.

The start of Seneca's *ad Marciam* necessitates, for him, justification of his chosen addressee. Some might assume that *infirmitas muliebris animi* prevents Seneca's *consolatio* from being effective in address to Marcia; however, Marcia's already-proven good character justifies her status as addressee, despite assumptions the wider readership might make about women and Marcia. The fact that such assumption necessitates Seneca's

justification is indicative of the marked philosophical status of women. Women are unusual addressees of philosophical texts, women are unusual ethical subjects – specifically on the grounds of their gender.

One reason for women's usual alienation from philosophy is, in a Roman context, the masculinity of ethical excellence. The qualities of *robur* and *virtus* which Marcia demonstrates, whilst providing justification for Seneca's address of a woman, also highlight the main problem Seneca faces in addressing women philosophically: the problem of the masculinity of *virtus*. Both *virtus* and *robur* are qualities associated with men and masculinity,[368] but are, here, markers of the ethical strength a woman must demonstrate in order to qualify as a philosophical addressee. The question of how Seneca deals with the tension between masculine *virtus* and female addressees is central when dealing with gendered issues in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*. This is an issue which, although not always directly invoked, looms over all parts of my discussion in this chapter. Towards the end of this chapter, I will return to this question with an answer as complex as the rhetorical and logical acrobatics Seneca employs to overcome this issue.

4 Womanliness and Ethical Weakness in the *ad Helviam*

Similar logical steps are made in the *ad Helviam*, as part of Seneca's assuagement of his mother's grief. Like Marcia, Helvia separates herself from conventional or common assumptions about women. The rhetoric of

[368] The associations with *virtus* and masculinity are discussed in Chapter Two (pp. 112-23). The association of *robur* with masculinity is illustrated by *OLD* 1658 s.v. "*robur*" 9 'potency, force, effectiveness', 10 'strength of character or purpose, firmness, resolve'. The strength and firmness associated with *robur* harks back to the *firmitas* associated with masculinity in the *Epistulae Morales*; see discussion on p. 188.

exceptionalism, which is employed as justification of Marcia's status as addressee in the *ad Marciam*, is, by its repeated use in the *ad Helviam*, revealed to be a broader strategy for addressing women philosophically. The logic of this strategy is that unlike the majority of women, who display ethical weakness, Marcia and Helvia are ethically upstanding. I first identify and explain instances where this logic is used in the *ad Helviam*.

Negative assumptions about the majority of women are pervasive in the *ad Helviam*, in which Helvia's distinction from other women is a repeated trope. Seneca describes Helvia as selfless, unlike other mothers who are self-interested, in order to ultimately show her that her grief is unfounded. Seneca states as a possible reason for Helvia's grief at his exile her own loss of material benefits due to his absence (*ad Helviam* 14.1), dismissing this as a possibility due to Helvia's past selflessness when dealing with her sons' property (*ad Helviam* 14.2-3):[369]

> Novi enim animum tuum nihil in suis praeter ipsos amantem. Viderint **illae matres**, quae **potentiam liberorum muliebri impotentia** exercent, quae, quia feminis honores non licet gerere, per illos **ambitiosae** sunt, **quae patrimonia filiorum et exhauriunt et aptant, quae eloquentiam commodando aliis fatigant.** Tu liberorum tuorum bonis plurimum gavisa es, minimum usa; **tu liberalitati nostrae semper imposuisti modum**, cum tuae non imponeres; tu filia familiae locupletibus filiis ultro contulisti; tu patrimonia nostra sic

[369] *Ad Helviam* 14.3 is also discussed by Gloyn 2017, 35–36, who focuses on the implications of Helvia's management of her sons' property for Seneca's dealing with *oikeiosis*.

administrasti, ut tamquam in tuis laborares, tamquam alienis abstineres; tu gratiae nostrae, tamquam alienis rebusutereris, pepercisti et ex honoribus nostris nihil ad te nisi voluptas et impensa pertinuit. **Numquam indulgentia ad utilitatem respexit**; non potes itaque ea in erepto filio desiderare, quae in incolumi numquam ad te pertinere duxisti.

(I know your spirit, which loves nothing in your relatives except them themselves. Let them regard that, those mothers, who use the power of their children with a woman's lack of self-control, who, since women are not allowed to take office, are ambitious through their children, who both use up and organise their sons' inheritances, who tire their sons' eloquence by lending it to others. You rejoice very much in the goods of your children, having used them minimally. You have always placed a limit on our generosity, when you did not place any your own. You, the daughter of the family, even contributed to your wealthy sons. You administered our inheritances in this way, such as you would take pains over your own inheritance, such that you would keep off from that of a stranger. You spared our favours, as if you used the property of a stranger, and from our honours, nothing belonged to you except pleasure and expense. Your leniency never looked towards self-interest. And so you cannot lack those things in a son taken away, which you never took to belong to you when he was safe.)

Seneca first describes other mothers (*illae matres*) and their selfish exploitation of their sons, then sets in opposition to them his own mother and her selfless financial management.[370] The phrase *illae matres* is generalising

[370] In the words of McAuley 2016, 186: 'Helvia becomes all the more praiseworthy the *less* she resembles some kind of maternal "norm".'

of other mothers, as opposed to Helvia, through the use of the plural form, which highlights reference to a general majority in contrast to a singular particular. Helvia is further set apart from other women by the demonstrative pronoun *ille*, which indicates distance – those women over there (*illae*), rather than these women over here (*haec*).

The way in which Helvia is distinct from *illae matres* is highly gendered. Set in opposition to each other are the power of sons (*potentiam liberorum*) and womanly lack of self-control (*muliebri impotentia*).[371] Chiastic word order draws attention to this opposition. Whilst *liberorum* can refer to children in general, Seneca is particularly referring to public, political power, which, as the second part of the sentence makes clear, can only be held by men. The attributive adjective *muliebri*, applied to *impotentia*, makes clear that this is a female characteristic. Lack of self-control is equated to feminine weakness, whereas self-control is equated to masculine strength.[372]

The characterisation of *illae matres* as uncontrolled and uncontrollable continues in this quote. They are described as *ambitiosae*, an adjective which refers to ambitiousness and self-interestedness in a negative way – an overmuch desire to achieve power and popularity.[373] This adjective is elaborated upon in the following relative clause, which describes how these women exhaust their sons' material and non-material goods – their inheritances and their skill at public speaking. I draw particular attention to the verbs *exhaurio* and *fatigo*, which both highlight how *illae matres* deplete

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[371] The contrast of *potentia* and *impotentia* is noted in discussion by McAuley 2016, 185 on *ad Helviam* 14.2.
[372] For further on these terms, see Edwards 1993, 78–84; Langlands 2004, 118.
[373] *OLD* 115 s.v. "*ambitiosus*" 2a 'anxious to win favour, eager to please', 4 'eager for advancement or glory, ambitious'.

and exploit resources which are not their own; these mothers not only use their sons' resources, but use them up to emptiness.

By way of contrast, Seneca's mother is restrained and self-controlled when it comes to her sons' capital. Helvia has been frugal with her sons' finances, placing a boundary (*modum*) on how she uses their wealth. Instead, Helvia has been generous with her own wealth, displaying her *liberalitas* with her own resources, rather than with her sons'. Any generosity with wealth which Helvia has demonstrated has been to her own detriment and not for her own self-interest (*numquam ad utilitatem*). Seneca distinguishes Helvia from other women, particularly *illae matres*, in her selflessness, as he describes her restraint with her sons' wealth but her generosity with her own.

This strategy of exceptionalism is employed again later, in *ad Helviam* 16. In this section, Seneca describes in caricature a group of "other women" to whom Helvia is opposed. These women are, as in *ad Helviam* 14, uncontrolled in their desire for wealth. The ethical weakness involved in pursuing wealth, especially to the detriment of offspring, might seem disconnected from the ethical weakness involved in excessive grieving. One of the main takeaways from *ad Helviam* 16 is that it shows how different kinds of ethical weakness are connected – around the central idea of self-indulgence and lack of self-control. The other main idea I discuss concerning *ad Helviam* 16 is that it is a very clear demonstration of Seneca's use of the rhetoric of exceptionalism. Since this long chapter will be quoted in its entirety, I preface it with a brief summary: 16.1-2 state to Helvia that she cannot claim womanhood as an excuse for her grief, unlike women whose lives are taken over by excessive grieving; 16.3 contrasts Helvia with women

who pursue wealth and with women who hide and prevent their pregnancies; 16.4 describes Helvia's modesty, through contrast with immodest women who wear excessive makeup and scanty clothing; 16.5 returns to grief, as Seneca applies the previous sections' demonstration of Helvia's good character to Helvia's grief, stating that her modesty in other areas prevents her from grieving excessively. I now quote *ad Helviam* 16 in full:

> §1. Non est quod utaris **excusatione muliebris nominis**, cui paene concessum est immoderatum in lacrimas ius, non immensum tamen; et ideo maiores decem mensum spatium lugentibus viros dederunt, ut cum pertinacia muliebris maeroris publica constitutione deciderent. Non prohibuerunt luctus sed finierunt; nam et infinito dolore, cum aliquem ex carissimis amiseris, adfici **stulta indulgentia** est, et nullo inhumana duritia: optimum inter pietatem et rationem temperamentum est et sentire desiderium et opprimere. §2 Non est quod ad quasdam feminas respicias quarum tristitiam semel sumptam mors finivit (nosti quasdam quae amissis filiis inposita lugubria numquam exuerunt): a te plus exigit uita ab initio fortior; non potest muliebris excusatio contingere ei a qua omnia muliebria uitia afuerunt. §3 Non te maximum saeculi malum, **inpudicitia**, **in numerum plurium** adduxit; non **gemmae** te, non **margaritae** flexerunt; non tibi **diuitiae** uelut maximum generis humani bonum refulserunt; non te, bene in antiqua et seuera institutam domo, periculosa **etiam probis peiorum** detorsit imitatio; numquam te fecunditatis tuae, quasi exprobraret aetatem, puduit, numquam more

aliarum, quibus omnis commendatio ex forma petitur, tumescentem uterum **abscondisti** quasi **indecens onus**, nec intra uiscera tua conceptas spes liberorum **elisisti**; §4 non faciem coloribus ac lenociniis polluisti; numquam tibi placuit uestis quae nihil amplius nudaret cum poneretur: unicum tibi ornamentum, pulcherrima et nulli obnoxia aetati forma, maximum decus uisa est **pudicitia**. §5 Non potes itaque ad optinendum dolorem muliebre nomen praetendere, ex quo te uirtutes tuae seduxerunt; tantum debes a feminarum lacrimis abesse quantum <a> uitiis. Ne feminae quidem te sinent intabescere uulneri tuo, sed ~leuior~ necessario maerore cito defunctam iubebunt exsurgere, si modo illas intueri uoles feminas quas conspecta uirtus inter magnos uiros posuit. A te plus exigit vita ab initio fortior; non potest **muliebris excusatio** contingere ei, a qua omnia muliebria vitia afuerunt.

(§1 It is not that case that you should use the excuse of a womanly name, to which the right to immoderate, yet not measureless, tears are almost yielded. And so our ancestors gave a period of ten months to those grieving for husbands, in order to settle the stubbornness of female grief with public regulation. They did not forbid grief, but put a boundary on it. For, when you have lost one of your dearest, it is stupid self-interest to be affected by infinite grief and inhuman hardness to be affected by none. The best is moderation between duty and reason, to both feel and to crush grief. §2 It is not that you should look towards certain women, whose sadness, once taken up, death ended; you know some women who, when their children died, never took off their donned mourning garments. From you, life, stronger from the start, exacts more. The excuse of womanhood is not available to

someone, from whom all female vices are absent. §3 The greatest evil of the age, immodesty, has not led you into the number of the masses: gems and pearls did not turn you; riches did not glitter to you as the greatest good of the human race. Imitation of worse women, dangerous even to upstanding women, did not distort you, who were trained well in an old-fashioned and strict house: you were never ashamed of your fertility, as if it reproached you for your age; you never, in the way of other women, by whom all praise for beauty is sought, concealed your swollen belly, as if an unbecoming burden, and you did not drive out your conceived hope for children within your body. §4 You did not defile your face with tints or whore-makeup. Clothing, which exposed nothing more when taken off, was not pleasing to you. In you it was seen, a singular ornament, the most beautiful beauty, vulnerable to no age, the greatest honour, modesty. §5 And so, you cannot hold out towards maintained grief the excuse of womanhood, from which your virtues separate you. You should be as far from the tears of women as from the vices of women. Not even women allow you to waste away with your wound, but they will order that you, lighter, having discharged the necessary grief quickly, rise up, if you are willing to observe those women whom obvious *virtus* has placed amongst great men.)

My analysis of *ad Helviam* 16 proceeds in two main sections. The first identifies and explains the conceptual link between the different areas in which ethical weakness is manifested: grieving, wealth, adornments, motherhood. In terms of structure, excessive grieving sandwiches other kinds of excessive behaviour, highlighting that all these areas are linked by the ideas of self-interest and a lack of self-control. These kinds of ethical weakness are those exhibited by most women; here, as elsewhere in the *ad Marciam* and

ad Helviam, Seneca attributes and associates ethical weakness with women, as an effeminate and effeminising quality. The second part of my analysis of *ad Helviam* 16 focuses on Seneca's use of the rhetoric of exceptionalism. Like Marcia in *ad Marciam* 1, Helvia is exceptional to the ethical weaknesses of women in general, due to her past demonstration of ethical strength.

Like *ad Helviam* 14, *ad Helviam* 16 characterises other women as ethically weak through reference to greed for wealth. Unlike other women, Helvia is not attracted to jewels (*gemmae* and *maragritae*) or wealth (*divitiae*). As in *ad Helviam* 14, an over-interest in material goods is associated with immodesty (*impudicitia*) and so ethical weakness. In contrast to this greed and indulgence, Helvia herself demonstrates modesty and chastity – *pudicitia*, the opposite of *impudicitia*. In this section on greed and indulgence (16.3), the contrast of singulars (of Helvia) and plurals (of other women) is implemented again to highlight Helvia's exceptionality; other women are referred to as *pluriae* and *aliae*, the latter also emphasising the separation of Helvia from a different group, from "other women".

In *ad Helviam* 16, immodesty extends beyond indulgence in wealth to self-interested concern with beauty and appearance (16.3-4). Worse (*peiores*) than those who are greedy are women ashamed of their motherhood.[374] Seneca implicitly applies the verb *pudere* to these women; it does not apply to Helvia, but it does apply to these other, worse women. These women are so ashamed of their pregnant bodies that they hide them (*abscondere*), considering them improper (*indecens*); they even go as far as inducing

[374] The explicit, bodily details of Helvia's motherhood are discussed by McAuley 2016, 181–83, who argues that Seneca exploits his mother's textual body, describing it as chaste and fecund, as proxy for his own virtues.

abortion (*spes liberorum elidere*). These women are dangerous influences on even upstanding women (*etiam probris*), the particle *etiam* emphasising the extent of their dangerous potential. Moreover, by extension, Helvia is even better than these ethically good women (*probrae*), setting her above not only the ethically worst women but also those who are usually morally upright.

Seneca connects this shame of motherhood and pregnancy with a concern with appearance. Other women – implicitly as opposites of Helvia – wear excessive makeup and revealing clothing. This interest in appearances is connected to greed through the idea of self-interest and self-indulgence. These other women – presented in caricature – are self-centred in their pursuit of wealth and indulge in the luxuries of wealth, makeup and scanty clothing; they are (according to Seneca) so self-interested that they hide and prevent their pregnancies. Seneca draws together these multiple manifestations of *impudicitia* into the extreme image of a group of "other women" who collectively demonstrate the ethically worst characteristics. This rhetorical strategy of Seneca depends on the contrast of a particular person (Helvia) with a hypothetical group who can – by virtue of their hypothetical nature – exhibit all the qualities Helvia does not. As noted by McAuley, by describing Helvia as ethically positive through a negative contrast, through extensive focus on the group of women who are everything which Helvia is not, Seneca distances her from this other group.[375]

Finally, *ad Helviam* 16 demonstrates the associative connection between self-indulgence, in wealth and appearances, and excessive grieving. The caricature of self-indulgent women is sandwiched between Seneca's

[375] McAuley 2016, 192–93.

statements to Helvia, that she cannot excuse any grieving on her womanhood. The connection between luxury and grieving is given in 16.1, where Seneca states that excessive grieving is self-indulgence (*stulta indulgentia*). Those who grieve excessively are guilty of self-indulgence and lack of self-control, just like those who pursue wealth or feel shame for their pregnancy and motherhood. These seemingly disparate ways of displaying ethical weakness – luxury, wealth, cosmetics, clothing – are unified by the idea of self-indulgence and lack of self-control, all of which is encapsulated in the Latin word *impudicitia*.

As earlier, in *ad Helviam* 14, Helvia is here contrasted with this group of ethically inferior women. Exceptionalism is very explicitly employed as a rhetorical, persuasive device. In previous sections (*ad Helviam* 2), Seneca has displayed back to Helvia her past demonstration of her ability to overcome grief. Here, in *ad Helviam* 16, Helvia's past demonstration of moral character is what currently prevents her from using *excusationes muliebres* – the excuse of womanhood – in order to wallow immoderately in grief. Like the *infirmitas muliebris animi* (of *ad Marciam* 1.1), *excusationes muliebres* are attributed to women in general; both *infirmitas* and *excusationes* are associated with women adjectivally. As such, these qualities are gendered, attributed to and associated with women in general.

The Roman model of gendered ethical weakness is demonstrated elsewhere in the *ad Helviam* and *ad Marciam*. Highly relevant to these texts is the fact that Seneca characterises grief as particularly female and feminine. Seneca associates women in particular with grief in a number of places in the

ad Marciam and *ad Helviam*.[376] Seneca also associates specifically female animals with grieving.[377] Seneca's employment of traditional models of gendered ethics is also illustrated by his use of the verb *effemino* to mean "to weaken".[378] It is clear from these texts that Seneca is buying into, rather than subverting, Roman gendered conceptions of ethics. To interpret this more cynically, Seneca's acceptance of this gendered model is merely utilitarian. It relieves him of the problem of creating brand new conceptualisations and provides for his Roman audience a familiar foundation, which they are more likely to take in their stride. If we take Seneca's words on this more sincerely, it seems that, despite their inherently equal ethical capacity, women are, for some other reason, ethically weaker than men; in other words, there is some reason why women are not realising their ethical potential – we return to this idea later, how it is possible to find a way through this potential contradiction, and the implications of doing so. The cynical and sincere interpretations are not alternatives, but can be resolved; by assimilating his philosophical

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[376] For example, at *ad Marciam* 11.1, Seneca says grief should be moderated more by women, *quae immoderate fertis* (who bear it [grief] immoderately). The relative pronoun *quae* is feminine, indicating that Seneca addresses women in particular with this remark. In addition, at *ad Helviam* 3.2, Seneca describes the actions of grief as things *per quae fere muliebris dolor tumultuatur* (through which the grief of, generally, women is disturbed). In *ad Marciam* 7.3, quoted below (p. 316), women are explicitly said to suffer grief more strongly than men.
[377] At *ad Marciam* 7.2, in order to show that excessive grief is not natural, Seneca describes how animals only grieve for a short period of time, gendering the animals he describes as female: *Vaccarum uno die alterve mugitus auditur, nec diutius equarum vagus ille amensque discursus est* (The lowing of cows is heard for one or two days, nor is that mad and aimless wandering of horses any longer). Both *vaccarum* and *equarum* are grammatically gendered as feminine. In the case of *equa*, the feminine form is the less common form of the noun, since it occurs most often in the masculine as *equus*.
[378] *Ad Marciam* 9.5: *Error decipit hic, effeminat, dum patimur quae numquam pati nos posse providimus* (This mistake deceives, feminises, whilst we suffer things which we never predicted we were able to suffer). Here, Seneca is discussing how people are weakened when they believe bad fortune cannot befall them. The verb *effemino* means, more literally, 'to deprive of male characteristics' or 'to regard as female' (*OLD* 589 s.v. "*effemino*" 1a, 1c), but in a more pejorative sense means 'to destroy the manly vigour of… to unman or enervate' (*OLD* 589 ss.v. "*effemino*" 2). By using this word to mean "to weaken", Seneca highlights that he buys into traditional gendered models of ethics which position effeminacy as weakness.

mission with existing Roman ideology, Seneca increases his persuasive power, his ability to be understood by his audience.

Although Seneca's stated purpose in this section of the *ad Helviam* differs from that of the above quoted section of the *ad Marciam*, both share a common logical leap. In the *ad Helviam*, Seneca's explicit purpose is not justification of consolatory address, but encouragement to Helvia; having overcome grief in the past, Helvia can do so again, in the present. The way in which this rhetoric works is very similar to that of the *ad Marciam*: despite commonly held assumptions about women in general and their ethical abilities, the past actions of these particular women in circumstances of grief attest to their present ethical abilities. Seneca's texts do not require him to demonstrate that all women have *virtus*, but that these particular women have *virtus*.[379] In fact, Helvia is unlike other women, who use *excusationes muliebres* as justification for ethically improper behaviour (*immoderatum in lacrimas ius*). Likewise, Marcia has distanced herself from *infirmitas muliebris animi*. In other words, both Marcia and Helvia are exceptional to their gender;[380] they are praiseworthy and so stand apart from most women, who are ethically criticised.

The rhetoric of exceptionalism might seem a rather convenient way for Seneca to address specific women, to walk the line between the general

[379] Vidén 1993, 114 notes similarly on Seneca's use of *exempla* in these texts: 'we must keep in mind that he is admonishing a special woman with examples from special women; this is not quite the same thing as saying that any woman could equal a man.'

[380] This exceptionalism of Helvia, her distancing from other women, is interpreted by McAuley 2016, 187–88 as masculinisation. I offer an alternative interpretation, in which exceptionalism allows Seneca to separate his specific addressees from the negative stereotype of women, through the employment of an alternative, positive archetype, the *matrona* – discussed in section 8 of this chapter. Exceptionalism allows Seneca to utilise existing gendered models of ethics, because it is not required that all women achieve *virtus*, but only that Seneca's specific addressees do.

Roman idea of ethical weakness being womanly and his own aim of addressing women philosophically and ethically. In the following section, I show that Seneca employs this rhetoric of exceptionalism elsewhere in his philosophy. This discussion will shed light on how this rhetoric is used in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*.

5 Exceptionalism in Seneca's Philosophy

At this point, it is necessary to pause discussion of the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* in order to look at Seneca's use of exceptionalism elsewhere in his philosophy. The exclusionary aspect of Seneca's philosophy has been identified by others. Habinek has explored the creation of a hierarchy of those who practise philosophy above those who do not – what Habinek calls "an aristocracy of virtue".[381] Habinek shows how Seneca's purportedly inclusive philosophy actually perpetuates a hierarchy of elite and non-elite. Habinek focuses on how Seneca's idea of philosophy reinforces existing hierarchies through creation of an apparently new hierarchy: 'Virtue may create its own nobility, but it is a nobility that mimics the old aristocracy's strategies of theatricality and disdain'.[382] Habinek's discussion makes clear that, despite its claim to levelling the philosophical playing field, Seneca's philosophy is, in its own way, elitist and exclusionary.[383] My discussion in this section stands alongside that of Habinek, as I identify a different way in which Seneca's philosophy is exclusionary, in the employment of the rhetoric of

[381] Habinek 1998, chap. 7.
[382] Habinek 1998, 141.
[383] Habinek 1998, 150: 'The distinction between the good and the vulgar or the best and all the rest frames a letter that purports to describe philosophy as a matter of effort or achievement. Seneca's aristocracy of virtue supplements, even as it seeks to supplant, the age-old aristocracy of birth.'

exceptionalism to those who study Stoic philosophy. My focus is particularly on Seneca's *Epistulae Morales*, for the same reason that this text is the focus of Chapter Two: this text, like the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, is a pedagogical address to a philosophical subject.

From the very start of the *Epistulae Morales*, Seneca distances his addressee, Lucilius, from the majority of people (4.5):

> Hoc cotidie meditare, ut possis aequo animo vitam relinquere, quam **multi** sic conplectuntur et tenent quomodo qui aqua torrente rapiuntur spinas et aspera. **Plerique** inter mortis metum et vitae tormenta miseri fluctuantur et vivere nolunt, mori nesciunt. Fac itaque **tibi** iucundam vitam omnem pro illa sollicitudinem deponendo.
>
> (Reflect on this everyday, so that with a calm mind you can leave life, which many people embrace and hold onto in the same way as those people, who are seized by rushing water, embrace and hold onto thorns and rough edges. Most people are tossed wretchedly amongst the fear of death and the tortures of life and they do not want to live, they do not know how to die. And so make for yourself a completely pleasant life, by putting aside worry on account of life.)

As in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, the singular addressee (*tibi*) is contrasted with the plural multitude (*multi*, *plerique*). The contrast of singular and plural verbs draws attention to Lucilius' singularity and exceptionalism. Similar sentiments are made elsewhere in Seneca's *Epistulae*.[384]

[384] For example, in *Ep.* 23.8: ***Pauci sunt*** *qui consilio se suaque disponant:* ***ceteri****, eorum more quae fluminibus innatant, non eunt sed feruntur* (There are few people who, with purpose, arrange themselves and their affairs. Other men, in the manner of things which flow with

Seneca uses the rhetoric of exceptionalism of his addressees, in both the *Epistulae* and the *consolationes* to women. The way in which this rhetoric is employed is slightly different in both groups of texts. The quote from *Ep.* 4.5, despite employing exceptionalism, addresses Lucilius in a different way to Marcia and Helvia. Where Marcia's and Helvia's exceptional status has been proved in the past and is now used as a grounds for encouragement, Lucilius is being exhorted in the present to create his own exceptional status. Marcia and Helvia have already proven their ethical excellence, their *virtus*, whereas it seems that Lucilius is yet to prove his distinction from the masses.

Lucilius' potential closeness to the majority of people, hinted at in *Ep.* 4.5, is explicit in Seneca's warnings that Lucilius stay vigilant. That Lucilius' distinction from the masses is precarious is clear from Seneca's warnings that he distance himself from the crowd. *Ep.* 7 is a prime example of Seneca's warning to Lucilius, indicating Lucilius' vulnerability. This letter details the potential dangers presented by the influence of the crowd or the majority of people. Near the start of this letter, Seneca states *nondum illi tuto committeris* (7.1: you will not yet be joined with that [crowd] safely). The pronoun *illi* refers to the aforementioned *turba* (the crowd), which, as Seneca goes on to explain, negatively influences even him (*Ep.* 7.1-3). By spending time amongst the crowds at the gladiatorial games, Seneca paradoxically becomes more inhumane: *immo vero crudelior et inhumanior, quia inter homines fui*.[385] The crowd is a threat not only to Seneca and Lucilius, but also to the more ethically developed figure of the *sapiens* (7.6):

rivers, do not go but are carried.). Seneca differentiates between *pauci* and *ceteri* – the few and the many, thereby contrasting the rarity of those who pursue philosophy with the ignorant masses.

[385] *Ep.* 7.3: Truly, I [become] more cruel and more inhuman, because I am amongst people.

> **Subducendus populo** est **tener** animus et **parum tenax recti**: **facile transitur ad plures**. Socrati et Catoni et Laelio excutere morem suum **dissimilis multitudo** potuisset: adeo nemo nostrum, qui **cum maxime** concinnamus ingenium, ferre impetum vitiorum tam **magno comitatu** venientium potest.
>
> (A mind tender and grasping too little what is right is to be led aside by the people: it easily crosses towards the many. The crowd could have shaken out their character from Socrates and Cato and Laelius (although dissimilar to them). As such, no one of ours, we who just now prepare our minds, is able to bear the force of vices which come with so great a train.)

A hostile crowd (*dissimilis multitudo*) would have shaken even the exemplary figures of Socrates, Cato and Laelius;[386] the verb *excutio* is particularly physical and violent, thus emphasising the very real threat the crowd can present even to a Stoic *sapiens*. By comparison, figures like Seneca and Lucilius are only *proficientes*; they are weaker (*tener* and *parum tenax recti*) particularly because they have only just (*cum maxime*) begun their journeys towards *virtus*. Such minds have no chance at successfully opposing the influence of the crowd. To contrast the crowd with these few individuals, Seneca describes them as a fairly anonymous body, as *populus*, *plures*,

[386] Seneca frequently invokes each of these figures as demonstrative of great virtue. Seneca first mentions Socrates in the *Epistulae* in *Ep.* 6.6, where he describes him as one example of an exemplary figure. Socrates is, as discussed by Inwood 2005, 195, one of few who have reached the status of the perfect Stoic *sapiens*. For further discussion of Seneca's use of Socrates as *exemplum*, see Ker 2010, 181–83. Like Socrates, Cato (if we assume, here, the Younger), also described by Inwood 2005, 195 as one of few Stoic *sapientes*, is accorded this status in Seneca's *De Constantia* 7.1. Edwards 2019, 141 notes that Cato 'features more prominently than any other historical or mythological figure in the letters.' Edwards 2019, 90 notes that, like Cato, Laelius, assumed to be Gaius Laelius, one of the protagonists of Cicero's *De republica*, also appears frequently in Seneca's *Epistulae*.

dissmilis multitudo and *magnus comitatus*. All these descriptions highlight their status as a crowd or group, the general populous, in opposition to those few who have chosen to pursue philosophy.

Warnings of this kind – that Lucilius separate himself from other people – feature not only near the start of Lucilius' journey (e.g. *Ep.* 7), but also continue into the later parts of Lucilius' education. One place where this idea returns is *Ep.* 103, another letter on the dangers of other people. Even over 100 letters into his teaching to Lucilius, Seneca still feels that Lucilius requires warning similar to that in *Ep*. 7, to stay vigilant against other people: *ab homine homini cotidianum periculum. adversus hoc te expedi, hoc intentis oculis intuere.*[387] In fact, Lucilius is not only at risk of being harmed by other people, but of being harmful to other people, and so being just like other people: *alterum intuere ne laedaris, alterum ne laedas*.[388] Thus, Seneca reminds Lucilius that the crowd presents two potential threats to him: firstly, that their influence might be harmful to him, to such an extent that, secondly, he might become like them and harm other people. Lucilius is not quite there yet and has to keep working hard to distinguish himself from the crowd – a very different sentiment than that addressed to Marcia and Helvia, who are described as ethically excellent and exceptional to the crowd.

This difference in the framing of exceptionalism can be attributed, at least in part, to the different generic expectations of didactic epistles and consolation. Where the addressee of a collection of didactic epistles, who has consented to the position of student, will be more accepting or expectant of

[387] *Ep.* 103.1: The danger to a human by a human is everyday. Prepare yourself against this, watch for this with intent eyes.
[388] *Ep.* 103.3: Watch out for one man lest you are harmed, for another lest you harm him.

confrontation of their shortcomings, the addressee of a consolation, who is grieving, will be much less amenable to berating or criticism.[389] However, this softer and gentler employment of exceptionalism is not only due to genre, but also due to the gender of the works' addressees. I note that Seneca's use of the rhetoric of exceptionalism in the *ad Polybium*, whilst less reproaching than its use in the *Epistulae* – highlighting the different approach required for consolation – is also less glorifying than its use in the *ad Maricam* and *ad Helviam* – highlighting the impact of gender. For Polybius, exceptionalism does not manifest as a source of exaltation, but as a gently scolding reminder of his station within the imperial court and his duty to limit his grief whilst in the public eye.[390] In other words, the framing of exceptionalism in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* is not only due to genre, but also due to gender. In particular, the extreme glorification of Marcia and Helvia – otherwise used of the Stoic sage or *sapiens* – is specific to them as addressees of Senecan philosophical works. As the close of this section will demonstrate, by figuring Marcia and Helvia as exceptional, Seneca justifies his address of a philosophical work to women and makes them (in their past actions) ethical paradigms for themselves.

It is clear that Lucilius, unlike Marcia and Helvia, is only slightly, or just about, exceptional. Rather, in Seneca's *Epistulae*, the most exceptional figure of all is not their addressee, Lucilius, but the one-in-a-million Stoic *sapiens* (Ep. 42.1):

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[389] Roman awareness of the fragile emotional state of those suffering bereavement is highlighted by Pliny, *Ep.* 5.16.10-11, in which Pliny advises Marcellinus to offer words of consolation gently (*molle et humanum*) to his friend Fundanus on the death of his young daughter.

[390] See *Ad Polybium* 6, quotes above on p. 291-2.

> Iam tibi iste persuasit **virum** se **bonum** esse? Atqui **vir bonus** tam cito nec fieri potest nec intellegi. Scis quem nunc **virum bonum** dicam? **hunc secundae notae**; nam ille alter fortasse **tamquam phoenix semel anno quingentesimo nascitur**. Nec est mirum ex intervallo magna generari: mediocria et in turbam nascentia saepe fortuna producit, **eximia vero ipsa raritate commendat**.
>
> (Does he already persuade you that he is a good man? Yet he is able neither to be made nor to be understood as a good man so quickly. Do you understand whom I speak of now as a good man? Him of second rank, for that other good man is born perhaps, like a phoenix, once every five hundred years. And it is not a wonder that great things are produced at intervals. Fortune often leads forth mediocre things, born to the crowd, and commends select things by their very rarity.)

Seneca here distinguishes between someone whom most people would describe as a *vir bonus* and a true *vir bonus* – between, in other words, this term's common usage and true meaning. The common usage *vir bonus* is *secundae notae* (of second rank), a lesser version of the true *vir bonus*. According to Seneca, it is highly unlikely that any contemporary of him and Lucilius might have reached this impossible status, since such an occurrence might happen only once every five hundred years, like the birth of a phoenix.[391] The exceptionalism of such a figure goes hand-in-hand with their scarcity, the infrequency of their appearance. Seneca highlights this by

[391] The rarity of the phoenix is also noted in antiquity by Herodotus (*Hist.* 2.73) and Tacitus (*Ann.* 6.28).

contrasting everyday and mundane things (*mediocria*) which are common (*in turbam nascentia*) with unusual things (*eximia*). The endorsement which infrequency affords is neatly summed up in the final clause: *eximia vero ipsa raritate commendat*. Unlike the quasi-mythical *sapiens* – a status attributed to (e.g.) Socrates – Seneca, Lucilius and their contemporaries are quotidian.

In contrast to the intended audience of Seneca's *Epistulae* (Lucilius and fellow *proficientes*), Marcia and Helvia are extremely exceptional in their ethical ability. Their ethical distinguishment from masses of other women (discussed in earlier sections) characterises them less as *proficientes* (like Lucilius) and more as *sapientes* (like Socrates). The ethical character of Marcia and Helvia is never in doubt or questioned, but already-enacted proof of their moral superiority. By contrast, Lucilius is constantly at risk of ethical downfall. In being undoubtedly ethically excellent, Marcia and Helvia stand head and shoulders above women in general; they are exceptional like the rare Stoic *sapiens*, epitomised in the figure of Socrates. That Seneca has found not one, but two women worthy of philosophical address, is quite the feat; Marcia and Helvia are ethically exceptional, *sapiens*-like figures, as rare as phoenixes.

Exceptionalism is, therefore, a rhetoric which appears in Seneca's philosophy more broadly; it is a rhetoric with which Seneca's Stoicism is comfortable and familiar. This idea, which might have seemed a convenient way to address women, is also employed by Seneca as a mode of address in the *Epistulae* as a carrot for Lucilius and fellow *proficientes*, as encouragement and aspiration to new heights. Exceptionalism is employed slightly differently in the *consolationes*, not as aspiration but as an already

proven state of Marcia and Helvia. As such, Marcia and Helvia are figured as *sapiens*-like in their already demonstrated ethical excellence; their exceptionalism justifies their status as addressees of a philosophical work.

6 Exceptionalism Coda: Social Standing and a Philosophical Education

A final area of comparison between the *Epistulae Morales* and the *consolationes* in question is the social standing of their addressees. In both cases, the social status of the addressee is correlated with their ethical achievement. Lucilius is figured as mediocre in both philosophical terms, as a *proficiens*, but also in social terms. Lucilius, although by no means a member of the lower classes, is nevertheless not amongst the most socially elite. A procurator in Sicily, Lucilius is well to do, but not of senatorial class. In this sense, Lucilius is an ideal addressee for Seneca, representative of the position of many Roman elite men who participate in public life more or less unremarkably. Lucilius' social mediocrity is correlated to his philosophical mediocrity; Lucilius is at risk of becoming too much like his social peers in his philosophical and ethical complacency.

The social standing of Marcia and Helvia, though less textually prominent, is nevertheless clear from how Seneca addresses and describes them. Marcia's high standing is demonstrated by her parentage and her familiarity with Livia. Although the *ad Marciam* addresses Marcia in response to the death of her son, Seneca first reminds Marcia of the death of her father, Aulus Cremutius Cordus, whose loss she reportedly bore admirably (1.2-1.5). In the *ad Marciam*, Seneca reports that Cordus was forced to take his own life by supporters of Sejanus (1.2, 22.4-7). The criminal

charge of *maiestas* which necessitated Cordus' death is also recorded in Tacitus' *Annals* 4.34-35. Both texts agree that Cordus was a historian, and it was his writings which caused him to be condemned by Sejanus.[392] In addition, Seneca reports, Marcia contributed to the preservation and publication of her father's writings (1.3-4). Seneca goes to great lengths to praise Cordus, describing him as a *vir fortissimus* (1.3: most brave man) and the epitome of Roman-ness.[393] From Seneca's reporting of Marcia's parentage, it is clear that Marcia moved within and interacted with the highest strata of Roman society; her father was a notable figure and composed histories which had impact. Marcia's social standing is also clear from her reported intimacy with Livia, wife of Augustus; Seneca describes Livia to Marcia as *quam familiariter coluisti* (4.1: whom you cherished closely). That Marcia had such a relationship with Livia to be described as *familiaris* is indicative of her position amongst the ruling classes.

Seneca's mother, Helvia, is, like Marcia, amongst the upper echelons of the elite. Seneca's own broad education and standing in society is indicative of the wealth and status of his family. Helvia's husband, Seneca's father, the elder Seneca, was a well-known rhetorical teacher. From the *ad Helviam*, we learnt that Helvia's step-sister was married to the prefect of Egypt, with whom Seneca lived as a youth (*ad Helviam* 19). It is no coincidence that the women who are ethically exceptional are also those who are socially exceptional. Rather, social standing hints perfectly at the distinction between all women, who possess an innate potential for *virtus*, and

[392] For further on Seneca's and Tacitus' accounts of Cordus, see Manning 1981, 29–30.
[393] From Cordus' example others will see *quid sit vir Romanus* (1.3: what it is to be a Roman man).

those few women who actually achieve *virtus*. Social circumstances provide an explanation for why not all women fulfil their innate ethical potential.

In the *ad Helviam*, Seneca explicitly states that the means by which ethical development occurs is philosophical education. It is also clear from the *ad Helviam* and *ad Marciam* that formal study is an important part of a philosophical education. The link I draw between social status and education is the privilege required in order to have access to such an education. The underlying reason for the correlation of social standing and education is the requirement of *oitum* for any kind of study; for men as much as for women, free time is required to take up education.[394] That Seneca's two ethically exceptional female addressees both come from high status backgrounds is no coincidence; these women's ethical excellence has been facilitated by their privilege, by the access to education that their privilege has afforded them. That most elite men in Rome had access to an education which would allow them to engage with philosophy is reflected in audience and rhetoric of the *Epistulae*; in the *Epistulae*, Seneca's addressee, Lucilius, and his peers are of elite but not aristocratic status, and they are all well-versed enough in philosophy to be able to easily reach the status of Stoic *proficiens*. That Seneca's only female addressees are of exceptionally high social status is indicative of the higher bar for women's education, the greater privilege required for women to be more likely to gain a formal education.

The importance of formal education to philosophical development is stated explicitly by Seneca at *ad Helviam* 17. I discuss two aspects of the

[394] Seneca himself notes the requirement of *otium* for one to commit themselves to the study of *liberalia* (*De Otio* 3.4-5). On the social inequality of Roman education, see Corbeill 2001.

below-quoted sections of this chapter: firstly, the connection between education and philosophical development; secondly, the radical potential of Seneca's encouragement that women pursue education.[395] To summarise the content of this section, Seneca describes the benefits of education, laments his father's prevention of Helvia from pursuing an education, then encourages her to take up education (17.3-4):

> Itaque illo te duco, quo omnibus, qui fortunam fugiunt, **confugiendum est**, ad **liberalia studia**. **Illa sanabunt vulnus tuum, illa omnem tristitiam tibi evellent**. His etiam si numquam adsuesses, nunc utendum erat; sed quantum tibi patris mei **antiquus rigor** permisit, omnes bonas artes **non quidem comprendisti, attigisti tamen**. utinam quidem virorum optimus, pater meus, minus **maiorum consuetudini** deditus voluisset te praeceptis sapientiae erudiri potius quam imbui! non parandum tibi nunc esset auxilium contra fortunam sed proferendum; **propter istas** quae litteris non ad sapientiam utuntur sed ad luxuriam instruuntur minus te indulgere studiis passus est. **Beneficio tamen rapacis ingenii plus quam pro tempore hausisti**; iacta sunt disciplinarum omnium fundamenta: **nunc ad illas revertere; tutam te praestabunt**.
>
> (And so I lead you to that place in which there should be a refuge for all who flee *Fortuna*, towards liberal studies. They will heal your wound, they will drive out all sadness from you. Even if you had never been accustomed to these, they would now need to be used by you. But how much the old-

[395] See also discussion of this passage by Gloyn 2017, 37–39.

> fashioned sternness of my father allowed to you; you have not yet grasped all liberal arts, but you have touched on them. Would that my father, indeed the best of men, had, consigned less to the custom of his ancestors, been willing that you be trained in the teachings of philosophy, rather than be only touched by them! Help against *Fortuna* would not now need to be prepared by you, but only brought forth. On account of those women, who do not use learning for wisdom but are equipped for luxury, he allowed you less to indulge in studies. Nevertheless, by the benefit of your grasping mind, you drew up more than proportional to the time. The foundations of all disciplines were laid. Now turn back to those disciplines; they will render you safe.)

At the start and end of this section, Seneca describes *liberalia studia* as beneficial to Helvia and her grief. He first uses medical imagery to describe *studia* as the cure to Helvia's ailment; the verb *sano* is applied to *studia*, whilst Helvia's grief is described as a *vulnus*. Such medical imagery to describe philosophy as curative and to pathologise emotions such as grief is common in Seneca's writing, and has featured earlier in the *consolatio*. Here, Seneca is even more specific about what has curative force: not just philosophy in general, but formal education (*liberalia studia*).[396]

[396] Elsewhere in Seneca's philosophy, he talks about the usefulness of formal education, at, for example, *De const. sap.* 14.1: *Tanta quosdam dementia tenet, ut sibi contumeliam fieri putent posse a muliere. Quid refert quam habeant, quot lecticarios habentem, quam oneratas aures, quam laxam sellam? Aeque inprudens animal est et, nisi scientia accessit ac multa eruditio, ferum, cupiditatium incontinens.* (Some men are mad enough to suppose that even a woman can offer them an insult. What matters it how they regard her, how many lackeys she has for her litter, how heavily weighted her ears, how roomy her sedan? She is just the same unthinking creature—wild, and unrestrained in her passions—unless she has gained knowledge and had much instruction.)

As well as describing *studia* as the cure to an illness, he also describes education as a defence or refuge against *Fortuna*. The safe haven that formal education provides is clear from the verb *confugio* and the adjective *tutus*. Within Stoic philosophy, *Fortuna* represents the uncontrollable happenings of life; by understanding that some things are beyond their control, the student of Stoic philosophy learns that those things have no ethical value. Rather, ethical value is to be found in the self-improvement Stoicism offers. It is this idea which the image of philosophical study as a refuge against *Fortuna* communicates, drawing attention to the positive power of formal education for philosophical and ethical development.

I pause in my analysis of *ad Helviam* 17 to discuss how the correlation between education and philosophical development is also reflected in *ad Marciam* 7.3. In chapter 7, Seneca explains how prolonged grief is not caused by nature, using as proof in 7.3 the different responses to similar loss exhibited by different kinds of people (*ad Marciam* 7.3):[397]

> Ut scias autem non esse hoc naturale, luctibus frangi, primum magis feminas quam viros, magis barbaros quam placidae eruditaeque gentis homines, magis **indoctos** quam **doctos** eadem orbitas vulnerat.
>
> (Moreover, in order that you may know that it is not by the will of Nature that we are crushed by sorrow, observe, in the first place, that, though they suffer the same bereavement, women are wounded more deeply than men,

[397] This passage is also discussed by McAuley 2016, 189, who notes that moderate grieving 'demonstrates not only one's *uirtus*, but one's refinement, education, and *nobilitas*'. I take Seneca's remarks in this passage further, highlighting the parallels between the categories of people Seneca contrasts, to such an extent that each set of contrasts can be considered an almost-gloss of the others.

> savage peoples more deeply than the peaceful and civilized, the uneducated, than the educated.)

Seneca contrasts the responses of differently opposing groups of people: [1] women and men, [2] "barbaric" and "civilised" people, and [3] uneducated and educated people. What these three comparisons have in common might not seem obvious at first glance. I show that the final comparison, between *indocti* and *docti*, can be interpreted as a gloss which explains the first two comparisons.

This final pair of groups makes clear that ethical capacity is explicitly correlated with knowledge, learning and education. The way Seneca describes the second pair of compared groups also makes connection with the idea of education. The comparison between *barbari* and *placidae eruditiaeque gentis homines* is, at first glance, a description which contrasts, in Roman eyes, "uncivilised", foreign peoples against "civilised" Romans. In addition, the noun *barbarus*, referring to foreign people, carries connotations of lack of education;[398] this aspect of the word *barbarus* is brought to the fore by the adjective *eruditus*, which is used to describe the other group of "civilised" people.[399] It is clear that that the main point of contrast in this second comparison, like the final one, concerns learnedness and education. The idea of education can be employed also in the first comparison, between men and women; men are much more likely than women to have received a philosophical education, explaining, according to Seneca's view, why women suffer grief more deeply than men. This fits into Seneca's argument that

[398] *OLD* 225 s.v. "*barbarus*" 2 '(of diction, etc.) rudely, uncouthly, unelegantly'.
[399] *OLD* 619 s.v. "*eruditus*" 1a 'well-instructed, accomplished, learned'.

women are no more naturally inclined to grieve excessively than men; rather, they are less likely to have the necessary learning to allay their grief. To take this idea alongside the qualifications to women's *virtus* in *ad Marciam* 16.1 (discussed at the start of this chapter), Seneca is saying that, in order to fulfil their philosophical potential women, like all people, require some degree of education.

Let us now return to *ad Helviam* 17. I have established the links between education and philosophical development. I now discuss the circumstances of Helvia's own education, showing, firstly, that Helvia's past experience of education is rather extraordinary and indicative of her unusual status, and, secondly, that Seneca's promotion of women's education goes against the grain.

Seneca is explicit that Helvia's past experience with education was hampered by his father's, her husband's, ideological position – a position Seneca implicitly opposes. Seneca reports that Helvia has not fully understood the *bonas artes*, but that she does have awareness of them (*non quidem comprendisti, attigisti tamen*). The reason for Helvia's cursory, but only cursory, experience of *liberalia studia* is Seneca's father. Seneca explains that his father, following old-fashioned habits, did not allow Helvia to indulge in studying (*minus te indulgere studiis passus est*) because of the behaviour of other women. We see, here, another instance of the rhetoric of exceptionalism, the contrast between Seneca's specific addressee and the faceless mass of women in general (*istae*). The majority of women are (again) characterised as self-interested, pursuing studies for luxury or extravagance (*luxuria*) rather than for wisdom (*sapientia*).

It is clear that, despite her husband's conservatism, Helvia has engaged with some formal education. Seneca says that she has touched on studies (*attingo*) and that her quick mind (*rapace ingenium*) has allowed her to pick up more than might have been expected (*plus quam pro tempore*). Seneca emphasises Helvia's talent for learning as unusual, thereby drawing attention to her unusual and extraordinary status – both socially and ethically. Likewise, Seneca's other female addressee, Marcia, is also extraordinary in her engagement with *liberalia studia*; Seneca describes at length Marcia's preservation and publication of her father's writings (*ad Marciam* 1.3). It is clear that both Marcia's and Helvia's exceptional status, in ethical and philosophical terms, is reflected in their past engagement with formal studies.

By acknowledging the association between women's education and the lack of self-control of women who pursue wealth and luxury, Seneca highlights the existing anxieties concerning women's education. Women's education is at odds with the values supported by Seneca's father, who is characterised as stern and conservative by the phrases *antiquus rigor* and *maiorum consuetudo*. The Elder Seneca's concern about educating women is clearly driven by the negative potential of this happening.[400] Anxiety around women's education is also reflected in the subject of the third of Musonius Rufus' discourses (mentioned above): ὅτι καὶ γυναιξὶ φιλοσοφητέον (that women too should be taught philosophy). That such an idea requires defending indicates scepticism and ambivalence concerning this idea. Like

[400] As Gloyn 2017, 38 states: 'When Seneca advises his mother to return to her studies, he rejects his father's traditional view and accepts that intellectual activity is essential for a woman aiming for virtue. The implications of this view are significant for the blueprint of the ideal Stoic mother constructed by this text and embodied in Helvia. The Stoic mother must actively pursue virtue herself and use education to that end; since she pursues education for the right reasons, it will not be frivolously misused as Seneca's father feared.'

Seneca's statement at *ad Marciam* 16, that women have equal innate potential for *virtus* as men, his advice at *ad Helviam* 17, that Helvia actively take up formal education, is also radical. The final section of this chapter will discuss how the radical potential of Seneca's call to women's education is allayed.

7 An Interval

Before the final section, on the tricks Seneca uses to alleviate the radical potential of women's education, it is worth pausing to take stock of the tricks we have seen Seneca use so far, in his philosophical address to women. I started from Seneca's claim that women have equal philosophical potential to men, equal enough that they too can achieve *virtus* (*ad Marciam* 16.1). This is a claim which is problematic, because of the masculine associations of *virtus*. Seneca, in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, undertakes rhetorical, logical and conceptual tricks in order to overcome the problem of female *virtus*. Seneca's claim at 16.1 actually contains one of these conceptual tricks, in its statement that women have the ability (*facultas*), i.e. potential, to attain *virtus*, and in its qualifications that they do so if they are willing to do so (*libeat*) or accustomed to do so (*si consuevere*). Hinted at here is a distinction between women's potential for *virtus* and actualisation of *virtus*, between women's natural, innate capacity and women's realistic achievement.

Seneca provides the information necessary to explain this gap between potential and realisation. He not only emphasises education as the means to achieve philosophical development, but also notes that women, in comparison to men, much more often lack access to formal education.

Seneca's female addressees, Marcia and Helvia, are exceptional in having received a certain level of formal education, an exceptional feature reflected in their exceptionally high social status. Marcia's and Helvia's exceptional ethical and social status facilitates Seneca's address of them as exceptional to the majority of women. Other women lack self-control and so are ethically weak, whereas Marcia and Helvia are unusually morally upstanding. Thus, Seneca singles them out as exceptional individuals, writing about and to them as though they themselves are exemplary figures.

Exceptionalism is not only convenient for addressing women, but also used elsewhere in Seneca's philosophy. Exceptionalism is used slightly differently in address to women, to elevate Marcia and Helvia and justify his address of them. It also draws attention to their exceptional status beyond philosophy, in terms of social standing too. Exceptionalism and education work together to make coherent what initially seemed like contradictory ideas: the affording of philosophical *virtus* to women, and the association of women with immorality and ethical weakness. The picture Seneca paints of how philosophical development occurs and how certain groups engage with philosophy is realistic, rather than idealistic. Seneca's realism is also reflected in his use of gendered ethical conceptualisations of women in general – facilitated by the apparent exceptionalism of his addressees – which is much more accessible to a conservative Roman audience.

It might have seemed that Seneca's proposition for the idea of female *virtus* was rather radical. However, this radical potential is allayed by the distinction between women's potential for *virtus* and women's actual achievement of *virtus*. Whilst, in theory, women are equally capable of

achieving *virtus*, in practice, it is recognisably more difficult for women to achieve *virtus*, because of the hurdles involved in accessing education. It again might seem that Seneca is making a radical proposition for women's education. And so, the final piece of this puzzle concerns the actuality of what it is to be a women with *virtus*, what ideal Marcia and Helvia are actually encouraged towards. It will become apparent that the *virtus* of Seneca's female addressees is manifested in distinctly domestic activities and epitomised in a distinctly feminine ideal.

8 The Conservative Ideal of the *Matrona*

I have said much on the more abstract side of Seneca's address and advice to women. This section addresses the practical aspects of women's address, how women are actually supposed to behave. It turns out that Marcia's and Helvia's ethical excellence is to be manifested in a distinctly domestic role.[401] Marcia and Helvia are encouraged to foster their philosophical development through, on the one hand, education, and, on the other hand, through supporting their family members. This focus on a familial and supportive role neutralises the radical, masculinising potential of women's *virtus*.[402]

[401] Although I describe the roles Marcia and Helvia are encouraged to take up as "domestic" and "familial", these roles and ideas are nevertheless highly politicised, particularly in the post-Augustan empire. As Milnor 2005 explores, the idea of the domestic is one created for political use: 'the result was an overriding concern with feminine virtue and its locations, an extremely public discussion of the private sphere, a discourse which brought women out into public view, even as it described how little they belonged there' (p. 4).

[402] The idea that women's support of their families neutralises masculine *virtus* is particularly discussed by Hemelrijk 2004 on the potential of the *Laudatio Turiae* to emasculate the husband, the *laudator* of this work; as Hemelrijk (p. 196) states: 'The reversal of gender-roles did not defeminize her (because of her adherence to the traditional virtues) nor did it threaten his masculinity. Since she did all in the service of her husband, he remained the superior partner.'

Some of the most direct instruction Seneca gives to Marcia and Helvia concerns their support of their surviving relatives.[403] This is most apparent in the *ad Helviam*, where Helvia is directed to find consolation in the relatives she has left, particularly her adoptive granddaughter Novatilla (*ad Helviam* 18.8):

> **Tene** in gremio cito tibi daturam pronepotes Novatillam … Nunc mores eius **compone**, nunc forma; altius praecepta descendunt, quae teneris imprimuntur aetatibus. Tuis **adsuescat** sermonibus, ad tuum **fingatur** arbitrium; multum illi dabis, etiam si nihil dederis praeter exemplum. Hoc tibi tam sollemne officium **pro remedio** erit; non potest enim animum pie dolentem a sollicitudine avertere nisi aut ratio aut **honesta occupatio**.
>
> (Hold in your lap Novatilla, who will soon give your great-grandchildren… Now put together her character, now her beauty. Teachings sink deeper which are imprinted at a tender age. Let her become accustomed to your speeches, let her be formed to your judgement. You will give much to her, even if you give her nothing but your example. This such solemn duty will be for your healing. For nothing is able to turn aside from worry a devoted spirit which is mourning, except either reason or honourable employment.)

In this section, we see the use of imperatives (*tene*, *compone*), which, through their directness, indicate the importance of this advice. We also see relatives described as positive forces against grief, through the phrase *pro remedio*

[403] Helvia's direction towards her family members is discussed from a different angle by Gloyn 2017, 38–40, who focuses on Helvia's exercise of *oikeiosis* as part of her philosophical development.

which has medical associations; Novatilla is a curative force in the face of grief.

In particular, Seneca directs Helvia to take solace not only in her relatives themselves, but in the act of caring for them. The nurturing role Helvia is to take is clear from the verbs Seneca uses to give instruction to her, in both imperative and subjunctive form (e.g. *teneo, componeo, fingo*). These verbs highlight that Helvia is to guide and teach Novatilla. Seneca describes these actions as a *sollemne officium* and an *honesta occupatio*. The nouns *officium* and *occupatio* show that Helvia's care of Novatilla is a role, a position to fulfil. In other words, Helvia is told by Seneca to become a parental, maternal figure for Novatilla.[404] And in taking up the maternal role of shaping Novatilla's character, Helvia makes a contribution to Roman society more generally, through the creation of more good Roman women like herself. Helvia's familially supportive behaviour has been mentioned earlier in the *ad Helviam*; we have already seen in *ad Helviam* 14, quoted above, that Seneca praises Helvia for her careful administration of his and his brothers' affairs. His mother was never self-interested, but only concerned with benefitting her children, supporting her family. Helvia is very much characterised as a modest and selfless maternal figure.[405]

A further example of women praised for a supportive role in their families can be found in *ad Helviam* 19, the chapter which focuses on Seneca's aunt. Seneca praises his aunt for her motherly care (19.2: *pio*

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[404] My focus in this section is on maternal roles as socially supportive and beneficial, rather than on the maternal, familial relationships of Marcia and Helvia, as discussed by McAuley 2016, chap. 4; Gloyn 2017, chap. 1.
[405] Fantham 2007, 178 notes that, by addressing Helvia with reference to her family, Seneca employs 'the sources of pride and affection proper to an elite Roman *materfamilias*.'

maternoque nutricio) for him during a period of illness. Seneca also praises her support of him during political campaign (19.2). He then goes on to report that she, after losing her husband during a sea voyage, ensured the recovery of his body for burial (19.4-5). When describing her support for him in politics and her recovery of her husband's body, Seneca draws attention to her selflessness in the same way, by emphasising the discomfort or danger she overcame in order to play her supportive role. Despite her shyness and timidity, she contributed to Seneca's political campaign; Seneca explains that *pro me vicit indulgentia verecundiam*.[406] And when faced with a shipwreck she was *oblita imbecilitatis, oblita metuendi etiam firmissimis maris*;[407] she ensured her husband's proper burial despite danger to her own life (19.5: *dicrimen vitae*). The prepositional phrase *pro me* adds additional emphasis to the selflessness of Seneca's aunt. We can draw connections with the conceptualisation of the actions of Seneca's Medea, who claims to have acted selflessly, on behalf of others, using this same prepositional phrase;[408] in Medea's case, not everyone agrees that she acted for the interest of others, but perceive her actions as self-interested. From the *ad Helviam*, it is clear that praiseworthy women are those who do not act for their own benefit, but for the benefit of their relatives, even when it entails danger to themselves.

Seneca offers similar advice to Marcia. In the *ad Marciam*, Seneca encourages Marcia to take solace in caring for her daughters and granddaughters (*ad Marciam* 16.6-8):

[406] 19.2: "on my behalf she conquered her shyness through her affection".
[407] 19.5: "forgetful of her weakness, forgetful of the sea, fearful even to brave people".
[408] At *Med*. 449 and 479, Medea tells Jason she acted *pro te*, and at 503, she tells him her guilt was *pro te*; see discussion on p. 249.

> At hoc iniquior fortuna fuit, quod non tantum eripuit filios, sed elegit. Numquam tamen iniuriam dixeris ex aequo cum potentiore dividere; duas tibi reliquit filias et harum nepotes. Et ipsum, quem maxime luges prioris oblita, non ex toto abstulit; **duas tibi reliquit filias et harum nepotes**. Et ipsum, quem maxime luges prioris oblita, non ex toto abstulit; habes ex illo duas filias, si male fers, magna onera, si bene, magna **solacia**. In hoc te **perduc**, ut illas cum videris, admonearis filii, non doloris! … Has nunc Metilii tui filias in eius vicem **substitue** et vacantem locum **exple** et unum dolorem **geminato solacio** leva!
>
> (Fortune was more unfair by this, because she not only tore away your sons, but chose them. Nevertheless, you will never call it an injustice, to apportion equally with one more powerful. She has left for you two daughters and your grandchildren from these women. And she has not taken away completely that very man whom you, forgetful of an earlier loss, grieve most of all; you have the two daughters of that man, great burdens, if you endure badly, but great solaces if you endure well. Guide yourself towards this, so that when you look at them, you are reminded of your son, not of your grief… Now place these daughters of your Metilius in his stead and fill the empty space and lighten one grief with a twin solace!)

In this section, Seneca addresses Marcia with imperatives, the most direct form of command (*perduc*, *substitute*, *exple*). This demonstrates the importance of what Seneca directs her to do, to find replacement for her son in her daughters and granddaughters. Seneca describes Marcia's relatives as *solacia*, sources of comfort in grief.

Seneca's direction of Marcia to a familial-focused role is in concert with his earlier praise of her for supporting her father. As has been mentioned earlier, Marcia is praised for her *approbata virtus*, ethical excellence which has already been proven, because of the role she played in supporting her father at the time of his death and preserving his literary works after his death. At the very start of the *ad Marciam*, Seneca goes into great detail about these events (*ad Marciam* 1.2-1.3):

> postquam tibi apparuit inter Seianianos satellites illam unam patere servitutis fugam, non favisti consilio eius, sed dedisti manus victa fudistique lacrimas palam et gemitus devorasti quidem, non tamen hilari fronte texisti; et haec illo saeculo, **quo magna pietas erat nihil impie facere**! Ut vero aliquam occasionem mutatio temporum dedit, ingenium patris tui, de quo sumptum erat supplicium, in usum hominum **reduxisti** et a vera illum **vindicasti** morte ac **restituisti in publica monumenta libros**, quos **vir ille fortissimus** sanguine suo scripserat. Optime **meruisti** de Romanis studiis: magna illorum pars arserat; optime de posteris, ad quos veniet incorrupta rerum fides, auctori suo magno inputata; optime de ipso, cuius viget vigebitque memoria quam diu in pretio fuerit Romana cognosci, quam diu quisquam erit qui reverti velit ad **acta maiorum**, quam diu quisquam qui velit scire **quid sit vir Romanus**, quid subactis iam cervicibus omnium et ad Seianianum iugum adactis indomitus, quid sit homo ingenio animo manu liber.

> (After it was clear that, amongst the attendant of Sejanus, that single flight from servitude lay open, you were not inclined to his plan, but you, conquered, surrendered and scattered your tears in public and even swallowed your groans; yet you did not cover it with a cheerful face – all these things in that age in which it was great *pietas* to do nothing unfilial! As, indeed, a change in times allowed an opportunity, you brought back into the use of men the talent of your father, concerning which his death was taken up, and you claimed that man from true death and you restored to public monuments his books, which that most brave man had written with his own blood. You have done excellent service to Roman studies – a great part of those books had burned – and excellent service to posterity, towards which the uncorrupted faith of matters will come, having been of great loss to their author, and excellent service to the man himself, whose memory flourishes and will flourish, as long as it is worthwhile that Roman things are known, as long as there is someone who wishes to be turned back to the deeds of their ancestors, as long as there is someone who wants to know what it is to be a Roman man, what, when the necks of all are driven down and forced to the yoke of Sejanus, it is to be unconquered, what it is to be a man free in mind, spirit and hand.)

In this passage, Seneca first talks about Marcia's response to her father's compelled death by suicide, drawing particular attention to Marcia's *pietas*. He praises Marcia for her acceptance of her father's decision to end his own life and for her moderation of her grief upon his death. The quality Seneca attributes to Marcia is not *virtus*, but *pietas*, a concept which concerns familial

duty.[409] In accepting her father's impending death and limiting her grief, Marcia is praised, with emphasis on the key Roman idea of filial duty, *pietas*.[410] Through antithesis, Seneca highlights that Marcia exceeds contemporary "definitions" of *pietas* by not just being *impie*, but by being truly filial.

Seneca then brings in a further aspect of Marcia's support of her father, praising her for her role in preserving her father's writings. Marcia's key role in these events is highlighted by the active second person verbs used of her (e.g. *reduxisti*, *vindicasti*, *restituisti*). Despite playing an important role in these events, it is clear that Marcia is (only) an accessory to a resulting legacy which is not her own. Seneca goes to great lengths to praise Marcia's father. The positive contribution of Cordus' writings is clear from how Seneca describes those who will benefit from them: those who want to know more about the *acta maiorum*, and how to be a proper Roman man (*quid sit vir Romanus*). Seneca characterises Cordus' writings as a public service to Rome, emphasised by his description that Marcia has brought them *in publica monumenta*.

Seneca's greater focus on the moral qualities of Cordus' writings than on the moral qualities of Marcia is indicative of Marcia's supporting role, for which she is praised. Indeed, Marcia is praiseworthy in that her actions result not in her own memorialisation and exemplification, but her father's; Marcia's father is said to embody the qualities of a *vir Romanus*, thus serving as an *exemplum* to future generations. Thus, by preserving his work, Marcia's

[409] On *pietas*, see Saller 1994, 105–14.
[410] Note how the similar foregrounding of *pietas* in the *Laudatio Turiae*, as discussed by Hemelrijk 2004, 194, likewise emphasises "Turia's" familial and supportive role.

pietas extends beyond her duty in supporting her father, to supporting Roman society more generally in providing an educational *exemplum*. Therefore, it is only by reproducing hierarchies and traditions that Marcia proves her virtue. Marcia's supportive role is particularly clear from the verb *mereo*, which Seneca uses of her. Through this verb, which is transactional, referring to earning financially and doing service, Seneca describes Marcia's preservation of her father's writing as a positive contribution to society. A form of this verb is used by Seneca's Medea, as she laments the lack of recognition of her deeds by Jason: *merita contempsit mea* (*Med.* 120). Where Medea tries to get others to see her deeds in a positive light, Marcia's deeds are undoubtedly for the benefit of others. This (and that earlier) comparison with the *Medea* demonstrates the similar ideas that the *consolationes* and the *Medea* converge upon, namely the supportive and selfless actions of women. The way that Seneca addresses and praises Marcia and Helvia demonstrates that ethical excellence for women is primarily located in a supportive and familial role.

It is significant, then, that the most direct instruction Seneca gives to his female addressees is in the familial, domestic sphere. Comparisons with the *Medea* demonstrate that women's benefit to others is key to how they are ethically evaluated. In addition, the domestic and familial are even more significant because similar domestic and familial advice is much more limited or entirely absent in Seneca's consolatory works addressed to men. To Polybius in the *ad Polybium*, Seneca only once mentions his wife and son (*ad Polybium* 12.1-2). Although mentioned as sources of consolation, like Marcia's and Helvia's relatives are for them, their mention is embedded in a

much less domestically-focused context. Polybius' primary consolation is to be sought in his work as a political advisor and in his studies.[411] Family is completely exempt from Seneca's consolatory address of Lucilius in *Ep.* 63; and in *Ep.* 99, a consolatory work to Marullus, no family is mentioned except for the deceased, Marullus's son.[412] By comparison, the emphasis on women's familial actions and roles in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* is striking.

The practical actions which Seneca describes as praiseworthy for women are domestic and supportive. This conservative manifestation of ethical excellence neutralises the radical potential of women's *virtus* and women's education. Seneca's foregrounding of domestic roles for women is, of course, not an innovation, but an ideal for women in Rome. In other words, as we have seen time and again in Seneca's writings, he employs existing ideas to his own advantage. The modest and selfless familial ideal Seneca envisages for women is that of the *matrona*, a figure associated with the behaviour of a proper Roman woman: 'this term not only indicated her married state and her (potential) motherhood, but was also closely bound up with the traditional female virtues of chastity, modesty, simplicity, frugality, reticence and domesticity.'[413] The *docta matrona*, the ideal central to Hemelrijk's 1999 monograph, contains tensions between restrictive ideals for women and the diversity of their social obligations, which require them to be

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[411] At *ad Polybium* 6, quoted above, Seneca focuses on Polybius' public role, and its prevention of him from grieving excessively. At *ad Polybium* 8.2, Seneca directs Polybius, in his spare time, to his *studia*, describing these *studia* at 18.1 as *munimenta animi* (defences of the mind).
[412] *Ep.* 63: Seneca addresses Lucilius on the death of his friend Flaccus. *Ep.* 99: Seneca sends to Lucilius the letter he wrote to Marullus upon the death of his son.
[413] Hemelrijk 1999, 13.

well-educated. This same tension is at play in Seneca's *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, and is alleviated, in part, by Seneca's rhetoric of exceptionalism through which Marcia's and Helvia's individual excellence is prevented from generalisation to all women.

9 Tying Up the Ends

The issue overshadowing this chapter is the address of women in philosophy. In the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, Seneca ascribes to women philosophical potential, in accordance with Stoic ideas on women's philosophical capacity. This radical idea, that women can achieve *virtus*, is at odds with the masculinity of ethical excellence, and bestows upon women a philosophical autonomy at odds with the constraints of their social roles. This chapter has discussed the ways in which women are addressed philosophically, in order to allay these potential tensions. From a more positive point of view, Seneca is sincere in his allowance to women of philosophical autonomy through *virtus*; women are taken seriously in their familial and social roles. However, from a more cynical perspective, the promise of philosophical autonomy is but a guise for the social constraints of familial duty which are imposed upon women.[414]

Seneca says himself in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* that it is unusual to address women in philosophy. Justification is required, in order to demonstrate that female addressees are capable of engaging with philosophy, as well as different, female *exempla*, which are more suited to the female addressee. Seneca is explicit about his use of these particular strategies.

[414] For this more cynical perspective, see Levick 2002.

However, this is not the whole story when it comes to Seneca's navigation of this obstacle course; he has some other tricks up his sleeve. In particular, Seneca employs a rhetoric of exceptionalism, which works in harmony with his realism and employment of existing conceptualisations. Despite the radical potential of women's *virtus*, exceptionalism, realism and the employment of existing conceptions ensure a firmly conservative overall picture of women's philosophical engagement.

Through the rhetoric of exceptionalism Seneca elevates his particular addressees to ethically excellent heights. Although employed in his philosophical address to men too, exceptionalism works slightly differently in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*. Where Lucilius in the *Epistulae* is only just exceptional and needs to continue proving his exceptionalism, Marcia and Helvia have already proven their ethical excellence, like the Stoic *sapiens*. Like the Stoic *sapiens*, Marcia and Helvia are rarities, in their ethical status. Marcia's and Helvia's exceptionalism entails their individualism, their uniqueness which is unable to be generalised to the whole population of women; Marcia's and Helvia's ethical excellence does not come with the unrealistic expectation that all women are ethically excellent.

Another way in which Seneca's *consolationes* are convincing and successful is his realism. Exceptionalism allows him to paint a realistic picture of women's ethical excellence. He does not need to claim that all women are ethically excellent, but only that his specific addressees are. In fact, Seneca describes an extremely different situation, that almost all women are ethically weak. In doing so, he employs existing gendered ethical conceptualisations, which associate women with ethical weakness. Seneca's

readers (women or not women) would be very used to this gendered ethical language, as part of the fabric of the Latin language and of Roman concepts. In addition to the negative stereotype of luxurious and uncontrolled women, Seneca buys into another Roman idea of women, the ideal of the *matrona* who exhibits ethically excellent behaviour. As such, Seneca's idea of exceptionalism relies upon the employment of two opposing characterisations of women: the negative stereotype of womanly weakness, and the positive ideal of the domestic, maternal *matrona*.

Like my approach to the *Epistulae* in Chapter Two, my approach to the *consolationes* has been one of conceptual dissection. In both sets of texts, Seneca finds harmony between traditional Roman and Stoic philosophical ideas, a reconceptualisation which has radical potential in both cases. The radical potential for men's philosophical freedom from the actions of others, in the *Epistulae Morales*, is realised but limited to those already in the position to pursue philosophy; in similar ways, the radical potential of women's philosophical excellence remains unrealised because it is neutralised by the conservative manifestation of ethical excellence in practice. Despite his encouragement that his female addressees should be philosophically educated, their education is directed towards the end goal of supporting their families, of acting for the benefit of their husbands. Paradoxically, the philosophical autonomy endowed by access to *virtus* is constrictive upon women's actions, by directing their practice of philosophical *virtus* to the realm of the social and familial. The issue of the motivation for women's actions is not limited to the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, but is also a key part of Seneca's *Medea*. Where Seneca's Medea is

troubled, experiencing constraint on her autonomy when her actions in benefit of her husband and society go unacknowledged, the ideal *matrona*, exemplified in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, need not experience such social constraints; instead, the fulfilment of her familial role entails the personal benefit of ethical fulfilment, in that it is a demonstration of ethical excellence, *virtus*.

Conclusion.

This thesis has discussed constructions of gender in the Senecan corpus, demonstrating a coherent set of concerns for men and women in both tragic and philosophical works. Central to all four chapters are the ideas of constrained and unconstrained action. I have shown how dramatic works (the *Medea* and *Thyestes*) are sandboxes for the display and exploration of the extremities of unconstrained human action. Complementary to these are philosophical works (the *Epistulae Morales* and *Consolationes ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*) which direct the reader towards constrained action, by means of rhetorical and conceptual acrobatics.

The *Consolationes ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, discussed in Chapter Four, are philosophical texts which, unusually, address women. These works, in accordance with Stoic ideas, offer women the radical potential to achieve personal, philosophical virtue through formal, philosophical education. Seneca's writings to women, then, seem to present them with the opportunity for philosophical autonomy. This philosophical autonomy, however, is part of a refiguring of women's ideal actions, constrained in the sense that they benefit others, as more palatable for women themselves. From a more cynical perspective, despite the promise of philosophical autonomy, the ideal woman of the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* still resembles the conservative and domestic figure of the *matrona*. Marcia and Helvia are, as part of their development of philosophical excellence, encouraged to take up supportive and maternal roles within their families. The radical potential of the Stoic equality of women's virtue and education is undercut by the traditional

Roman and conservative practical actions women are encouraged to perform. To further accord with conservatism, Seneca employs a rhetoric of exceptionalism which limits philosophical virtue to the highest class of women, whilst also elevating his female addressees, Marcia and Helvia, to the heights to the Stoic sage. In summary, Chapter Four demonstrated how women's socially constrained actions are, in the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, reconceptualised as part of women's philosophical virtue.

The *Medea*, discussed in Chapter Three, shares the concern of the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam* with women's socially constrained actions. Despite her capacity for extreme and unconstrained actions, Medea, nevertheless, experiences a sense of constraint and impinged upon autonomy. At first glance, Seneca's *Medea* seems to present Medea's empowerment and assertion of autonomy through her infanticide. However, comparison with the *Thyestes* reveals Medea's concentrated meditation on her disempowerment. Unlike Seneca's Atreus, Medea does not take a straightforward route to revenge, but describes her experience of disenfranchisement in an ultimately vain attempt to convince others of her perspective. Others in the play perceive Medea's past actions as criminal and Medea herself as morally unconstrained. However, Medea conceptualises her actions as beneficial to others and actively unbeneficial to herself, thereby highlighting the social constraint she experiences when performing seemingly unconstrained, criminal actions. Even when committing the most socially extreme crime of infanticide, Medea brings in her social ties as motivation for her crime. Medea's articulation of the social-embeddedness of her criminal actions highlights the potential for women to experience social constraint, a loss of autonomy when acting for

another's benefit. It is the extremity of the tragic stage and the extreme capacity of Medea to commit crimes which make legible this issue arising from women's constrained actions.

Together, Chapters Three and Four draw attention to the social constraint placed on women's actions, in their performance for the benefit of others. By means of rhetorical and conceptual gymnastics, Seneca, in the *Consolationes ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, offers to women philosophical autonomy as a personal motivation for familial, socially beneficial actions. From a more cynical perspective, the promise of philosophical excellence is the sugar to help the medicine of traditional social duty go down. My discussion in Chapter Four particularly focused on the conceptual lengths to which Seneca goes to in order to resolve Stoic and traditional Roman ideas of women's ideal, ethical behaviour. Although the unconstrained action of the *Medea* is more straightforward to communicate, this play nevertheless makes valuable conceptual contributions to the understanding of constructions of and anxieties about women. Medea's experience of constraint despite the apparent unconstraint of her actions raises the problem that women can perform actions beneficial to their families which are harmful to themselves (and potentially society more generally). Chapters Three and Four present, therefore, two different perspectives on the same idea: one perspective is extreme and tragic, the other is moderated and pedagogical. A similar relationship of drama and philosophy is displayed in Chapters One and Two.

Chapter Two, on the *Epistulae Morales*, demonstrated how constraint of action, particularly in the face of physical suffering, is made more palatable and acceptable to men. I discussed how Seneca rehabilitates the concept of

patientia – a concept with the potential to include passivity and effeminacy – for masculinity. Like the *ad Marciam* and *ad Helviam*, the *Epistulae* deal with the positive reconceptualisation of constrained actions and involve much conceptual complexity. The complexity of Seneca's teaching on *patientia* is illustrated by the late stage at which *patientia* is discussed (in Books 7 and 8 of the *Epistulae*), the advanced level of learning assumed of the reader, and Seneca's employment of Stoic physics in order to teach about *patientia*. Seneca carefully (re)introduces *patientia* to the more learned reader, at first as a concept identified with *virtus* (*Ep.* 64). He then explains the macrocosmic, pervasive presence of *patientia*, through explanations of Stoic physics (*Ep.* 65). After showing that macrocosmic *patientia* is natural, he explains that all exercises of *virtus* are equal, aligning *patientia* with the wounded body of the soldier (*Ep.* 66). Finally, he argues for *patientia* as a formal part of *fortitudo* and so of *virtus* (*Ep*. 67). After arguing for the masculinity and virility of *patientia*, Seneca employs the idea conceptually, but not verbally in *Ep.* 70 and 71, before the explicit return of *patientia* in *Ep.* 74. In 70, 71 and 74, the reader's knowledge of *patientia* is assumed, and Seneca answers related queries about *patientia* and the reader's place in the world. By rehabilitating *patientia* as a masculine and virile concept, Seneca offers to his reader positively evaluated constraint in the face of suffering beyond his control, imposed on him by a more powerful force – abstract or human.

The *Thyestes*, discussed in Chapter One, presents a most aggressive and dominant force in the figure of Atreus. Like Medea, Atreus performs criminal and unconstrained actions. Unlike Medea, Atreus is unequivocally

powerful, autonomous and unconstrained. By forcing his brother, Thyestes, to cannibalise his own children, Atreus literalises Catullus' priapic threats. In the face of Atreus' masculine sexual aggression, Thyestes is effeminised, at the whims of his brother's will. In their gendered roles, Atreus and Thyestes are diametrically opposed. However, neither embodies the ethically positive *virtus* usually associated with masculinity, but are, in ethical terms, associated with each other. In making the priapic pose literal, Atreus demonstrates the possibility that masculine aggression can go too far, can be hypermasculine – there can be too much of a good thing. That Atreus' masculinity is overmuch, is hypermasculinity, is communicated through his elevation to suprahuman status. Like the Giants, Atreus ousts the Olympian gods, disrupting proper order. At the same time as being so unequivocally opposed, Atreus and Thyestes are also presented as potentially interchangeable figures, often conflated by other characters in the play. This interchangeability, their apparently equal potential to be either hypermasculine or effeminate, calls into question rigid Roman conceptualisations of gender as an innate quality.

Together, Chapters One and Two show two very different responses to threats or accusations of effeminacy. The *Epistulae Morales* navigate a path towards masculinity through/in spite of the constraint on actions necessitated by *patientia*. The potential for effeminacy involved in men's constrained actions is illustrated by the extreme lengths Seneca goes to in the *Epistulae Morales* in order to masculinise *patientia*; his employment of Stoic physics is highly indicative of the difficulties he faces in valorising *patientia*. The turning upside down of ideas involved in valorising a potentially effeminate concept is mirrored in the *Thyestes*, in which masculinity

(typically considered positive) is shown to be capable of going too far. Where such excess of dominance and aggression would usually be coded as effeminacy, Seneca firmly positions Atreus as masculine, in binary opposition to Thyestes. Despite this, the two brothers are considered similar and interchangeable, suggesting questioning of the rigidity of Roman conceptualisations of gender more broadly. Chapters One and Two (like Chapters Three and Four) present, therefore, two perspectives on the same idea, namely the problems of traditional models of gendered ethics.

All four chapters of this thesis have dealt with constrained and unconstrained actions, and the experience of performing such actions. Both men and women have been shown to experience constraint by society: whereas men are constrained by those more powerful than them, women are constrained by the duties and roles imposed upon them by society more generally. The range of works discussed in this thesis have allowed for exploration of the full range of human action. Whereas the dramatic works discussed in this thesis have presented extreme figures performing extreme actions, the philosophical works have offered positively evaluated constraint through conceptual complexity. The complete freedom of action on the tragic stage is straightforward, but has apocalyptic results. In contrast, the constraint of action required in the real world is shown to be a conceptual tightrope walk for men and women alike.

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