

This paper argues that Seneca's *Medea* adapts a specifically Ovidian version of the Orpheus myth, as characterized by W.S. Anderson's comparison of *Metamorphoses* X with Vergil's *Georgics*. Scholars thus far have failed to explore adequately the ramifications of Seneca's particular importation of Ovid's Orpheus on our reading of the Argonautic voyage and the character of Medea herself. Using textual comparison between Seneca and Ovid, and confronting issues of gender within the paradigm of cultural conquest, we see that the tragedy offers a more sympathetic evaluation of Medea's character than proposed by scholars such as Segal (1983).

As Anderson states, Vergil's Orpheus is a sympathetic character, a victim of human "*furor*," who cannot proceed with his life because of excessive passion and guilt (32). Ovid's Orpheus, on the other hand, "deserves" the "hostility" of the Thracian women (44). He has neither *furor* nor any real concern for Eurydice: "Orpheus' love ... is a self-indulgent masculine love that cannot perceive or feel the woman as a person, that blames Eurydice for dying, and that gives up women because they aren't worth the inconvenience" (47).

It is precisely this misogyny, this stance towards the feminine, that must complicate Segal's initial reading of the *Medea*. Segal, in his essay "Dissonant Sympathy: Song, Orpheus, and the Golden Age in Seneca's Tragedies," shows how Medea and Orpheus parallel each other in the *Medea*: they share "power over beasts," "songs" that produce "stupefaction," and "magic" (241). Segal argues, however, that Seneca's *Medea* should be read as an "anti-Orpheus." "Like Orpheus they [i.e., Medea and Atreus] place themselves at the center of the chords of sympathy that their artfulness creates between man and the world around him. But the energies which they thereby release, far from creating a new accord between man and nature, disrupt the peace of the world and of the soul" (237). What this paper questions, using textual comparison between Seneca and Ovid, is the degree to which the Orpheus of the *Medea* is meant to be seen as "creating a new accord between man and nature" in the first place. The paper argues that Seneca, using the thematic opportunity provided by Ovid, places alongside Medea a morally ambivalent and fully culpable fellow-magician.

Orpheus' appearance in the choral odes of Seneca's tragedy reflects the chorus' equivocation concerning the voyage of the Argo. On the one hand, Orpheus' powers over nature save the Argo from the Sirens and other female dangers (358-60); on the other hand, Orpheus' death at the hands of the Thracian women is depicted as punishment for the Argonauts' offense against nature (625-33). By reading Orpheus' role in the Argo's journey in the terms of Ovid's depiction - as an agent against the feminine -, we alter our perspective concerning the parallelism of Orpheus and Medea in the tragedy. Medea is not the evil "anti-Orpheus," the "black magic" to Orpheus' "white magic" (Segal 241); like nature, Medea is the victim of a masculine (and misogynist) offense, the Eurydice of Seneca's tragedy. It is only by recognizing the influence of Ovid's Orpheus on Seneca that we can clearly see the gendered imbalance of individual and cultural conquest.