The emotions of Medea – an introduction

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Ancient Greek and Roman emotions have become a field of increasing academic interest over the last few decades. We can particularly refer to such formative scholars in the field as David Konstan,[1] Douglas Cairns,[2] Robert Kaster,[3] and more recently Angelos Chaniotis[4] –

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[1] In particular D. Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks. Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2006). Also D. Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge, 1997); D. Konstan, *Pity Transformed* (London, 2001); D. Konstan, *Before Forgiveness. The Origins of a Moral Idea* (Cambridge, 2010); D. Konstan, *In the Orbit of Love. Affection in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford, 2018); and numerous shorter studies.

[2] E.g. D. Cairns, Aidôs. *The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1993); D. Cairns, 'Ethics, Ethology, Terminology. Iliadic anger and the Cross-cultural Study of Emotion', in S. Braund and G. W. Most (eds.) *Ancient Anger. Perspectives from Homer to Galen* (Cambridge, 2003), 11–49; D. Cairns, 'Look Both Ways. Studying Emotion in Ancient Greek', *Critical Quarterly* 50.4 (2008), 43–63; D. Cairns, 'Looks of Love and Loathing. Cultural Models of Vision and Emotion in Ancient Greek culture', *Mètis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens* 9 (2011), 37–50; D. Cairns, 'Mind, Body, and Metaphor in Ancient Greek Concepts of Emotion', D. Boquet and P. Nagy (eds.) *Histoire intellectuelle des émotions, de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, *L'Atelier du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 16 (2016), DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/acrh.7416.

[3] R. A. Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (New York, 2005a); R. A. Kaster, 'The Passions', in S. J. Harrison (ed.) *A Companion to Latin Literature* (Oxford, 2005b); R. A. Kaster, 'Some Passionate Performances in Late Republican Rome', in R. Balot (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Political Thought* (London, 2009).

[4] Principal investigator of 'The Social and Cultural Construction of Emotions. The Greek Paradigm' project, University of Oxford, 2009–14; outputs: A. Chaniotis (ed.), *Unveiling Emotions. Sources and Methods for the*

though the cast list goes much wider. Early interest in emotions prevalent across Classical genres, such as shame,[5] anger,[6] pity,[7] envy/jealousy,[8] and *erôs*,[9] has more recently expanded to include more peripheral emotions such as forgiveness,[10] remorse,[11] and disgust.[12] A number of studies too have focused on specific genres.[13] This research has been conducted

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Study of Emotions in the Greek World (Stuttgart 2012); A. Chaniotis and P. Ducrey (eds.), *Unveiling Emotions II. Emotions in Greece and Rome. Texts, Images, Material Culture* (Stuttgart, 2013); A. Chaniotis, N. Kaltsas, and I. Myonopoulos (eds.), *A World of Emotions. Ancient Greece 700BC–200AD* (New York, 2017).

[5] Cairns 1993 (n. 2); B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, 1993); C. A. Barton, *Roman Honor. The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley, 2001); R. Alexandre, C. Guérin, and M. Jacotot (eds.) *Rubor et pudor. Vivre et penser dans la Rome ancienne* (Paris, 2012).

[6] W. V. Harris, *Restraining Rage. The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge MA and London, 2001); Braund and Most (n. 2); K. Kalimtzis, *Taming Anger. The Hellenic Approach to the Limitations of Reason* (London, 2012).

[7] Konstan 1997 (n. 1); R. H. Sternberg (ed.), *Pity and Power in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge, 2005); D. L. Munteanu, *Tragic pathos. Pity and fear in Greek philosophy and tragedy* (Cambridge, 2011).

[8] D. Konstan and N. K. Rutter (eds.), *Envy, spite, and jealousy. The rivalrous emotions in ancient Greece* (Edinburgh, 2003); R. R. Caston, *The Elegiac Passion. Jealousy in Roman Love Elegy* (New York, 2012); E. Sanders, *Envy and jealousy in Classical Athens. A socio-psychological approach* (New York, 2014).

[9] C. Calame, *I greci e l'eros. Simboli, pratiche, e luoghi* (Rome-Bari, 1992); M. C. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (eds.), *The sleep of reason. Erotic experience and sexual ethics in ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago, 2002); E. Sanders, C. Thumiger, C. Carey, and N. J. Lowe (eds.), *Erôs in ancient Greece* (Oxford, 2013); E. Sanders (ed.), *Erôs and the polis. Love in context* (London, 2013); S. Caciagli (ed.) *Eros e genere in Grecia arcaica* (Bologna, 2017).

[10] Konstan 2010 (n. 1); C. L. Griswold and D. Konstan (eds.), *Ancient Forgiveness. Classical, Judaic, and Christian* (Cambridge, 2012).

[11] L. Fulkerson, *No Regrets. Remorse in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford, 2013).

[12] D. Lateiner and D. Spatharas (eds.), *The Ancient Emotion of Disgust* (New York, 2017).

[13] E.g. D. Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry. Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton, 1994); Munteanu (n. 7); Caston (n. 8); E. Visvardi, *Emotion in Action. Thucydides and the Tragic Chorus* (Leiden,

against a background of much wider interest in emotion studies in fields as diverse as neuroscience, cognitive psychology, anthropology, medicine, philosophy, jurisprudence, history, literary studies, and the performing arts. Many publications by Classicists have demonstrated awareness of this wider body of research, and some directly incorporate theoretical findings – particularly from cognitive psychology, but from other disciplines too – into exploration of Classical texts and other media.[14]

The articles in this collection aim to 'cut the cake' in a different way, by using techniques and methodologies developed in recent work on the Classical emotions (on which more below) to explore various instantiations of one Classical figure. This is not the first time that the emotions of one figure have been compared across texts, but it is the first on such a scale.[15] Medea has been chosen as the object of focus, for several reasons. First, she appears in a number of Greek and Roman literary texts,[16] so presentations of her in different periods and

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2015); E. Sanders and M. Johncock (eds.), *Emotion and Persuasion in Classical Antiquity* (Stuttgart, 2016); D. Spatharas, *Emotions, Persuasion, and Public Discourse in Classical Athens* (Berlin, 2019).

[14] E.g. R. Kaster, 'Introduction', in 2005a (n. 3), 3–12; D. Konstan, '*Pathos* and Passion', in 2006 (n. 1), 3–40; 2008 (n. 2); A. Chaniotis, 'Introduction', in 2012 (n. 4), 11–36; D. Cairns, 'Introduction. Emotion History and the Classics', in D. Cairns (ed.) *A Cultural History of the Emotions in Antiquity* (London, 2019), 1–15.

[15] L. Fulkerson, 'Helen as Vixen, Helen as Victim: Remorse and the Opacity of Female Desire', in D. L. Munteanu (ed.) *Emotion, Genre and Gender in Classical Antiquity* (Bristol, 2011), 113–33 might be considered such a study in miniature for Helen across multiple texts; however, it focuses on only one emotion, which appears to greater or lesser extent in each text. Z. M. Torlone, 'Engendering Reception: Joseph Brodsky's 'Dido and Aeneas'' (same volume), 241–60 provides a better parallel, as her various Didos exhibit a greater range of emotions. It is notable that both studies also focus on a mythological figure with multiple literary instantiations.

[16] See J. J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (eds.), *Medea. Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy and Art* (Princeton, 1997), especially the chapters in Parts II and III; B. Gentili and F. Perusino (eds.), *Medea nella letteratura e nell'arte* (Venice, 2000); H. Bartel and A. Simon (eds.), *Unbinding Medea: Interdisciplinary*

genres can, should the reader wish, be considered side by side. Second, she is a fictional character, and thus removed from the sorts of factional (hagiographic, denunciatory, satirical) presentations a historical figure might be subjected to,[17] while offering the endless opportunities for reinvention common in Classical mythopoeia. And finally, in almost all her instantiations Medea is presented as acting under the influence of, or against the impulse of, strong emotions – and, thanks to her fictive nature, often quite different emotions in different texts.

Indeed, her emotions – especially in Euripides' and Seneca's *Medea* tragedies – have already been an area of scholarly enquiry, not least by authors in this collection. In Euripides' play, some argue that she is motivated by heroic pride – a 'masculine' hero like Achilles (in the *Iliad*) or Ajax (in Sophocles' *Ajax*).[18] Alternatively her murderous actions are ascribed to anger, as Jason's appalling ingratitude and betrayal overwhelm her, leading her to enact a terrible revenge.[19] Sexual jealousy has also been posited as a motivation, either alongside anger, or as a specific type of it for which we (unlike the Greeks) have a label.[20] In Seneca's

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Approaches to a Classical Myth from Antiquity to the 21st Century (London, 2010), especially the first few chapters; for a brief overview, E. Griffiths, *Medea* (London and New York, 2006), 14–22.

[17] This is not to say that analysis of a historical character's emotions, as presented in different texts over time, might not also be a worthwhile exercise.

[18] P. E. Easterling, 'The Infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*', *YCS* 25 (1977), 178 and 183; B. M. W. Knox, 'The *Medea* of Euripides', *YCS* 25 (1977), 196–202; A. H. Gabriel, 'Living with Medea and Thinking after Freud. Greek Drama, Gender, and Concealments', *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (1992), 353; D. M. Mastronarde, *Euripides.* Medea (Cambridge, 2002), 8–9; L. Holland, 'Πᾶς δόμος ἔρροι. Myth and Plot in Euripides' *Medea*', *TAPA* 133 (2003), 270.

[19] Harris (n. 6), 266 and 383; Mastronarde (n. 18), 17–18; Konstan 2006 (n. 1), 57–9.

[20] A. P. Burnett, *Revenge in Attic and Later Tragedy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1998), 194; Mastronarde (n. 18), 16; F. McHardy, *Revenge in Athenian Culture* (London, 2008), 61–2; Cairns 2008 (n. 2),

Medea, anger too has traditionally been explored as the overwhelming emotional motivation.[21]

This collection of articles aims to go beyond these studies to explore Medea's emotions, and occasionally those she stimulates in others, more broadly. Two articles (Douglas Cairns' and William Allan's, Paulo Lima's and Chiara Battistella's) look at each of the tragedies that have been repeatedly studied – reflecting their importance in the list of Classical Medeas – but they take new and, unusually, non-monolithic approaches to her emotional psychology. These are joined by studies on two quite different texts: one (my own) on Apollonius's *Argonautica* book 3, looking at the start rather than the end of her relationship with Jason; and one (Andreas Michalopoulos') on Ovid *Heroides* 12, depicting a much more self-reflective character than elsewhere.[22] The articles appear in order of the works' composition, and Battistella's article compares Seneca with Euripides, allowing a kind of ring composition within the collection. The inclusion of articles on the *Argonautica* and *Heroides* allow the reader alternatively to consider Medea's emotions in chronological order: from the day she meets Jason, through the progression of her relationship (as recalled on the eve of the filicides), to that day itself. This is not to suggest a linear or steady development – none such

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53-6; E. Sanders, 'Sexual Jealousy and *Erôs* in Euripides' *Medea*', in Sanders et al. (n. 9), 41–57; contra Konstan (n. 1), 59 and 233–4.

[21] C. Gill, 'Passion as Madness in Roman Poetry', in S. M. Braund and C. Gill (eds.) *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge, 1997), 217–18 and 222–3; G. Guastella, 'Virgo, coniunx, mater. The Wrath of Seneca's Medea', *CA* 20.2 (2001), 197–219; H. M. Roisman, 'Women in Senecan Tragedy', *Scholia. Studies in Classical Antiquity* 14 (2005), 82–6; C. Battistella and D. Nelis, 'Some Thoughts on the Anger of Seneca's Medea', in D. Cairns and D. Nelis (eds.) *Emotions in the Classical World. Methods, Approaches, and Directions* (Stuttgart, 2017), 245–56.

[22] Other Classical works could have been chosen instead, but there are natural limits to a small collection.

exists; but it does serve to demonstrate both the strong inter-relationship and differences between these works' portrayal of her. All versions of the myth present (and sometimes present from) Medea's point of view, giving insights into her emotional and psychological state, which provide the motivation(s) for her actions. Jason is generally portrayed as having a utilitarian view of the relationship: all authors leave it ambiguous as to whether Medea's erotic love for him was ever genuinely returned.

From the moment she falls in love with Jason, Medea experiences a maelstrom of emotions, that she seems to repeat in each episode of their relationship.[23] In the *Argonautica*, I show this triggered by love, which gives rise to three other emotions: fear at the danger to Jason (and herself), grief at his impending death, and shame at loving an enemy of her father. The clash of motivations these emotions impel leads to a helpless despair and paralysis. In the Ovidian letter, Michalopoulos also finds love, fear, and grief in Medea's reminiscence of meeting Jason; guilt, sadness, and remorse at the crimes she has committed; sorrow, fear, wounded pride, and rage at his remarriage; and spite and anticipated joy in her intended revenge. In Euripides' Medea, Cairns shows Medea's joy at imagining the ways her enemies might die, her grief and pity at the impending death of her children, and the anger and jealousy which drive the filicides. In the same play, Allan also finds jealousy, anger, grief, and pity, as well as love and gratitude. In Seneca, Lima lists 'family love, erotic love, anger, rage, and resentment', but concentrates less on enumerating and describing her emotions, than on their 'monstrosity': the obscene levels to which they are taken in motivating her monstrous revenge. Battistella, by contrast, concentrates on just one emotion: joy – an emotion Cairns and Michalopoulos briefly mention, though one not usually associated with Medea. Battistella shows that in Seneca, unlike Euripides and Ovid, her joy is not merely

[23] Michalopoulos refers to an 'emotional storm in her soul'.

anticipatory, but builds through each filicide to their triumphant aftermath, becoming progressively more 'monstrous' (and thus connecting to Lima's argument).

Medea's emotions in these texts are explored using a variety of methodological approaches. Such tools have been proliferating in Classical emotion studies over the last fifteen years.[24] They include approaches based on ancient philosophy, particularly Aristotle (who saw emotions as a natural, and ethically perfectly proper, concomitant of social interaction and literary engagement) and Stoicism (with its more nuanced approach),[25] but also thinkers such as Plato, Cicero, Quintilian, Longinus, and Galen. The philosophical subdisciplines of rhetoric, poetics, and aesthetics are particularly relevant.[26] Classicists working on emotions have also become more open to utilising theoretical approaches from other disciplines. These include script theory,[27] cognitive psychology,[28] trauma theory,[29] metaphor studies,[30]

[24] Volumes particularly concerned with methodological issues include Chaniotis 2012 (n. 4), and Cairns and Nelis (n. 21).

[25] Konstan 2006 (n. 1) approaches a range of genres, especially epic, tragedy, and oratory, through the prism of Aristotle's discussion of individual emotions in *Rh*. 2.2–11. M. R. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago and London, 2007), a different type of study, nevertheless somewhat similarly uses Stoic ideas to understand a number of (principally mythical) Classical figures.

[26] See e.g. D. Konstan, 'Rhetoric and Emotion', in I. Worthington (ed.) *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric* (Malden, MA and Oxford, 2010), 411–25; S. Halliwell, 'The Poetics of Emotional Expression: Some Problems of Ancient Theory', in Cairns and Nelis (n. 21), 105–23.

[27] As used by Kaster 2005a (n. 3) and Sanders (n. 8).

[28] E.g. C. Thumiger, *A History of the Mind and Mental Health in Classical Greek Medical Thought* (Cambridge 2017), 335–418.

[29] A. Eckert, '"There is No One who Does not Hate Sulla": Emotion, Persuasion and Cultural Trauma', in Sanders and Johncock (n. 13), 133–45.

politeness studies,[31] pragmatics,[32] and discursive psychology.[33] This is not, of course, to say that any theoretical approach could be applied to any text, but (depending on the text) one or more theoretical approaches might provide additional insights to a more traditional linguistic study.

Of the articles in this collection, Cairns' is particularly rich in reference to emotional theories, both ancient (primarily Aristotelian, also Platonic and Stoic) and modern. He sees Euripides' *Medea* not just as a play rich in emotions, but 'emotions *about* emotions' (italics original). Characters read the emotions of other characters, not just by what they say, but by how they say it: words used, facial expressions, body language. They experience emotions at other characters' emotions, as does the audience. Emotions are motivations, explains Cairns, and Medea is adept at manipulating the emotions of others by 'fostering and exploiting … trust'. Allan also makes use of an Aristotelian lens, specifically his view (contra Kant) that virtues are dispositions both to act and to feel emotions correctly.[34] Battistella, by contrast, uses Seneca's Stoic theory of morally uneducated and educated passions – specifically *uoluptas* and *gaudium* – to analyse his Medea's thought and actions, showing her 'successfully

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[30] E.g. Cairns 2011 and 2016 (n. 2); D. Cairns, 'Horror, Pity, and the Visual in Ancient Greek Aesthetics', in Cairns and Nelis (n. 21), 53–77. See also M. Theodoropoulou, 'The Emotion Seeks to Be Expressed: Thoughts from a Linguist's Point of View', in A. Chaniotis 2012 (n. 4), 433–68.

[31] E. Dickey, 'Emotional Language and Formulae of Persuasion in Greek Papyrus Letters', in Sanders and Johncock (n. 13), 237–62.

[32] F. Iurescia, 'Strategies of Persuasion in Provoked Quarrels in Plautus: A Pragmatic Perspective', in Sanders and Johncock (n. 13), 281–94.

[33] K. Hammond, '"It Ain't Necessarily So": Reinterpreting Some Poems of Catullus from a Discursive Psychological Point of View', in Sanders and Johncock (n. 13), 295–313.

[34] Aristotle's theories of emotion are frequently a fruitful approach to Attic tragedy, since that genre was his primary focus of study in the *Poetics*. He mentions Euripides' *Medea* briefly at 54b1.

(mis)applying Stoic principles'. Forsaking ancient emotion theories, my article uses a modern one, 'script' theory, to explore the genesis and effects of Medea's emotions: their causes and their symptoms – psychological, physiological, and behavioural – as well as metaphors used to describe these. Lima, meanwhile, develops what he describes as an existential approach to Seneca's tragedy, to point out the deficiencies of previous psychoanalytic readings; he argues that Medea's attempts to identify her human 'self' in her social-religious ties lead, paradoxically, to her ending as a mythical 'irruption of the monstrous' into that society. The construction of the self is also a concern for ancient letter writers, and Michalopoulos shows that Ovid's Medea is no exception.

Returning to my earlier observation that Medea is fictional, what these texts show are not simply aspects of Medea *ipsa*, but examples of the very different ways that authors can choose to present fictional and particularly mythological characters, who are interpreted and reinterpreted through the demands of different genres (transgressive in tragedy, egregious in epic, exploratory in epistle), and over centuries as the styles of authors and demands of audiences change. Emotion is, still, an underexplored lens through which to view characters, but an aspect that ancient authors are always alive to: what emotions are felt; how they manifest in the mind and body; how they affect characters' relations with those around them; attempts made – or pointedly not made – to regulate intensity of emotional experiences and impelled actions; and the extent to which emotional experiences are presented as those of every(wo)man (the girl who falls in love with the wrong man, and is terrified of how her father will react), or monstrous perversions of such (how *not* to react when your husband leaves you for a younger woman).

What emerges here, then, is not one Medea but many: Medeas who will benefit from a variety of different tools – theoretical, literary, or philosophical approaches – through which to interpret their individual manifestations and representations. The studies in this collection showcase a range of approaches that can help a reader make sense of such diverse portrayals of characters, particularly fictional characters, in literary texts.