Seneca’s Medea

Background:
1) Seneca was born around 1 B.C.E and committed suicide in 65 C.E.
2) Medea along with Seneca’s other plays was written probably during the second half of his lifetime (Boyle).
3) In a stylometric study to find when Seneca’s plays were written in comparison with the others, Medea would be grouped together with Hercules Furens and Troades (Boyle).
4) There were at least six Greek versions of the Medea and six Latin versions, the only remaining ones that are fully intact are Euripides’ and Seneca’s versions, with fragments remaining from Ennius’, Accius’, and Ovid’s versions (Costa).

Features:
1) The Character of Medea:
   I. Medea does not develop during the course of the play; she just becomes more deranged and wicked (Costa).
   II. The Corinthian people look upon Medea as being a symbol of Barbaric wickedness and a plague that has been brought upon them (Benton).

2) The Chorus:
   I. During the beginning of the play Medea has a verbal contest or argument with the chorus (Hine).
   II. In this exchange, the chorus prays to the gods so that Jason and Creusa have a happy marriage. Medea begs the gods in the underworld to have the marriage ruined and Jason tormented.
   III. Medea’s prayers are victorious against those of the chorus (Hine).

3) Medea Nunc Sum (910):
   I. Medea at this point appears that she has realized “her own dramatic myth” (Boyle, 215).
   II. When Medea makes this statement, she is joining her former Virgo with her current Coniunx and the loss of her being a Mater in accordance with Roman marriage laws (Guastella).
   III. This statement represents Medea’s embracing of her barbaric nature, she then becomes what all of the Corinthians actually believe her to be (Benton).
   IV. This line references a previous line in the play when Medea says Medea, Fiam (171) and is the completion of the deed that she has set out to complete (Henry, Walker).
   V. Medea gives birth to her new self in this seen. After shedding the bonds that held her from freedom (Autarkeia), she finally begins to arise in her new perfection (Johnson).
The Finale:

1) Medea is driven mad by the orders of her murdered brother, Absyrtus, and the Furies into killing her children in the most gruesome possible manner, in order to avenge the death of her brother (Guastella).

2) Seneca shows how Medea not only wishes to kill her children but to have Jason as a witness to at least one of their deaths (Benton).

3) Before Medea is taken away by the chariot she says to Jason coniugem agnoscis tuam? sic fugere soleo (1021-1022). This statements links together her previous actions with Jason and depicts her as always fleeing a city when she has just committed murder and when the city is in a state of uproar (Boyle)

Bibliography: