



## PSEUDO-SACRIFICIAL ALLUSIONS IN HOSIDIUS GETA'S *MEDEA*\*

### ABSTRACT

This article explores the allusive strategy of the late second-century cento-tragedy *Medea* attributed to Hosidius Geta, which recounts *Medea*'s revenge against Jason using verses from the works of Virgil. It argues that the text's author recognized a consistent strand of characterization in earlier treatments of the *Medea* myth, whereby the heroine's filicide is presented as a corrupted sacrifice. Geta selectively uses verses from thematically significant episodes in the *Aeneid*—the lying tale of Sinon and the death of Laocoön; the murder of Priam; the suicide of Dido—at key points to foreground the theme of pseudo-sacrificial violence. Geta's use of Virgil evinces a keen appreciation both of the symbolism of the broader mythic tradition in which his text is situated and of the original narrative contexts of the verses he recycles. The article's findings contribute to a growing recognition of the creative potential afforded by the cento technique.

**Keywords:** Latin poetry; intertextuality; Virgilian reception; Hosidius Geta; *Medea*; sacrifice

### INTRODUCTION

The *Medea* attributed to Hosidius Geta is a Virgilian cento-tragedy, recounting the eponymous heroine's revenge against Jason after he abandons her for Creusa in Corinth. The work is preserved in the Codex Salmasianus (Paris, BnF 10318), a seventh- or eighth-century poetic anthology likely derived from a collection first compiled in sixth-century Vandal Africa.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript itself names no author, and its attribution rests on the likely identity of the text with that ascribed to one Hosidius Geta in Tertullian's *De praescriptione haereticorum* (39.5).<sup>2</sup> If correct, this would date the play's composition prior to Tertullian's treatise, written in 203.

The text has been historically neglected by scholarship, owing perhaps in part to our lack of knowledge of its author, and to the fact that the cento's imitative nature jars with modern conceptions of artistic originality.<sup>3</sup> However, more recent criticism has recognized the complexity and artistry of late antique centonic poetry in the broader context of intertextuality and allusion in Latin literature.<sup>4</sup> Herzog, discussing the repurposing of Virgilian verses by Christian centonists writing on biblical topics, has developed the concept of *Leitreminiszenz* to denote the accumulation of allusions to a

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<sup>1</sup> A. Rondholz, *The Versatile Needle: Hosidius Geta's Cento Medea and its Tradition* (Berlin and Boston, 2012), 82–4.

<sup>2</sup> Rondholz (n. 1), 14, 84–9.

<sup>3</sup> S. McGill, *Virgil Recomposed: The Mythological and Secular Centos in Antiquity* (Oxford, 2005), xvii.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of modes of intertextuality in Latin poetry, see G.B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca, NY, 1986); D. Fowler, 'On the shoulders of giants: intertextuality and classical studies', *MD* 39 (1997), 13–34; S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (New York, 1997); L. Edmonds, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Roman Poetry* (Baltimore, 2001).

given source-passage in association with a particular character or episode.<sup>5</sup> McGill highlights the importance of the cento corpus to fields including reception and genre theory.<sup>6</sup> As noted by Pelttari, the predominance of Virgil's works as hypotexts for Latin centos is no accident, since intimate familiarity with the source material was essential to the appreciation of the centonist's allusivity.<sup>7</sup> Pelttari posits three different levels of engagement which the centonist encourages the reader to navigate: first, the narrative surface of the text; second, its evocation of specific contexts in the source-text (microtextual allusion); and third, the cento as a transformation of its source-text (macrotextual allusion).<sup>8</sup>

Geta's *Medea* merits attention as the earliest,<sup>9</sup> as well as the longest, of the sixteen extant Virgilian centos, a poetic form which achieved immense popularity in the classical and late antique Roman world;<sup>10</sup> it is additionally the sole surviving Virgilian cento tragedy.<sup>11</sup> Lamacchia and, more recently, Rondholz have highlighted the sophisticated interplay between Geta's play and its source-texts, with particular verses carrying narrative significance as a result of their original contexts. Thus, for instance, Geta's frequent use of verses and clusters of verses from *Aeneid* Book 4 encourage the reader to draw connections between his primary narrative and that of Aeneas' relationship with Dido. Elsewhere, verses from the *Eclogues* are used to foreground the destructive power of *amor*—a central theme of Geta's treatment of the myth. Virgilian allusions can additionally evoke Virgil's own models: verses referring to Dido also call to mind her exemplar in the *Medea* of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, whilst verses taken from the Nisus–Euryalus episode in *Aeneid* Book 9 in turn recall the 'Doloneia' of *Iliad* Book 10.<sup>12</sup> Schottenius Cullhed has highlighted similar allusive techniques in Proba's fourth-century *Cento Vergilianus de laudibus Christi*. In narrating the life of Adam and Eve in Eden, for instance, Proba prefigures the Fall through verses from the Dido episode along with other Virgilian passages evoking imminent disaster;<sup>13</sup> allusions to the death of Laocoön (*Aen.* 2.199–233), the tree of Polydorus (3.22–48) and the Golden Bough (6.136–48, 187–211) are used to draw a typological link between original sin and the death of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

In what follows, I explore Geta's sensitive engagement both with his Virgilian source-texts and with the mythic tradition underlying the narrative of his play. Specifically, I argue that Geta consciously evokes episodes of corrupted sacrifice in the *Aeneid* to reflect a conception, well attested in earlier treatments of the myth, of *Medea's* filicide as a pseudo-sacrificial act.

<sup>5</sup> R. Herzog, *Die Bibelegik der lateinischen Spätantike. Formgeschichte einer erbaulichen Gattung* (Munich, 1975), 12–51.

<sup>6</sup> McGill (n. 3), *passim*.

<sup>7</sup> A. Pelttari, *The Space that Remains: Reading Latin Poetry in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, NY, 2014), 97–8.

<sup>8</sup> Pelttari (n. 7), 98–103.

<sup>9</sup> Except for a three-line segment in Petronius (*Sat.* 132.11).

<sup>10</sup> S.J. Harrison, 'Cento', in *OCD*<sup>4</sup>; Rondholz (n. 1), 24–7.

<sup>11</sup> S. McGill, 'Tragic Vergil: rewriting Vergil as a tragedy in the cento *Medea*', *CW* 95 (2002), 143–61, at 145.

<sup>12</sup> R. Lamacchia, 'Dall'arte allusiva al centone', *A&R* 3 (1958), 193–216; Rondholz (n. 1), 107–43.

<sup>13</sup> S. Schottenius Cullhed, *Proba the Prophet: The Christian Virgilian Cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 141–6.

<sup>14</sup> Schottenius Cullhed (n. 13), 150–4.

## I. CORRUPTED SACRIFICE IN THE MEDEA MYTH

Medea's filicide is consistently framed in ancient sources as a pseudo-sacrificial act. In Euripides' play, Medea is conflicted as she prepares to kill her children; she strengthens her resolve by presenting her act as a sacrifice: ὅτῳ δὲ μὴ | θέμις παρῆναι τοῖς ἔμοισι θύμασιν | αὐτῷ μελήσει ('Whoever is not permitted at my sacrifice should see to it for himself', 1054–5), alluding to the exclusion of the uninitiated or ritually unclean from sacrificial ceremonies.<sup>15</sup> As was conventional in Greek tragedy, the violence occurs offstage, but vase paintings likely inspired by Euripides' play show Medea performing the deed at an altar or in another ritual context,<sup>16</sup> sometimes wearing her mantle as a sacrificial apron.<sup>17</sup> The same imagery occurs in Roman treatments, with a depiction in Pompeii showing the children playing on top of an altar as Medea draws her knife.<sup>18</sup> Seneca's Medea invokes her deceased brother as she kills her first son: *uictima manes tuos | placamus ista* ('with this victim I appease your ghost', 970–1).

Only Medea dignifies her filicide as a sacrifice. In the dramatic treatments by both Euripides and Seneca, Medea seeks to legitimize her crime through the use of sacrificial language. McDermott has highlighted Euripides' engagement in his play with Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy,<sup>19</sup> in which the illegitimate assertion of sacrificial authority is a central theme.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, other characters in Euripides' play do not endorse Medea's sacrificial terminology. On learning Medea's true intention, the shocked chorus asks: ἀλλὰ κτανεῖν σὸν σπέρμα τολμήσεις, γύναι; ('but could you bring yourself to kill your own offspring, woman?', 816). κτείνειν ('to kill') is neutral with a wide semantic range. More frequently, however, the chorus explicitly refers to the deed by the noun φόνος ('murder') or the verb φονεύειν ('to murder': for example 855, 862, 977, 998, 1266–7, 1275, 1313). Jason labels Medea παιδολέτορ ('destroyer of children', 1393) and παιδοφόνου ('murderer of children', 1407), and both he and the chorus declare Medea 'stained' by the killing of kin (μιάσματ[α], 1268–9; μαιφόνε, 1346). Numerous Latin sources affirm the illegitimacy of Medea's sacrificial act by declaring her *impia* ('impious').<sup>21</sup> An instructive contrast may be drawn with medieval Old Norse–Icelandic legendary tradition, in which the heroine Guðrún kills her children by her husband Atli (Attila the Hun) to avenge her brothers' murders. In the thirteenth-century poetic accounts of the legend, the sacrificial character of Guðrún's filicide is acknowledged by other characters, and by the poems' narrators.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> W. Allan, *Euripides: Medea* (London, 2002), 91.

<sup>16</sup> W. Burkert, 'Greek tragedy and sacrificial ritual', *GRBS* 7 (1966), 97–121, at 118.

<sup>17</sup> C.O. Pache, *Baby and Child Heroes in Ancient Greece* (Urbana, IL and Chicago, 2004), 32.

<sup>18</sup> L. Richardson, Jr., 'Pompeii: the Casa dei Dioscuri and its painters', *MAAR* 23 (1955), 1–165, Plate LIV; Pache (n. 17), 37–8, fig. 10.

<sup>19</sup> E.A. McDermott, *Euripides' Medea: The Incarnation of Disorder* (University Park, PA, 1989), 75–6.

<sup>20</sup> F.I. Zeitlin, 'The motif of the corrupted sacrifice in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*', *TAPhA* 96 (1965), 463–508.

<sup>21</sup> *Ov. Trist.* 3.9.9; *Sen. Med.* 395; *Sen. Ag.* 119–20; Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 5.686; *Cul.* 249.

<sup>22</sup> *Atlakviða* 34–7 and *Atlamáli* in *Grænlenzko* 74–5, in U. Dronke (ed. and transl.), *The Poetic Edda I: Heroic Poems* (Oxford, 1969), 10–11 and 92; and see C. Larrington, "'I have long desired to cure you of old age": sibling drama in the later heroic poems of the Edda', in P. Acker and C. Larrington (edd.), *Revisiting the Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend* (New York and Abingdon, 2013), 140–56.

Pseudo-sacrificial killing is a recurring facet of Medea's broader mythic persona. This is clear from the divergent accounts of the murder of Apsyrtus, which different sources situate at a hearth or altar (Eur. *Med.* 1334, with scholia),<sup>23</sup> or at a temple of Artemis (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.452–76). Apollonius has Jason perform the killing, but Medea's equal guilt is made symbolically clear by the bloodying of her robe (4.471–4), and by Zeus's decree that both she and Jason must suffer great hardships before being purified of the crime (4.557–61). The pseudo-sacrificial character of the act is expressed through the comparison of Jason to a βουτύπος ('bull-slaughterer', 4.468).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Medea's engineering of the death of Pelias has been identified as a 'perversion of ritual sacrifice';<sup>25</sup> in Ovid's account (*Met.* 7.297–349), the sacrificial overtones are foregrounded by the detailed description of the ritual preparations, and by Medea cutting Pelias' throat when he is already fatally wounded.

## II. EPISODES OF CORRUPTED SACRIFICE IN THE *AENEID*

The *Aeneid* is dense with episodes of overt or implicit human sacrifice, with the language and imagery of sacrificial ritual permeating many of the poem's death scenes.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes a death occurs at an altar, as when Pygmalion kills Sychaeus (1.348–50),<sup>27</sup> or Messapus kills the Etruscan king Aulestes (12.289–96); the Trojan sailor Orontes is thrown from his ship onto a rock formation called the *Arae* (Altars: 1.108–17). Following the death of Pallas, besides selecting victims for an actual human sacrifice (10.517–20), Aeneas kills a series of opponents in ways which evoke sacrificial ritual. He kills Magus (10.521–36) and Liger (10.595–601) in the act of supplication, and slaughters the priest Haemonides (*immolat*, 10.541); all three scenes include pointed intratextual echoes of earlier sacrificial episodes. The death of the suppliant Turnus, with which the poem closes, is also depicted as a quasi-sacrificial act.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, the poem features several key extended episodes in which sacrificial ritual is in some way corrupted. First, as Aeneas recounts the final days of Troy, he explains how the city walls were breached by means of the wooden horse. Debate over what to do with the horse is settled by the conjunction of two factors—the false testimony of the captured Greek warrior, Sinon; and the death of the Trojan priest Laocoön, who guessed the horse's true purpose and called for its destruction. The theme of corrupted sacrifice runs conspicuously through both scenes.

Sinon claims that the horse is an offering to Minerva as restitution for the Palladium stolen from Troy by Ulysses and Diomedes. If brought inside the walls, the horse would

<sup>23</sup> E. Schwartz (ed.), *Scholia in Euripidem*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1891), 2.211; J.N. Bremmer, 'Why did Medea kill her brother Apsyrtus?', in J.J. Claus and S.I. Johnston (edd.), *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (Princeton, NJ and Chichester, 1997), 85.

<sup>24</sup> See M. Leigh, 'Boxing and sacrifice: Apollonius, Vergil, and Valerius', *HSPH* 105 (2010), 117–55, at 128–9 for intratextual links between this episode and the earlier killing of Amycus by Polydeuces (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.90–6).

<sup>25</sup> E. Griffiths, *Medea* (London and New York, 2006), 57.

<sup>26</sup> J.T. Dyson, *King of the Wood: The Sacrificial Victor in Virgil's Aeneid* (Norman, 2001); B. Gladhill, 'The poetics of human sacrifice in Vergil's *Aeneid*', in P. Bonnechere and R. Gagné (edd.), *Sacrifices humains: perspectives croisées et représentations* (Liège, 2013), 217–45.

<sup>27</sup> I use the text of R.A.B. Mynors (ed.), *P. Vergili Maronis opera* (Oxford, 1969).

<sup>28</sup> Dyson (n. 26), 112–24, 210–27; W.S.M. Nicoll, 'The death of Turnus', *CQ* 51 (2001), 190–200. Cf. S. Farron, 'Aeneas' revenge for Pallas as a criticism of Aeneas', *Aclass* 29 (1986), 69–83.

protect the city from future invasion; the Achaeans have therefore built it too big to fit through the gate. Important for our purposes is Sinon's justification for betraying his countrymen. He is a kinsman of Palamedes, who foiled Ulysses' attempt to avoid the call-up to fight at Troy; in revenge, Ulysses had Palamedes framed and executed for collusion with the Trojans. Sinon vowed to avenge Palamedes once the war was over, so Ulysses bribed or threatened the prophet Calchas to name Sinon as a human sacrifice required by the gods to atone for Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia. Sinon, however, escaped and hid until the Achaeans departed. The Trojans are persuaded by Sinon's tale, and their conviction is reinforced when the sceptical priest Laocoön is killed, with his two sons, by sea serpents, an event interpreted as divine punishment for his denunciation of the horse. The Trojans therefore dismantle part of the city wall in order to bring the horse within.

The two episodes are closely intertwined, and the theme of corrupted sacrifice is prominent throughout both.<sup>29</sup> In the case of Sinon's deception, the explicit claim of attempted human sacrifice is highly significant, since human sacrifice was widely and vociferously denounced by the Romans of Virgil's era—Livy deemed it *minime Romano sacro* ('wholly alien to the Roman sensibility', 22.57), and authors including Caesar, Cicero and Tacitus deployed it as a trope in characterizations of foreign peoples, to distance them from Roman cultural norms.<sup>30</sup> Before Virgil's time, Lucretius cited Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia as proof of the evil of superstition (1.80–101). For Virgil's readers, this opprobrium is compounded by the fact that, within Sinon's fiction, he is an illegitimate victim, falsely selected as a result of Ulysses' manipulation of Calchas. On top of this, the narrative of human sacrifice itself is revealed to be fraudulent. And while not a sacrifice in the narrow sense, the ruse of the wooden horse relies on its misidentification as a propitiatory offering. Aeneas describes how the horse's entry was accompanied by choral hymns (2.238–9), and how the city's altars were adorned for its arrival (2.248–9).

The death of Laocoön is likewise composed in such a way as to emphasize the perversion of a sacrificial ritual: Laocoön is performing a sacrifice when he is attacked (2.202); he is symbolically substituted for his victim,<sup>31</sup> with his cries resembling those of a wounded bull fleeing the altar (2.223–4). The *incertam ... securim* ('ill-aimed axe', 2.224) suffered by the bull in the simile and its consequent implied survival reinforce the impression of an illegitimate sacrifice.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, as Hardie has observed, Virgil consciously evokes Lucretius' description of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia,<sup>33</sup> explicitly condemned in the source-text and elsewhere as a barbaric act.<sup>34</sup>

The city is sacked when the warriors concealed within the horse open the gates to the Achaean army. Aeneas recalls the doomed Trojan resistance, culminating with the murder of Priam by Achilles' son Pyrrhus. Priam's death is narrated as a climactic set-piece, its

<sup>29</sup> C. Bandera, 'Sacrificial levels in Virgil's *Aeneid*', *Arethusa* 14 (1981), 217–39, at 235–6; R.M. Smith, 'Deception and sacrifice in *Aeneid* 2.1–249', *AJPh* 120 (1999), 503–21.

<sup>30</sup> Caes. *BGall.* 6.16; Cic. *Rep.* 3.15, *Font.* 31, *Pis.* 16, *Flac.* 95–6; Tac. *Ann.* 14.30. S. Farron, 'Aeneas' human sacrifice', *AClass* 28 (1985), 21–33, at 23–4; C.E. Schulz, 'The Romans and ritual murder', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78 (2010), 516–41 discusses how the Romans reconciled this aversion with their own observance of rituals requiring human deaths.

<sup>31</sup> N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 2: A Commentary* (Leiden, 2002), 200–2.

<sup>32</sup> G.S. Aldrete, 'Hammers, axes, bulls, and blood: some practical aspects of Roman animal sacrifice', *JRS* 104 (2014), 28–50 examines the logistics of controlling large bovines at the moment of slaughter, and ideological demands that sacrificial victims should appear compliant.

<sup>33</sup> P.R. Hardie, 'The sacrifice of Iphigeneia: an example of "distribution" of a Lucretian theme in Virgil', *CQ* 34 (1984), 406–12, at 407–8.

<sup>34</sup> Farron (n. 30), 22–3.

significance heightened through being explicitly addressed to Dido,<sup>35</sup> and through Priam's metonymic identification with the city itself. From the outset, Priam's death is already emphatically identified as a corrupted sacrifice: *uidi ... Priamumque per aras | sanguine foedantem quos ipse sacrauerat ignis* ('I saw ... Priam too amid the altars, polluting with his blood the fires he himself had sanctified', 2.502–3). This is reiterated throughout Aeneas' detailed account. The altar and the protection it should have afforded are repeatedly underscored (2.512–14, 2.515–17, 2.523). Priam forsakes the sanctuary of the altar in his anger at witnessing the death of his son Polites (2.533–46), yet Pyrrhus deliberately drags him back *altaria ad ipsa* ('to the very altar stones', 2.550) before killing him.

Aeneas concludes with a reference to the desecration of Priam's corpse: *iacet ingens litore truncus, | auulsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus* ('He lies, a huge trunk on the seashore, a head severed from the shoulders and a body without a name', 2.557–8). The comment is striking for its dislocation from the preceding account of Priam's death (how, for instance, did he end up on the seashore?),<sup>36</sup> and is likely a deliberate echo of Pompey's death at Pelusium.<sup>37</sup> Equally, however, the description also serves to heighten the sacrilegious nature of the scene, linking Priam's death to those of Hector and Deiphobus, whose mutilated ghosts Aeneas encounters (2.270–9, 6.494–9).

The third episode of corrupted sacrifice in the *Aeneid* is Dido's suicide following her abandonment by Aeneas. Dido conceals her true intentions, having her household make preparations for a sacrificial ritual, *quae mihi reddat eum uel eo me soluat amantem* ('to return him to me or release me from my love for him', 4.479). The deception is stressed by Virgil's comment on the unsuspecting Anna: *non tamen Anna nouis praetexere funera sacris | germanam credit* ('Yet Anna does not suspect that her sister disguises her death beneath these strange rituals', 4.500–1). Dido maintains the charade, directing the nurse Barce to fetch Anna: *et pecudes secum et monstrata piacula ducat* ('and may she bring with her the victims and offerings appointed for sacrifice', 4.636). Only on hearing the screams of Dido's handmaidens does Anna realize the truth—that the sacrifice she believed she was preparing was in fact the human sacrifice of her sister: *hoc illud, germana, fuit? me fraude petebas? | hoc rogos iste mihi, hoc ignes araeque parabant?* ('Was this your purpose, sister? Did you assail me with fraud? Was this the meaning of that pyre, the fires and altars?', 4.675–6).

### III. GETA'S SACRIFICIAL ALLUSIONS

The composition of the play demonstrates Geta's awareness of the pseudo-sacrificial associations of Medea's filicide in previous treatments. The filicide is first alluded to at the end of the first choral song (25–51).<sup>38</sup> Medea has announced her intended revenge against Creusa (21–4), and the chorus voice their approval. However, whilst this endorsement is directed at the plotting of Creusa's death, the choral song has the additional effect of foreshadowing the second element of Medea's vengeance. The authoritative version of the myth in the Roman period was that in which Medea

<sup>35</sup> R.J. Sklenář, 'The death of Priam: *Aeneid* 2. 506–558', *Hermes* 118 (1990), 67–75, at 67; Horsfall (n. 31), 391.

<sup>36</sup> A.M. Bowie, 'The death of Priam: allegory and history in the *Aeneid*', *CQ* 40 (1990), 470–81, at 473–4.

<sup>37</sup> Bowie (n. 36), 474–81; Horsfall (n. 31), 417–23.

<sup>38</sup> I use the text of R. Lamacchia (ed.), *Hosidii Getae Medea: Cento Vergilianus* (Leipzig, 1981).

murdered her children after Creusa and Creon, so that reference to one facet of her revenge also suggests the other. Additionally, the chorus conclude their song by urging Medea: *uaginaque eripe ferrum | ferroque auerte dolorem* ('tear your sword from the sheath and with the sword ward off grief', 50–1). As Rondholz notes, line 51 echoes Dido's speech in which she steels herself for suicide by rejecting alternative courses of action: *quin morere, ut merita es, ferroque auerte dolorem* ('Rather die, as you deserve, and ward off sorrow with the steel', 4.547). Dido's conflict is itself modelled on Medea's decision to commit suicide in *Argonautica* Book 3.<sup>39</sup> Both scenes begin with a description of the onset of night (4.522–4, Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.744–6):

nox erat, et placidum carpebant fessa soporem  
 corpora per terras, siluaeque et saeua quierant  
 aequora, cum medio uoluntur sidera lapsu

It was night, and weary animals over the earth were tasting peaceful slumber, and the woods and wild seas had quietened, when the stars roll in the middle of their gliding course

νύξ μὲν ἔπειτ' ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἄγεν κνέφας· οἱ δ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ  
 ναυτίλοι εἰς Ἑλίκην τε καὶ ἀστέρας Ὠρίωνος  
 ἔδρακον ἐκ νεῶν

Then night was drawing darkness over the earth, and the sailors on the ocean gazed towards Helice and the stars of Orion

Yet both heroines endure sleepless torment: *at non infelix animi Phoenissa, neque umquam | soluitur in somnos* ... ('But not so the Phoenician queen, wretched at heart, she never sinks into sleep', 4.529–31); ἀλλὰ μάλ' οὐ Μήδειαν ἐπὶ γλυκερὸς λάβειν ὕπνος ... ('But by no means had sweet sleep taken Medea', 3.751). They each consider and dismiss alternative courses of action (*Aen.* 4.534–52, *Argon.* 3.766–801), concluding that suicide is their only recourse.

Internally, then, the chorus' reference to the sword may be interpreted as inciting either violence against Creon and Creusa or suicide owing to the Apollonian allusion. However, readers familiar with the myth know that Medea will use the sword not on herself, nor on Creon and Creusa (whom she kills with witchcraft), but on her children.<sup>40</sup> For the external audience, therefore, the chorus' final exhortation alludes pointedly to Medea's filicide. In this first foreshadowing, the act is imbued with sacrificial associations through the verses' primary contexts. Line 50 is extracted from the instructions of the Sibyl immediately following Aeneas' sacrifice to Hecate at the gate of Hades: *tuque invade uiam, uaginaque eripe ferrum: | nunc animis opus, Aenea, nunc pectore firmo* ('And you, Aeneas, be on your way, and tear your sword from the sheath: now you need courage, and a firm mind', 6.260). Line 51, as already noted, belongs to Dido's monologue as she resolves to commit her quasi-sacrificial suicide (4.547).

The reader's anticipation of Medea's revenge is exploited further in subsequent scenes. Immediately following the first choral song, Medea is confronted by Creon and ordered to leave his kingdom (52–66). After failing to dissuade Creon from marrying his daughter to Jason (67–76), Medea begs leave to remain in Corinth until winter is past (77–86); Creon, though wary, grants her one night (87–103). Medea

<sup>39</sup> Rondholz (n. 1), 115.

<sup>40</sup> Rondholz (n. 1), 115.

echoes Sinon's lying tale as she entreats Creon: *et nos aliquod nomenque decusque | gessimus* ('I, too, once had some name and honour': 82–3 < *Aen.* 2.89–90). The reader knows from earlier treatments that it is this grace period which enables Medea to complete her vengeance;<sup>41</sup> the allusion to Sinon's tale highlights the deceit of her plea for clemency and foreshadows the sacrilegious form her revenge will take.

Geta also presages Medea's revenge during her later encounter with Jason (181–283). The opening of Medea's speech to Jason includes the half-line *tibi ducitur uxor* ('a new wife is brought to you': 201b < *Ecl.* 8.29), with the source-poem featuring Medea's filicide as a mythic exemplar of cruelty inspired by love: *saeuus amor docuit natorum sanguine matrem | commaculare manus* ('savage love taught a mother to foul her hands with her children's blood', *Ecl.* 8.47–8).<sup>42</sup> As Rondholz notes, Jason invokes this exemplar more explicitly in reference to Medea's murder of her brother Apsyrtus (263a < *Ecl.* 8.48).<sup>43</sup> As well as foreshadowing Medea's imminent vengeance, this allusion also draws a firm connection between Medea's fratricide and filicide as two pseudo-sacrificial murders; consequently, references to the former function also as implicit references to the latter.

Medea has already made two such references: *obieci caput, id sperans fore munus amanti* ('I sacrificed one life, hoping that it would be a gift for my lover', 221); *an fratris miseri letum ut crudele uideres?* ('or so that you could watch my miserable brother's cruel death?', 260). A further allusion follows after Jason departs, as Medea laments: *quid labor aut benefacta iuuant? mea tristia facta | fessa iacent* ('What use are my toils and benefactions? My sorry deeds lie worn out', 276). The *tristia facta* refer to the actions she took to aid Jason, including the murder of Apsyrtus; accordingly, the verse heralds the approaching filicide. Of additional significance is the provenance of the expression—the words are borrowed from Pyrrhus as he murders Priam at the altar (*Aen.* 2.547–9):

referes ergo haec et nuntius ibis  
Pelidae genitori; illi mea tristia facta  
degeneremque Neoptoleum narrare memento.

Then you will go as a messenger and bring this news to my father, Peleus' son; remember to tell him of my sorry deeds, and his degenerate Neoptolemus.

Thus Medea's filicide is again prospectively associated with an act of pseudo-sacrificial violence in the *Aeneid*.

The immediate build-up to, and completion of, the filicide is recounted in lines 374–407 and revisited in the play's final act (438–61), when Medea reveals the full extent of her revenge to Jason before departing Corinth. In both sections, the illegitimacy of Medea's sacrifice is conveyed through allusion to several episodes of pseudo-sacrificial or sacrilegious killing in the *Aeneid*. The most prominent is Dido's suicide, a source for seven of the thirty-three verses (21 per cent) in the filicide scene itself. As previously noted, Aeneas' relationship with Dido in *Aeneid* Book 4 is mined extensively throughout Geta's play; this section, however, features a particular concentration of verses taken from Dido's self-immolation.

<sup>41</sup> Rondholz (n. 1), 117–18, who notes that Medea's deceit is also conveyed through allusions to the speech of Drances in *Aeneid* Book 11, in which he opposes Turnus out of personal envy.

<sup>42</sup> Rondholz (n. 1), 126.

<sup>43</sup> Rondholz (n. 1), 128.



Medea's pseudo-sacrificial habit is foregrounded at the opening of the filicide scene, as she celebrates the murder of Creusa: *hoc habet, haec melior magnis data uictima diuis* ('So it goes, this nobler victim has been given to the mighty gods': 374 < *Aen.* 12.296). The words are those of Messapus as he kills Aulestes on an altar, after the truce between Rutulians and Trojans is broken; as Leigh notes, Aulestes' death may be seen as a substitution sacrifice for Turnus, echoing Entellus' earlier substitution of a bull for Dares, whom he has defeated in a boxing match: *hanc tibi, Eryx, meliorem animam pro morte Daretis | persoluo* ('This better life I offer you, Eryx, instead of the death of Dares', 5.483–4).<sup>44</sup> Then, as Medea prepares for her final act of vengeance, Geta uses parts of two consecutive verses in which Dido tells Anna to prepare a sacrificial pyre: *tu secreta pyram ... | erige* ('You, ... | secretly raise a pyre': 376a–377a < *Aen.* 4.494–5). Additionally, he recycles three consecutive verses from Dido's instructions to Barce: *tuque ipsa pia tege tempora uitta* ('and cover your temples with a pious ribbon': 377b < *Aen.* 4.637); *sacra Ioui Stygio, quae rite incepta parauit, | perficere est animus finemque imponere curis* ('To complete the rites for Stygian Jove, which I have duly prepared and begun, my mind is set, and to put an end to my cares': 379–80 < *Aen.* 4.638–9). The theme of Dido's death is also echoed during the filicide itself; after Medea has killed the first child, the second pleads for mercy (Geta, *Medea* 399–402):

nec te noster amor pietas nec mitigat ulla,  
 nec uenit in mentem natorum sanguine matrem  
 commaculare manus? nostri tibi cura recessit  
 et matri praereptus amor?

Does not our love or any sense of duty soften you, does it not enter your mind that with the blood of her children a mother is staining her hands? Has your love for us vanished, and has love been snatched away from our mother?

Here, Geta uses verses from earlier in *Aeneid* Book 4 (399a < *Aen.* 4.307; 400a < 4.39). With Dido's suicide already foregrounded in the scene, these allusions take on additional significance by invoking the chain of events that led Dido to this end. In the first, Dido begs Aeneas not to leave: *nec te noster amor, nec te data dextera quondam, | nec moritura tenet crudeli funere Dido?* ('Does not our love restrain you, nor your right hand once pledged, nor Dido soon to die a cruel death?', 4.307–8). In the second, Anna urges Dido to surrender to her feelings for Aeneas and thus to secure his protection, not knowing the tragic consequences of her advice: *nec uenit in mentem, quorum consederis aruis? | hinc Gaetulae urbes, genus insuperabile bello ...* ('Does it not enter your mind in whose lands you have settled? Here are the cities of the Gaetulians, a race unconquerable in war', 4.39–40). Finally, Medea's son cements the theme of corrupted sacrifice by concluding his appeal with words from Dido's ritual preparations for her death (402 < *Aen.* 4.516).

The concentration of verses alluding to Dido's suicide at the beginning of Geta's filicide scene primes the reader for the pseudo-sacrificial connotations of subsequent verses. The killing of Priam is echoed (with slight alteration) as the first child laments his imminent death: *hostis amare, quid increpitas mea tristia fata?* ('Bitter enemy, why do you agitate my wretched fate?': 396 < *Aen.* 2.548 [*fata* for *facta*]); in Virgil, these words are addressed to Priam by Pyrrhus himself, ironically acknowledging his own

<sup>44</sup> Leigh (n. 24), 130–1.

depravity. The Sinon episode is also evoked as Medea rejects the entreaties of her sons: *sanguine quaerendi reditus* ('the return must be sought with blood': 398 < *Aen.* 2.118). The verse in its original context is rich with pseudo-sacrificial connotations, taken from the falsely reported utterance of the prophet Calchas before he (allegedly) illegitimately selected Sinon as the required victim. In Geta's text, it gains additional prominence as a hypometric verse—one of only 7 such in the play's 364 spoken verses.<sup>45</sup>

The same allusive strategy is operative in the play's final scene, in which Jason learns of Medea's revenge. On hearing of Creusa's death from Medea's witchcraft, Jason laments in words originally spoken by Aeneas to Dido's ghost: *funeris heu tibi causa fui* ('Alas, I was the cause of your death': 437a < *Aen.* 6.458); Creusa's death is thus aligned with Dido's pseudo-sacrificial suicide. Medea's revelation that she has also killed Jason's sons contains a twofold allusion to unnatural sacrifice. She instructs Jason: *conde sepulchro | corpora natorum* ('bury your sons' bodies in a tomb', 338–9). The verse fragment *corpora natorum* is situationally appropriate, but additionally evokes two thematically significant scenes from the *Aeneid*—first the corrupted sacrifice of Laocoön and his sons (2.214), and later the tribute of human victims demanded by Minos from Athens (6.22). Priam's death too is again referenced when Jason learns of the murder of his sons, as he rebukes Medea using Priam's own words to Pyrrhus: *patrios foedasti funere uultus?* ('Did you defile a father's face with death?': 445b < *Aen.* 2.539).

## CONCLUSION

The popularity of the cento in late Latin poetry may be seen as a natural development of a long-standing aesthetic preoccupation with allusion and intertextuality on the part of Roman authors. Far from being an exercise in passive mimicry, Hosidius Geta's *Medea* exemplifies the rich allusive potential inherent in the form. Geta's treatment of the motif of corrupted sacrifice shows him to be highly attuned both to the symbolism of Medea's filicide in the broader mythic tradition and to the original contexts of the Virgilian verses he recycles. The filicide is repeatedly associated with prominent episodes in the *Aeneid* in which deaths are cast in terms of corrupted sacrifice: Sinon's false tale of victimhood and the death of Laocoön; the killing of Priam at the altar; and the self-immolation of Dido. These pseudo-sacrificial allusions are an important facet of Geta's characterization of a deeply ambivalent heroine. As Rondholz notes, many of Geta's intertexts are calculated to call into question the extent of Medea's agency in the face of irresistible forces;<sup>46</sup> however, the play does not straightforwardly absolve Medea of responsibility for her crime. By evoking instances of corrupted sacrifice from the *Aeneid* at key junctures, Geta foregrounds the brutality and sacrilege of Medea's filicide, and the illegitimacy of her claim to sacrificial authority.

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<sup>45</sup> For discussion of Geta's metre, see R. Lamacchia, 'Metro e ritmo nella *Medea* di Osidio Geta', *Stud. Ital.* 30 (1958), 175–206; Rondholz (n. 1), 91–5. Geta differentiates between spoken passages and choral song, using hexameter lines for the former and paroemiacs for the latter. Whilst some spoken verses are not perfect hexameters where Geta has prioritized content over scansion, his imperfect hexameters none the less approximate the hexameter line, making the hypometric verses conspicuous.

<sup>46</sup> Rondholz (n. 1), 142–3.