

From Stage to Stone: Female Friendship in Senecan Drama and Ancient Art

This paper builds upon a previous paper on female friendships in Seneca's *Medea*, *Phaedra*, and *Troades*, now focusing on how these women are represented in ancient art. My previous paper included two parts. First, I examined how Seneca's tragic women align with or deviate from ideals of friendship proposed by Cicero and Seneca the Younger. Second, I assessed the extent to which Seneca's dialogues align with the overarching models of ancient friendship proposed by three scholars (Konstan, 1997; Williams, 2012; Sisk, 2013).

I now compare Seneca's portrayal of these women to Euripides' and Ovid's portrayals, as Seneca's tragedy was most influenced by both (Tarrant, 1978, p. 215). Since Tarrant suggests that Seneca's *Medea* was likely heavily influenced by Ovid's lost *Medea*, I also examine the nurses in other works by Ovid to infer how he might have portrayed the nurse in his *Medea*. For instance, the *Metamorphoses* story of Myrrha, where a nurse aids a young woman in pursuing an incestuous relationship, provides a parallel. This comparison is essential for art analysis because it is unclear which version of the tragedy art depicts.

I then extend my analysis to the realm of classical art. Consulting the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (1981-2009), I identify classical art pieces—classicism being defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as ending in the 5th century AD (Deng, 2024)—that depict key relationships from the three plays: Phaedra and her nurse, Medea and her nurse, and Andromache and Hecuba. Although I do not restrict my study to specific art forms, I find that vases and sarcophagi are especially prevalent. Vase art doesn't rely on a specific version of the myth; it gains depth from the viewer's familiarity with the overall narrative (Taplin, 2007, p.25). Further, the myths depicted on sarcophagi are significantly shaped by the emotions of their creators, which not only affects how the myths are represented but also aims to evoke specific feelings in the viewer (Rystedt, 2023, p. 159).

I examine these artworks to analyze what elements such as positioning, scale, and posture reveal about the dynamics of these relationships. I then assess whether the artistic representations align with the character relationships as conveyed in the texts.

According to Marice Rose, the status of slaves in relation to their mistresses is often indicated by the smaller scale of the slave and their positioning relative to the mistress (2008, p. 43). Despite the prevalence of visual art on Medea, few works prominently highlight her relationship with the nurse. However, these select works adhere to Rose's observation, as the nurse is typically positioned below Medea.

In contrast, many depictions of Phaedra emphasize her relationship with her nurse. In several instances, Phaedra and her nurse are depicted at the same scale and positioned similarly, reinforcing my earlier argument that, unlike Medea's utilitarian bond with her nurse, Phaedra's relationship with her nurse was more akin to friendship. To further support the claim that Phaedra and her nurse are portrayed in ways uncommon for mistresses and their slaves, I include examples of classical art showing other mistresses and their slaves as a control group.

Regarding visual representations of Hecuba and Andromache in *Troades*, the two characters frequently appear together in scenes of grief, often positioned close to each other. This supports my textual findings that the fall of Troy and its accompanying suffering fostered a growing friendship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

This exploration strengthens my argument by showing that these characters' relationships were portrayed in classical art in ways that align with their literary portrayals. The recognizable depiction of non-friendship relationships, such as that of utilitarian Medea and her nurse, reinforces the idea that dynamics of relationships were reliably captured in artistic representations. This, in turn, enhances our confidence in asserting that relationships like the one between Phaedra and her nurse—where elements of friendship are evident in the texts—are also reflected in the art.

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