



Euripides: Medea. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics. Ed. Donald J. Mastrorarde. Cambridge University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-521-64365-1. \$70.00 (hb). 0-521-64386-4. \$26.00 (pb). Pp. 442.

Reviewed by Thalia Papadopoulou
University of Ioannina
thaliap@cc.uoi.gr

Euripides' *Medea* is one of the most famous, most influential as well as most controversial Greek tragedies, and it was a great fortune that in the course of the same year two important studies of the play appeared, each with its own distinctive scope, to enrich our understanding of it: Mastrorarde's book, the first commentary on a Euripidean play in the 'Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics' series, and Allan's Duckworth companion (William Allan, *Euripides: Medea*. London: Duckworth, 2002).

The need for an up-to-date edition and commentary now that Page's long-established book is quite old, is explained by Mastrorarde by the fact that despite the lasting value of Page's work, in some respects his book is 'outmoded, partly because of changes in critical approaches, and partly because of new evidence (papyri and vase paintings) and new work on the textual tradition.' (viii).

The aim, scope and intended readership of Mastrorarde's book are clearly stated in the preface: 'The goal of this commentary is to make the play accessible in all its complication and sophistication to present-day students. It aims to provide, on the one hand, the linguistic and technical information that will support the task of translation and equip the student to appreciate the formal and artistic devices of Greek tragedy: hence, the sections Language and Style, and Prosody and Metre that follow the General Introduction. On the other hand, it is equally important to give an introduction to the major interpretive problems, with reference to some further discussions (mostly in English), and this purpose is addressed both in the Introduction and in the Commentary itself' (vii).

The scope of the book is ambitious in that, apart from offering a learned approach to the play for specialists, it also aims at making the play accessible to students who read Greek tragedy for the first time. For those familiar with Mastronarde's work in general, it is easy to see that in this commentary he combines his familiar territory of commentary-writing (D.J. Mastronarde, *Euripides: Phoenissae*. Cambridge 1994) with his interest in the teaching of Greek grammar (D.J. Mastronarde, *Introduction to Attic Greek*. Berkeley 1993). The section on the structural elements of Greek tragedy, which follows the General Introduction, is a useful guide for every student who comes to tragedy for the first time. Similarly, in the next sections on language and style and on prosody and metre, most examples are chosen from *Medea* but may also be read independently. The commentary too abounds in linguistic information for inexperienced students and Mastronarde consistently refers the reader back to the corresponding sections for theoretical discussion. The interest in providing students with a lot of linguistic instruction throughout accounts for the length of the volume, which is unusual for the series. It is a novelty which will certainly be appreciated by students but at the same time what appears as a strength may also become a weakness, that is, the detailed explanation of grammar in the commentary can be wearying for advanced readers.

In the General Introduction Mastronarde divides his material conveniently into sections and his discussion is knowledgeable, lucid and insightful throughout. Section 1 gives a concise overview of Euripides' life and works; Mastronarde also addresses the question of *Medea*'s 'failure' in the competition by stressing the parameters determining the success or not in dramatic contests (5). Section 2, which is the longest, focuses on the structure, themes and problems of the play. Mastronarde is particularly successful in arranging all major issues under separate headings, selecting helpful bibliography and giving further insight. He contextualizes *Medea* as a revenge-play and examines the complexities in Medea's motivations and decisions. What constantly emerges from Mastronarde's discussion is the idea that the very richness of the play argues against any ready-at-hand and one-sided reading.

He also examines Medea's 'otherness' in her tripartite role as barbarian, witch and woman. This is a much-discussed topic and Mastronarde's own approach is judicious and balanced. With regard to ethnicity, he shows the varieties and ironies in the Greek-foreign contrast and stresses that the exaggeration in the motif of Medea's foreignness is post-Euripidean. As to Medea as witch he shows that this motif too is intensified by later authors. To mention an example of Mastronarde's sensitive reading here: the fact that no chance is given to Medea to anoint the gifts after this is announced at 789 is generally attributed to Euripides' carelessness or indifference (Mastronarde on 789; cf. 'oversight' in Page *ad loc.*); but the fact

that such an act is thereafter neither shown nor narrated is also evaluated in terms of its dramatic effect, that is, as one of the factors which show that the supernatural element is downplayed before the end of the drama (25; cf. Mastronarde on 397). As to Medea's status as woman in regard to the ideology of classical Athens, Mastronarde shows the inherent complexity in terms of audience reception, the multiplicity of perspectives and the impossibility of absolute certainty. The significance of Greek institutions such as marriage, oath, supplication and the code of reciprocity becomes the object of investigation, as well as the role of the divine in relation to individual responsibility. Due attention is given to the use of figurative language and all types of imagery in the play.

Section 3 is devoted to production, a topic which is among Mastronarde's fields of expertise (cf. D.J. Mastronarde, *Contact and discontinuity. Some conventions of speech and action on the Greek tragic stage*. Berkeley 1979 and D.J. Mastronarde, 'Actors on high: the skene roof, the crane, and the gods in Attic drama', *Classical Antiquity* 9: 247-94). It gives a brief introduction to the topic and analyzes several of its aspects with regard to *Medea*, from mechanical devices to Medea's costume and mask. Contrary to the view that Medea's 'oriental' dress marks her foreignness or 'otherness', Mastronarde suggests, more cautiously, that it may signify the otherness of the heroic world in general (41), while he argues in favour of a white-skinned, and not dark-skinned, mask for Medea.

Section 4 focuses on the Medea-myth in relation to the Euripidean play. It gives a detailed account of both the background and the dramatic events and aims at establishing the innovations of the play. The issue of the exact relation of Neophron's *Medea* to the Euripidean play is examined in Section 5, and Mastronarde concludes by considering Neophron's play as most probably post-Euripidean.

Section 6, 'Medea after Euripides and the influence of his *Medea*' is particularly welcome, as the *Nachleben* of plays is a topic usually ignored in commentaries. Mastronarde refers to tragic and comic treatments of the myth, the iconographic tradition, and concludes with a brief sketch of the various adaptations of Medea since the Renaissance, in stage-drama, opera, film, novel, and the visual arts (cf. ch. 5, entitled 'Multi-Medea', in W. Allan's companion to *Medea*).

Section 7 focuses on the text of this new edition and states the exact places where it differs from the Oxford Classical Text of James Diggle. This section also gives an overview of the history of the transmission of dramatic texts in an engaging manner which will certainly excite students' interest in this topic.

An Appendix discusses the authenticity of *Medea* 1056-80 and the vexing issue of the meaning of 1078-80. Mastronarde deletes 1062-3 and offers two possible interpretations of 1079. The select

bibliography at the end is good, while two detailed indexes conclude this excellently produced book.

There is a constant and direct correspondence between issues examined in the General Introduction and the remarks made in the commentary. A distinctive feature of the commentary is the emphasis on issues related to stagecraft. Corresponding to the section on 'production', the commentary abounds in information about the action on stage, consistently given in separate paragraphs entitled 'Action' (first on 46), along with an evaluation of the implications in terms of dramatic effect (e.g. Mastronarde on 1293, whether Jason enters alone or accompanied). At 324-51 (the supplication of Creon), Mastronarde carefully suggests at least two ways to stage the passage, while at 1314-15 he revises what he had argued in Mastronarde 1990 (that Jason enters with attendants) and now suggests that Jason comes alone. Mastronarde's interest in *Medea* as a play which is staged and not only read can thus range from his attempt to establish the features of Medea's chariot (on 1317) to the difference that the tone of voice may have made in the utterance of a pronoun (on 23).

Each ode is followed by full metrical analysis, where the reader is often referred back to the Section on Prosody and Metre for more details. Apart from topics related to stagecraft, acute and insightful comments are made with reference to dramatic technique, the use of rhetoric (esp. Medea's manipulative language), the vocabulary and every other aspect of interpretation. E.g. the language of civil strife at 15, the legal overtone at 157, the evocation of the egalitarian ethos of Athenian democracy at 216, or the civic connotation at 438. What at first glance seems to be merely awkward grammar, that is, the use by Medea of the active voice, *gamousa*, at 606, for herself (noted by the ancient scholiast) turns out to be an apt way by which Medea sarcastically inverts gender relations. The commentary is also open to relatively modern trends such as the reading of a meta-theatrical dimension in some passages (e.g. on 190-204, 546) or the reading of mystic connotations elsewhere (initiation to Eleusinian mysteries on 482).

Overall, the book admirably fulfils its goals as stated in the preface (vii). It is an extremely wide-ranging, learned, lucid and elegantly-written volume, which offers a comprehensive treatment of *Medea*. Mastronarde has produced an exemplary edition and commentary, an impressive and valuable book for scholars and students alike.