

EURIPIDES' MEDEA AND PERFORMANCE

EWANS (M.) (trans.) *Euripides' Medea. Translation and Theatrical Commentary*. Pp. x + 88, ill. London and New York: Routledge, 2022. Paper, £12.99, US\$16.95 (Cased, £39.99, US\$54.95). ISBN: 978-1-03-210543-7 (978-1-03-210545-1 hbk).

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With this slender volume Euripides' *Medea* becomes the latest ancient drama to receive E.'s familiar treatment: an 'accurate and actable' (p. vii) translation with a brief introduction and accompanying theatrical commentary.¹ E., who directs performances testing his translations before publishing them, focuses primarily on the needs of modern performance, with significant attention also given to describing the ancient performance conditions.

A brief introduction offers cogent thoughts on the *Medea* and Greek values (pp. 1–6), the figures of Medea and Jason (pp. 6–9), E.'s philosophy and practice of translation (pp. 9–12); the play's original performance conditions (pp. 12–14) and (very briefly) '*Medea* today' (p. 14). The discussion of values emphasises gender and sexual dynamics, and locates a good deal of the play's essential interest in Euripides' efforts to encourage his audience to see the Athenian male-dominated society from a woman's perspective. For E. the play would have caused uneasiness and discomfort to both male and female audiences: to the male audience by presenting a woman who triumphs over men, yet does so by adhering to Greek values that the male audience would admire; to the female audience by eliciting their sympathy when Medea talks about the worth of women and their disapproval when she destroys her own children (pp. 5–6). To reconcile Medea's sympathetic portrayal at the beginning of the play with the savageness of her children's murder, E. sees a development in her character from weak to strong and a progressive change in 'the perspective from which the Athenian audience was made to view her' (p. 5).

While discussing the characters of Medea and Jason, E. has a production team in mind and focuses on elements pertinent to directorial decisions. Medea operates in two modes, deceptive and sincere, so the actor playing Medea must find a way to differentiate between them (pp. 7–8). Similarly, a director's choices will be crucial in shaping audiences' attitudes towards Jason who displays both sophistic argumentation and naivety (pp. 8–9).

E.'s discussion of the original conditions of performance is particularly successful. He compares the spatial dynamics of the ancient outdoor theatre to a modern proscenium arch stage, an end-on theatre, as he calls it (pp. 12–14). Of special interest is the concentration of action in ancient performances in the rear part of the orchestra, where acoustics and visibility were best. Also helpful is E.'s discussion of metre and the structure of choral odes (p. 11). Though not replicable in a modern performance, these elements can be brought out creatively: for instance, by effects of sound and lighting.

The introduction closes by suggesting themes that make the play resonate with audiences to this day: the integration of immigrants in society, the place of women in a male-dominated society and filicide. E. states that 'up to 50% of all children who are

¹E.'s previous commentaries have covered all surviving plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, as well as six of Aristophanes' comedies: *Aeschylus: Oresteia* (1995), *Aeschylus: Suppliants and Other Dramas* (1996), *Sophocles: Four Dramas of Maturity* (1999, with G. Ley and G. McCart), *Sophocles: Three Dramas of Old Age* (2000, with G. Ley and G. McCart), *Aristophanes: Lysistrata, the Women's Festival and Frogs* (2010), *Aristophanes: Acharnians, Knights and Peace* (2012).

murdered are killed by one of their parents' (p. 14), a shocking as well as slippery statistic (what should we make of 'up to?') that could have been discussed further.

In embarking on the challenging task of creating another translation of Euripides' *Medea*, E. followed two main principles: (1) to remain as faithful as possible to the original text and (2) to create a version that is actable, making it both appealing and accessible to a modern audience (pp. 9–10). E. succeeds in this, producing a translation that is clear, concise and to the point. On the one hand he maintains the brevity of the Greek, its occasional ambiguity and often even the grammatical construction. For example, the Greek construction of *συνήδομαι* + dative is preserved at 136–7, when the chorus exclaims 'I do not rejoice | at suffering in this home' (cf. O. Taplin [2013]: 'The sufferings of this household cause | me pain'), and brevity is maintained when Medea reveals her resolution: 'I know how great a crime I'm going to commit, | but anger has control over my plans – | anger, which is the greatest cause of human pain' (1078–80). Compare Taplin: 'I realize what evil things I am about to do, | but it's my anger dominates my resolution – anger, | the cause of all the greatest troubles for humanity'. Both E. and Taplin fit their work to the original line numbering, but E. regularly uses fewer syllables, partly by avoiding Latinate roots. Reading both aloud makes clear the difference for an actor. D. Arnson Svarlien (2008) translates 'I know that I am working up my nerve for overwhelming evil, yet my spirit | is stronger than my mind's deliberations: | this is the source of mortals' deepest grief'. On the other hand, E. does not shy away from interpreting, to elucidate the meaning of particular passages. Thus, in Medea's exposition of women's unjust treatment E. makes it clear that the salience of women's inability to 'deny' (*ἀνήνασθαι*) their husbands is sexual: women 'can't refuse a husband's right to sex' (237).

A theatrical commentary aimed at assisting modern productions follows the translation (pp. 60–79). This section will be useful to anyone seeking to adapt ancient spatial dynamics to a modern, small end-on theatre. E. moves through scene by scene, giving detailed comments on blocking and discussing directorial decisions at the play's key moments: Medea's plea to the women in her first speech, the formal agon between Jason and Medea, Medea's supplication to Aegeus and their taking of oaths, her speech persuading Jason to send gifts to the princess, her divided-self speech, the 'virtuoso' performance required by the messenger who narrates the deaths of the princess and Creon, the murder of the children and the finale. Here, E. offers his own interpretation – he thinks the audience should leave disturbed, unsure about their feelings towards both Medea and Jason (p. 79) –, but his approach invites directors to make their own choices too. His comments on blocking are sometimes too specific, but I take them as suggestions that aim at facilitating directors rather than restraining them.

I would have liked to see a discussion of how the Aegeus scene may help Medea form her plans. In this scene Medea is confronted with the high value fathers place on sons (cf. C. Segal 1996), and it has been plausibly argued that this helps motivate her decision to kill her children. A discussion about how the performance might communicate Medea's change of plans would have been welcome.

One drawback of the book is the occasional appearance of bold generalisations without argumentation or acknowledgement of counter views: for example 'The males in the audience could not condemn Medea at the end, as they would undoubtedly want to, because they could not deny that she possesses what mattered in their value system – power and success' (p. 6). The claim is interesting, but not the only possibility. In the theatrical commentary E. also implies that murders did not take place on the Greek stage because of stagecraft limitations (p. 76). One can think of many more reasons for this convention, and more elaborate discussion on the topic could be of use to contemporary directors of the play.

I would highly recommend this book both for students on Classics and theatre courses and for use in production. Preferences for *Medea* translations will vary, but E.'s emphasis on actability and clarity ensures his work a special place among the options. The accompanying notes are useful and insightful for anyone interested in performance questions. Given the focus on brevity, the commentary will not, of course, replace more extensive treatments of the play such as C. Segal (1996), H.P. Foley (2001), W. Allan (2002), D.J. Mastrorarde (2002), P.E. Easterling (2003) and L. Swift (2016), to name a few.

College Year in Athens

NINA PAPATHANASOPOULOU
nina.papath@cyathens.org

THE ODES OF EURIPIDES' *SUPPLICES*

GIANNINI (P.) (ed.) *Euripide: Supplici. I Canti*. (I Canti del Teatro Greco 10.) Pp. 135, pls. Pisa and Rome: Fabrizio Serra Editore, 2021. Paper, €44. ISBN: 978-88-3315-349-0.

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This book provides an edition of the lyrical sections of Euripides' *Supplices* based on the manuscript colometrical division of the text. G.'s methodology will not be immediately apparent to readers unfamiliar with the series or with the body of scholarship that, in the last decades, has been arguing and elaborating on the assumption that the MSS colometry might reflect the original arrangement of the lyrics. No critical assessment of such theoretical framework is provided, nor does G. refer to scholarly work arguing for or against it (see e.g. the points of method in G. Galvani, *Eschilo: Coefore. I canti* [2015], pp. 13–21, and the contrary judgement of L. Battezzato, *QUCC* [2008], 137–58).

G.'s edition is based not only on **L** (Laur. plut. 32.2), which the scholarly consensus regards as *codex unicus* for Euripides' 'alphabetic' plays, but also on **P** (Vat. Pal. 287), examined respectively in 'digitised colour photographs' and Spranger's facsimile. (To the extent I judged necessary, I checked G.'s readings against the reproductions made available online by the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana and the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, and on other collations, mainly, N. Rosso's UPO dissertation, *La colometria ... delle Supplici di Euripide* [2015].) Although the view that for the alphabetic plays **P** is not a (mere) *codex descriptus* from **L** has recently gained supporters within the Italian academy, G.'s position seems to rely on an *a priori* assumption: none of the divergences between **P** and **L** listed on pp. 21–2 or recorded in the apparatus is a separative error, nor does their cumulative weight seem appreciable; as for colometry and strophic arrangement, as ascertained by G., **P** substantially reproduces the original facies of **L**. As for Triclinius' interventions on **L**, G. dismisses Zuntz's distinction between three phases of revision according to the ink colour (Tr^{-3} ; only Tr^1 would find its way into **P**). Attaching to it a descriptive rather than a chronological meaning, G. implicitly opens the possibility that not only Tr^1 , but also $\text{Tr}^{2/3}$ might depend on the lost antigraph. Nevertheless, whatever their weight may be, the examples of agreement of **P** and $\text{Tr}^{2/3}$ against **L** listed on p. 22 turn out to be oversights: 284 (σοῖσι<ν> is due to **P**²= Diggle's p, not **P**); 609 (ἀμφιβαίνει was already in **L**^{ac}); 617 (**L**^{ac} [G. reports πάντα]: the erasure probably hides two letters