

more complex understanding of how human identity has often been defined through the dramatisation and normalisation of a traumatic past (p. 7).

University of Connecticut, Storrs

SARAH WINTER
sarah.winter@uconn.edu

THE MEDEA

LUSCHNIG (C.A.E.) *Granddaughter of the Sun. A Study of Euripides' Medea.* (*Mnemosyne Supplementum* 286.) Pp. xii + 219. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007. Cased, €99, US\$139. ISBN: 978-90-04-16059.

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Euripides' *Medea* has received much scholarly attention over the past ten years. In addition to D. Mastronarde's splendid commentary (Cambridge, 2002), we are now equipped with a fine introduction by W. Allan (Duckworth, 2002) and a new translation by M. Collier and G. Machemer (Oxford, 2006). Building on these works, the new monograph by L. offers an interpretation of the play that focusses on Medea's character, emphasises her humanity, stresses the politically and socially subversive implications of her revenge, and describes her as a political hero.

The book has a preface, an introduction, seven chapters, an afterword, a remarkably rich bibliography, and two indexes. The first part responds to critics who, along with Page in his 1938 commentary, have emphasised Medea's otherness, stressed the monstrosity of the filicide, and tied it to Medea's identity as barbarian, witch and woman. By contrast, L. sees Medea as a mixture of multiple essences – that is, among other things, a human being – able to arouse the sympathy of the audience. The argument about Medea's humanity is supported in four chapters that are in effect running commentaries on major scenes of the play. Chapter 1 focusses on the prologue, especially the fleeting image offered by the Nurse (*Med.* 10–15) of a not-so-distant past when Medea played the role of ideal woman in Corinth and perfect wife for Jason. Chapter 2 analyses the *agôn*, exposes Jason's selfishness and opportunism, and emphasises the legitimacy of Medea's position. Chapter 3 analyses the mixture of essences that Medea becomes in the final scene, when she is at once divine, monstrous and elemental, but also human. Chapter 4 stresses the pain, emotional strain and agony that Medea experiences in the monologue that leads to her decision to kill the children. As a formerly perfect wife, a woman wronged by her husband, and a mother grieving for her children, L. argues, Euripides' *Medea* is a human being with whom the audience can at least partly empathise: 'Her alterity does not frighten us as much as her familiarity does ... The story of Medea itself becomes our protection from the Medea within us, if not from the Medea among us' (p. 83).

This idea leads to L.'s second main thesis, that Medea's revenge challenges the political inertia and social inequities of Creon's Corinth, thus casting her as a 'political hero' (p. xi). Chapter 5 analyses Medea's revenge as a political response to Creon's tyranny that contrasts with the apathy of the Corinthian citizens. Chapter 6 stresses the socially subversive implications of the plot, the unusual prominence of the

Nurse (a female slave), and Medea's evolution from powerlessness – as both a woman devoid of male protection and a potential exile – to full control over her and others' life. Taking the issue of power to a metapoetic level, Chapter 7 analyses Medea as a figure of the dramaturge who, like him, takes control of the myth and offers a new version of the story. In L.'s interpretation, the play offers an experiment in the possibility that a marginal figure excluded from patriarchal order has the will and power to act on her resentment: 'Can she [Medea] (or her creator) also be hinting that the humanity of those denied a voice, denied the right to say no, is potentially explosive enough to destroy the false and fantastic structure that excludes them?' (p. 174)

L.'s methodology relies on close reading. Of particular interest are her attention to word order and her sensitivity to 'pictorial syntax' (by which she refers to the relation between word order and meaning). Chapter 3 on the *agôn* is a case in point. In his 1996 book *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy*, p. 160, C. Gill contrasts Jason's attempt to separate their lives with Medea's emphasis on their interconnectedness. Applying that insight to the verbal and pronominal syntax of Medea and Jason's competing speeches, L. perceptively demonstrates the inherent contradiction of Jason's rhetoric. In particular, she shows that the syntax of his speech demonstrates the entanglement of his and Medea's lives at the very moment when he attempts to separate them. In addition to shedding light on Euripides' *Medea*, such analyses could contribute useful data to studies on the semantics and pragmatics of word order of the kind performed by H. Dik.

While I generally agree with L.'s argument about the subversive implications of Medea's revenge, I believe that her description of Medea (or Euripides) as a 'political hero' needs to be qualified. Tied to the idea of audience sympathy, the phrase strikes me as a description of contemporary responses to Euripides' play exemplified in dramatic productions (e.g. D. Warner's) or literature (e.g. C. Wolf's *Medea*). Yet those positive reactions to Medea's empowerment cannot be dissociated from the gender composition of contemporary audiences and the integration of at least some feminist values in contemporary ideologies. It is far from clear, however, that the original fifth century B.C.E. male audience had a similar reaction to the play. Euripides' play won only third prize at the Great Dionysia of 431 B.C.E. Can we dismiss the possibility that the lack of enthusiasm of the Athenian audience was due to the play's engagement of male anxieties about female power? Since much of L.'s argument engages with the pragmatics of the play and relies on the notion of audience sympathy, a systematic discussion of the values, expectations and gender composition of Euripides' audiences would have been helpful; in addition, one may want to distinguish between the contemporary reception of Euripides' play and the pragmatics of the 431 B.C.E. production.

The book is well produced; its *index locorum* and thematic index make it easy to consult on specific issues. Readers will find here an interpretation of *Medea* that combines an intimate familiarity with the play, a full knowledge of the scholarship on it and a wide interest in contemporary deployments of Athenian drama.

Northwestern University

MARIANNE HOPMAN
m-hopman@northwestern.edu