

ENRICO MEDDA, *La saggezza dell'illusione*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2013, pp. xvi + 487, ISBN 978-8-846-73579-9.

This volume consists of fourteen studies on tragedy and two on comedy. All but one (ch. 11, on problems in the text of Euripides' *Phoenissae*) have appeared previously – in journals, in edited volumes, or as introductions to translations – between 1997 and 2007; they are republished essentially unchanged (except for ch. 10, to which has been added a one-page response to critics), but references have been updated when necessary, cross-references inserted, and occasionally an important new item of bibliography has been added (marked off by square brackets). The plays most fully discussed are Sophocles' *Ajax* (ch. 2) and *Electra* (ch. 3, 4) and Euripides' *Electra* (ch. 4), *Orestes* (ch. 5-7), *Phoenissae* (ch. 8, 9, 11) and *Cresphontes* (ch. 12 and part of ch. 13). Aeschylus, on whom M. has also worked extensively, has only two chapters (ch. 10 on *Agamemnon* 1649-54, ch. 16 on Pasolini's treatment of the *Oresteia*), but M. intends to devote a subsequent volume to him (p. xi). Of the remaining studies, ch. 1 is concerned with the ways in which tragic dramatists make it clear to their audience that a character is to be imagined as weeping, ch. 14 with Aristophanes' use of the monologue, and ch. 15 with hymnic language and motifs in the passage in Aristophanes' *Wealth* (124-221) where Wealth is persuaded that if he is healed of his blindness he can be master of the world.

In his introduction (pp. ix-x) M. defines an important theme of the book: the relationships constructed in particular plays between the characters and the dramatic space in which they move, a construction largely effected by means of 'verbal illusion'; hence the book's title, alluding to the famous saying of Gorgias (fr. 23 D-K) that in the theatre 'he who is deceived is wiser than he who is not deceived' (see p. x).

Many of M's discussions are highly illuminating or at least valuably thought-provoking. These include (the listing is not exhaustive) his analysis of the gestural business associated with weeping (pp. 10-18); his emphasis on the continued loneliness of the Sophoclean Electra even after the return of Orestes (pp. 69-73) and on the importance of the city-country contrast in Euripides' play of the same name (pp. 97-108); his perception of the strong tendency in *Orestes* for characters to converge on the palace (p. 114) – though we may add that at the end not one of them remains in it, or even in Argos at all; the comparison (pp. 145-150) between the exit of Orestes and Pylades at *Or.* 806, and the aborted exit of Neoptolemus and Philoctetes near the end of a play of the previous year (Soph. *Phil.* 1408); the absence of the Theban community

from *Phoenissae* (pp. 228-9) – it might be argued that the only characters who have Thebes truly at heart are Teiresias and young Menoeceus; and the contrast between Antigone's *teichoskopia*, with its emphasis on sights, and the *parodos* of Aeschylus' *Seven* with its emphasis on sounds (pp. 241-6).

Some suggestions are more dubious. In *Ajax*, for example, it is hardly likely that the *skene* was physically removed between 814 and 815 (pp. 36-37); it is one thing to hang up suitably painted panels, but quite another to dismantle and take away, in mid-play, a structure which, temporary or not, must have been of some size and complexity. Ajax is not seen 'lying prostrate' among the victims of his madness (p. 44); already before he appears we have been told he is *sitting* among them (325 θακεῖ). His reappearance at 646 is certainly a surprise (p. 47), but the audience will not have been expecting a 'predictable messenger announcing the hero's death', since Ajax had been alone in his hut; they would have expected, rather, that someone (probably Tecmessa) would *go into* the hut and find Ajax dead there – but at the moment when that might be thought about to happen, Ajax comes out instead. M seems (p. 47) to regard the ensuing *Trugrede* as a true monologue, not intended (until 684) for the ears of Tecmessa or the chorus; that requires us to believe that all its notorious ambiguities are, so far as Ajax is concerned, purely coincidental. It is worth remarking, incidentally, that the 'lonely place' (657) where Ajax goes to die eventually becomes more crowded than the place he leaves, as his corpse attracts to itself every significant human person in the play – the chorus, Tecmessa, Teucer, Eurysaces, Menelaus, Agamemnon and Odysseus.

The new chapter (ch. 11) is mainly concerned with passages of disputed authenticity in *Phoenissae*. The principle is laid down (p. 316) that our best chance of identifying interpolations is to consider the compatibility of a passage with the general plan of the work and the typical dramaturgy of Euripides. M. then turns to the notoriously problematic *exodos* of the play. He quickly gets rid of 1737-66 (absent in an early Hellenistic papyrus) and also rejects the Colonus prophecy (1703-7) while strongly defending the lines preceding it (1693-1702) on the ground that they contain standard features of tragic lamentation over the dead which had not appeared, where we might have expected them, in 1485-1581. Beyond this, he grants in general terms that there has been some revision in the rest of the section 1625-1709, and points to some particularly suspicious sections; and he rejects the parade of the Seven (1104-40) on the ground that elsewhere in the narrative neither Eteocles nor Polyneices is associated with a particular gate, and emphasis is placed on the mass armies, not on individual champions; actually this messenger has quite a lot to say (1153-86) about the exploits and fate of some of the Seven, but he begins by introducing Parthenopaeus (1153) in a manner hardly consistent with his having been prominently mentioned earlier in the same speech (1104-9).

Since in the update to chapter 10 (p. 306) M. responds to my criticism of his original article (in *Prometheus* 36 [2010] 104-7), I should say a little more about his discussion of *Ag.* 1649-54. The crucial question is who speaks line 1651: any decision about that pretty much automatically determines all the other assignments. The options for 1651 (εἶα δῆ, ξίφος πρόκωπον πᾶς τις εὐτρεπιζέτω) are (i) Aegisthus, (ii) the chorus-leader, and (iii) the captain of Aegisthus' bodyguard. M. brings good arguments (pp. 295-6) for rejecting (i), and having already rejected (iii) (p. 290) for lack of any adequate parallel (more on this presently) he is driven to adopt (ii). But he rightly argues (pp. 298-301) that the chorus-leader cannot here be addressing his colleagues; for one thing they cannot possibly be wearing swords, and for another the third-person imperative, with or without πᾶς τις, is not used in these circumstances in tragedy. M. therefore revives a suggestion by Bothe that the call is addressed to other citizens of Argos. As he himself notes (p. 302), there is nothing in 1651 to make it clear who is being addressed, and no call to them to come to the spot; M. tries to explain this away as due to 'the pressing rhythm of the stichomythia in trochaic tetrameters', but in fact it would have been perfectly easy to make the meaning clear within a single line, e.g. δεῦρο δῆ ξίφει προκώπωι πᾶς τις Ἀργείων ἴτω. Furthermore, as M. also notes, no Argives do in fact appear in response to the call – which would suggest to the audience, wrongly, that there is little opposition in Argos to Aegisthus' usurpation, and cast doubt on the chorus's claim that being nice to tyrants is not the Argive way (1665). M. cites the parallel of *Eur. Or.* 1625ff, but the intervention of a *deus ex machina*, which by well-established convention puts a stop to the dramatic action, is not at all the same thing as the intervention of a mortal character. One may also observe that Clytaemestra at 1654, appealing for the avoidance of violence, addresses herself only to Aegisthus, and makes no mention of any danger from the Argive public (neither does he).

In my 2010 article I argued for solution (iii), criticizing as inconsistent M.'s reasons for rejecting the parallels of *Cho.* 657 and 900-2. M. in his addendum rejoins that I mistook the rationale of his arguments; in particular, he explains, the Porter's single line at *Cho.* 657 is 'merely instrumental', whereas at *Ag.* 1651 the Captain would be intervening 'at the climactic moment of a fiery, quarrelsome stichomythia, only then to fall immediately silent'. But the latter (apart from the word 'stichomythia') is precisely what Pylades does at *Cho.* 900-2! That, says M., is different because Pylades 'has a prominent presence throughout the tragedy [one might doubt that, considering e.g. that he is never mentioned between 208 and 561, and only once – without being named – between 564 and 899], and the breaking of his silence has an enormous dramatic effect'. At the end of the day it is always possible to find differences between any two dramatic roles (unless they were intentionally written so as to be indistinguishable); the fact remains that the

Oresteia certainly contains two extremely short speaking parts that have no parallel elsewhere in surviving tragedy, and M. has unintentionally shown that there is no acceptable alternative to positing a third at *Ag.* 1651.

This book will be found rewarding by any student of Greek drama, especially Sophocles and Euripides.

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